On March 10th 1922 two Herald Post newspapermen viewed a secret Ku Klux Klan meeting in the area west of Kern Place in El Paso, Texas from a distance. A few days earlier the city editor of the Herald Post received an anonymous invitation allowing the journalists to attend a Klan gathering, a ceremony those outside the organization rarely, if at anytime, had an opportunity to witness. The calm desert night lay juxtaposed to the burning campfires lit in the shadows helping to conceal the identity of hundreds of El Paso Klansmen gathered at the meeting place. The special occasion would initiate 282 new Klansmen into the organization. A distorted voice masking the hooded member’s identity served as an audible guide. Step by step closer and closer to the center of the secret congregation and then a whistle from afar. Their advancement halted and their attention suddenly swayed, the two Herald Post men watched in awe as a fiery cross appeared on the side of the Franklin Mountains. Frontier Klan No. 100 dramatically announced its presence in El Paso.1

It is seemingly an effortless assumption to place Ku Klux Klan activity in the Deep South during the Reconstruction Era where the group was known to have had a strong presence. El Paso, with its historically Mexican American demographics, would not be, at least in theory, a place where anyone would think this “radical” group would assume a prominent place especially in the city’s political arena. This actually nearly occurred in El Paso in the early part of the 1920s as the KKK was on the verge of achieving political prominence and actually placing a pro-Klansman on the mayoral ballot.

One of the questions guiding this work asks why the KKK saw El Paso, Texas as a place of interest. A driving ideology commonly attributed to the Klan presents white racial superiority, religious intolerance, and moral authoritarianism and the maintenance of these ideals. In theory, places where these ideals came under challenge could be deemed as vulnerable and in need of protection. So did racial group relations or religious imbalance (i.e.; growth of Catholic influence) reach an intolerable state in El Paso hence pulling the Klan to the city? As mentioned above, the city for the most part was tranquil with race relations having been at a tolerant state for as long as anyone could recall.2 On the other hand, the moral state of El Paso could be seen as more of a leading factor and why reforms were sought by groups such as the Klan.

Reformists in the United States saw a need to bring a “cleansing” to the various ills created by industrialization and its “side-effects” (e.g.; immigration, urbanization, and whole-scale social degradation). Driving this “reformation” in search of social justice were social-scientifically grounded notions that hierarchi-
cally placed white Protestant, American middle-class values at the apex of society. The concept of “100% Americanism” held a central position in this rhetoric and was perhaps the driving ideology of the Progressive movement across the United States. In effect the pro-American mentality behind the reformist concept sought to maintain the United States a nation insulated and purged of all foreign or alien entities, cultures, and persons. The idea that America was being quickly overrun by immigrants, and conservative belief systems, became a major recruiting tool across the country for groups such as the extreme rightist KKK. In the fall of 1921 this ideology helped foment a Klan chapter in El Paso, Texas a place where apparently debauchery, alcohol, drugs, and more importantly the Catholic church was threatening the “real” American way of life. The border city needed to be “saved” from the clutches of “the devil” and the “gate of Hell” lying just a few feet away across the Rio Grande.

So how did these reformist movements occurring across the United States in this particular time period lead to the rise of ideologies such as the Americanization movement and 100 percent Americanism, ideas embraced by radical groups such as the KKK, which in turn led to a movement to cleanse El Paso society? It is the contention of this paper that Ku Klux Klan came to El Paso in the early 1920s not necessarily, at least in the beginning, seeking or promoting a racial agenda but rather the organization sought to reform a city it deemed as impregnated with corruption and immorality. The binational region of El Paso/Ciudad Juarez aided this immorality and debauchery and measures that stretched across international boundaries had to be taken. This aggressive and ambitious goal had its very demise within its aims. The economic relationship held by El Paso and Ciudad Juarez was too important a financial institution to allow a morally-based and economically impractical overhaul to be carried out. The existing balance achieved through generations of binational cooperation not only kept socio-cultural relations at a friendly state but it also maintained the area thriving economically.

A fascinating aspect in relation to *The El Paso Herald* and *The El Paso Times*, the two publications analyzed in this work, is in the way each portrayed the “reformist” Klan as it conducted business in the city. The *El Paso Herald* appears to take on a Progressivist stance and presents a sympathetic view of the group as research shows the appearance of pro-Klan articles on the front page subjectively prompting a moralistic view on the Klan’s actions across the U.S., while *The El Paso Times* appears to be on the pragmatic side and views the Klan as a destabilizing agent that will disrupt local (economic) interests embedded within the local social structure and is a bit more critical of the group.

Contending that newspaper articles are objective and unbiased would be downright erroneous. The positionality of those writing and editing the different news stories in any epoch will inevitably bring about subjectivity to the matter being presented to the public. Different agendas both pro and against any particular topic, entity, ideology, group, etc. are part of the news printing establishment and *The El Paso Times* and the *El Paso Herald* are no exception. This partial view on behalf of the El Paso Herald was juxtaposed to *The El Paso Times* tone, which went for the proverbial throat from the very beginning consistently attacking the Klan. These countering views will provide excellent interpretations of the occurrences during this era.

Another important source of information utilized in this paper is census records from 1920. The records provide a sense of the demographic makeup of the city which helps demonstrate a significant number of ethnic-Mexicans and Anglo Americans sharing a mutual biosphere with in El Paso, making the Sun City a binational, multicultural urban community. The 1920 U. S. Census puts the total population of El Paso County at 101,877 with the city of El Paso having a total of 77,560 residents. Of the nearly 78,000 residents
75,804 were counted as “white,” 1330 as “negro,” and 426 as “Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and all other.” The total number of “whites” includes 30,769 residents born in Mexico so this shows that El Paso’s demographic makeup consisted of a significant number of Mexican-origin individuals and add to this the close to 3000 “other” immigrant and the “foreign born” population combines for nearly 44% of the total population of El Paso. The number of ethnic Mexicans living in El Paso at the time is vital to understanding a racial factor in the formation of a historically racially-biased or racist organization.

The concept of race in the 1920s can be characterized as a complex socio-politically constructed phenomenon and as always in a constant state of formation and reformation. A letter received by El Paso intellectual Cleofas Calleros from Frederick S. Haskin, Director of the El Paso Herald Information Bureau in Washington, D.C., in August 1921 is telling of the period’s conceptualization of race as it pertained to Mexicans. In the letter Mr. Haskin assures Calleros that “The majority of Mexicans are of mixed blood. Some are white, some red, and some black. The high class Mexicans of Spanish descent are white.” In this interpretation the Mexican “race” was composed of a hierarchical makeup where the “colored” Mexican was below the “high class” “white” Spanish descent Mexican. The social order of El Paso was not a white and “brown” dyad but a complex caste-like system perhaps unique to the Sun City.

The racial differentiation then has to be seen as an influence in the way the groups related to one another especially in a highly competitive job market. Historian Mario T. Garcia contends that racial tensions were present in El Paso stemming from differences and competition in the local job market in the early decades of the twentieth century. As the census demonstrates, El Paso held a significant number of foreign born Mexicans and this influx of immigrants was a hotly contested issue in cities across the U.S. as industrialization opened up employment markets creating “pull” factors luring people from distant lands putting them in direct competition with American workers occupying similar job niches. Anglo Americans saw a need to ensure that employment would be open to the white workforce demanding that employers hire American citizens (i.e.; whites) before hiring foreign workers.

This might appear to be a strong factor motivating (racially-based) actions from a pