

The David Stephenson Case and the Ku Klux Klan Retreat in 1924

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Abstract

With the beginning of 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan organization reached its maximum expansion in the United States of America. That organization was founded by Joseph Simons in 1915 in the hope that it will have the same effect as the first Ku Klux Klan organization that spread during the reconstruction period between 1866 and 1877.

Indiana was the largest and most powerful stronghold of the new organization, and David D. C. Stephenson is primarily responsible of it in that state, but that position completely collapsed with his accusation of killing Madge Oberholtzer with whom he had an emotional relationship. This led to his public trial, which made the case spread throughout the United States of America, after which the reputation of the organization and position in the state collapsed, and a new era began of community elements fighting and trying to overcome the organization.

Keywords: *Ku Klux Klan, David Stephenson, Madge Oberholtzer, USA.*

Introduction

The accusation of David Stephenson, a member of Ku Klux Klan (the prominent hidden empire in Indiana and its chief official responsible for the torture and murder of Madge Oberholtzer) was a milestone in the history of the hidden empire. It has affected the spread of Ku Klux Klan in Indiana and David Stephenson's leadership, which will be presented by this research, in addition to trying to show the impact of David Stephenson's moral crisis on the decline of Stevenson himself, reaching the issue of arresting, prosecuting and convicting Stevenson for that crime.

This topic seeks to answer a major question, which is the extent to which the David Stephenson case affects Ku Klux Klan, and whether the court made sentence against one of the organization's most important men at a time when some claimed that the organization was above the law.

The importance of this issue appears in the research on a case that occupied American public opinion and clearly threatened the continuation of the Ku Klux Klan organization, and even contributed to its deterioration until it completely collapsed during the Second World War.

The peak membership of the Ku Klux Klan organization in 1924 was more than four millions, which is an amazing number given that the total American population was close to one hundred million. Simultaneously, violence erupted in more than one region in the

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United States of America, given that the spread of the organization was bound to provoke a confrontation between it and its enemies 'The organization's gatherings sparked violence in "Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas" (1).

The North-central and South-western states registered most of the members of the hidden empire, followed by the southeast, the Midwest and Far West, and finally, the American North, and its members are distributed among nearly four thousand local branches, a contemporary journalist sympathetic to the hidden empire at the time reported that it had become the most active and active regulator in American life (2).

First: The Ku Klux Klan spread in Indiana and David Stephenson's leadership:

The organization has crossed its borders to become a real American phenomenon, with great power in the Midwest, and Indiana has become the organization's new stronghold, and despite the continued violent attacks against it, it has become widespread 'Relying on the propaganda it carried out, the members of the (hidden empire) insisted on denying the charge of extremism from their organization and that it was a law-abiding union of white and patriotic Protestants born in the country (3).

For the organization's new stronghold with 1924, in Indiana, which had the largest spread of the organization among all the United States of America, it was David D. C. Stephenson (4) is the most powerful man in Indiana in the 1920s, and his strength emanated from his association with Ko Klux Klan, as Stephenson was appointed to the position of (Big Dragon) of the organization in Indiana, and Stephenson became 'Who enjoyed a simple but rhetorical appearance with a clear charismatic personality, its official organizer of nineteen states, was also responsible for joining fees and uniforms (5).

The organization's entry there came with David C Stephenson's arrival in Evansville Indiana during World War I, and he began organizing veterans after his efforts to enter the political sphere failed 'He joined the Ku Klux Klan and joined the veterans, and in 1922 he was assigned the task of expanding the organization in Indiana. He hired full-time organizers and found that Indiana is a fertile field for the traditional Ku Klux Klan II program directed against Catholics, Jews, Negroes and foreigners. The circle of enemies expanded to include Communists, smugglers, Muslims, supporters of evolution and all the people whom the organization considered immoral (6).

Despite the spread of the organization across small cities and towns of Georgia, the organization's promoters moved to California, sold patriotism, brotherhood and moral enforcement, spread from Los Angeles, and moved north across the border to Oregon. They introduced anti-Catholicism, and in the Midwest its legions grew in Missouri and Kansas, in 1924 Colorado became another stronghold for the organization, as Ku Klux Klan helped elect the mayor of Denver 'But it was nowhere stronger than in Indiana under the leadership of the ambitious Dragon Stephenson to spread his organization throughout the state, and the organization's calls led to its "majority Protestant" joining" Resulting in an enlarged membership (7).

Stephenson kept himself four dollars out of ten dollars from his start-up fees, and bought the organization's covers and sheets for \$ 1.75 for the group and sold them to new members for six dollars, within 18 months. His wealth amounted to more than a million dollars (8).

With wealth and position came political power, and with the use of his money and influence, there was no doubt that Stephenson could have controlled the voices of the members of the organization in the state. Dozens of municipal, provincial and state officials were credited with their jobs for belonging to Ku Klux Klan and Stephenson (9).

David Stephenson's political ambitions grew, and he used the organization more in 1923 and stressed that it was its duty to purify and purge Indiana's policies, so that the political campaigns of Ku Klux Klan candidates in the state would succeed in 1924. Including the candidate for governor, Stephenson became a great political force there. However, the relationship between Stephenson and (Emperial Magician) Hiram Evanner for Stephenson's desire to control the direction of the organization's management is a unit in that stronger state among the states of America in which the organization is deployed. Evans was strained and signed an imperial decree ordering Ku Klux Klan Indiana to try Stephenson for misconduct, and Stephenson had begun an attempt to separate Ku Klux Klan Indiana from Evans' dominance. Attacking members of the organization who sought to exploit its power selfishly (10).

According to the sources, Stephenson's personal behavior destroyed the organization's presence and collapse in Indiana. It is the state in which the hidden empire – has enjoyed as indicated - a degree of strength unparalleled in any other state (11).

After the 1924 elections, the power of the "hidden empire" began to diminish with the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act Immigration Act of 1924 to restrict the annual number of immigrants who could be accepted from any country to 2% of the population of this country, instead of 3% as before, which has alleviated the concerns of many Americans. Although membership in each branch of the (hidden empire) declined at a different pace and for various reasons, it was clear that the hidden empire as a whole was in decline (12). This process was accelerated by the scandals of Bedi Stephenson who was in contact with a woman in June 1923 accompanied by her and another girl and one of his followers on a trip to Atlanta, Georgia. Her story may have been correct - but when it was on the night of May 28, 1924, the magician's investigator Hiram Evans and the alleged victim were expelled from their hotel in Nashville due to immoral acts (13).

Second: David Stephenson's moral crisis and trial:

Mysteriously, at the height of Stephenson's authority, Ku Klux Klan stripped him of the title of Big Dragon and expelled him for his immoral behavior with a girl named Madge Oberholtzer and accused of killing her. It was this that caused Stevenson to fall on April 2, 1925 as he was arrested for the murder of Madge Oberholtzer in March 1925, after he kidnapped her at gunpoint and sexually assaulted her. He was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment (14), and although Stephenson was discharged from the organization the year before the accident. However, he retained effective authority over both Indiana and his arrest caused great damage to the image of the organization. Which was said to have been in 1924 and early 1925 had more than four million knights in Indiana alone (15).

Because of the political implications of that case, it was a controversial issue and Stephenson later said, "I should have been imprisoned for my political activities, but I'm not guilty of murder" (16).

On November 14, 1925, the jury sentenced Stephenson to a second degree murder. The state prosecutor's investigations in 1927 revealed that most of the state's politicians and officials were members of the (hidden empire), and newspapers began publishing this, which contributed to destroying the organization's popularity (17). Although Stevenson filed multiple appeals (18) for his acquittal in the case of the Uberholtzer murder, the most prominent of which was in 1932, to no avail (19).

Accordingly, it is evident that by the mid-twenties, the organization's practices revealed corruption within it, especially the (Big Dragon) prison in Indiana de C. Stephenson, as the organization's reputation was severely damaged. The issues of the "hidden empire" were almost always before the judiciary to settle internal disputes, just as Simmons and Hiram Evans competed for those who were more worthy of them to be (the imperial magician), and young leaders disagreed over the spoils. The exploitation of membership

for material and political profit was a factor affecting the destruction of the organization, and by the second half of the 1920s the strength of the organization was fading, in 1926 when the organization organized a review of it on Pennsylvania Street in Washington. Only half of the organization's men and women participated(20).

The death of Madge Oberholtzer and the condemnation of Stevenson alone, Ku Klux Klan, did not fall, but there was opposition to the organization since its appearance, but early opposition voices were weak and scattered. The opponents fought against the enthusiasm for America by one hundred percent, and against the organization's skilled tactics to build its components and against the intimidation it carried out, and that resistance required extraordinary courage. An appreciation of the ethnic and religious differences in American society in the 1920s, and many citizens who opposed the organization remained silent while its members were waving their flags and praising their inspiration – Simons and then Evans- This was confirmed by the New York Times in late 1923 when it indicated that "opposition to the organization appears to be without leadership, not found in any US state, not even in Texas. The absolute domination of Ku Klux Klan as it was in Indiana, in Indianapolis the organization swept the mayor's office, city council, and school committee (21)

As Mr. Rutledge said. Rutledge was a member of an association called "American Unity League" at the McAlpin Hotel in Chicago in December 1922, that Ku Klux Klan would be destroyed by exposing its members, adding: "We intend to publish the names of Klan's men in New York City, because our experience in Chicago demonstrated that the sure way to kill the Ku Klux Klan group is to publish the names of its members." And that was true because the member of the organization was afraid of his societal perception and general feelings, and once he became known he would resign or stop his activities. Dozens of members of the organization in Chicago came to the offices of that association during 1922 every day to ask what they could do to prevent their names from being published. Each of these men was asked to send their resignation so that their name would not be published, and when the names of members of the organization had already begun to be published in Chicago, the city's membership decreased to five. And that organization held that no member of the Ku Klux Klan could hold a position in the United States without being guilty of treason, as he divided the loyalty that he divided for the emperor "Makes it impossible for him to be loyal to the United States government "(22).

In many parts of the south, notably Florida, Texas, Oklahoma, North Carolina and Georgia, citizens and officials have launched a strong campaign against the organization since 1922. In North Carolina, the government ordered the dissolution of the organization's branch in the state (23).

Conclusions:

The David Stephenson and Madge Oberholtzer case affected the reputation of the Ku Klux Klan organization in Indiana and throughout American society, and this effect appeared on several points, as follows:

- The study answered the main question about the extent of the effects of that issue on the decline in the position of Ku Klux Klan in American society which confirmed that the American society in which the organization found fertile ground for proliferation is the same society that fought it when its faults seemed clear to everyone, and that the organization was not stronger but the law. Rather, the law was applied to one of its most important leaders.
- The rise of the Ku Klux Klan spread in the United States in the 1920s, and Indiana was the largest stronghold of that organization.

- The murder of Madge Oberholzer and its brutal method was a milestone in the defamation and destruction of Ko Klux Klan.
- Stephenson was tried and convicted, and his appeal against the verdict was later rejected.
- The disappearance of Stephenson from the public workplace in the United States of America coincided with the disappearance of Co-Clux Klan, which was fiercely fought until it fell in 1944.
- This incident confirmed that the Ku Klux Klan organization assisted its enemies in combating its lack of internal cohesion and the failure to warn its members of their own practices, which ultimately led to a decline in its popularity and collapse.

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- (3) Felix Harcourt: OP. Cit., P.3
- (4) David Curtis D. S. Stephenson David Curtis D. C. Stephenson, born on August 21, 1891, until his death on June 28, 1966, when Stephenson was born in Houston, Texas, and moved with his family to Misville, Oklahoma in 1901. He was active in the Socialist Party of Oklahoma and

briefly served in the US Army during World War I. After moving to Evansville, Indiana in 1920 he got involved in democratic politics, and also joined Ko Klux Klan, who started looking for northern members. Soon he became one of the most successful recruits in the organization, then Stephenson ran for the US Congress in vain in Evansville in 1922, then moved to Indianapolis in November 1922. Hiram Evans helped remove Joseph William Simons from the position of imperial magician, to become Evans the new imperial magician and to give Stevenson the responsibility of Dragon Indiana and 22 other northern states under his command. The organization grew to about 250,000 members in Indiana, became very wealthy as a result of commissions on new memberships and selling organization fashion, then Stephenson separated from Evans and Co Klux Klan in September 1923. In November 1925 Stevenson received a life sentence for his role in the death of Madge Oberholtzer, who brutally raped her, see

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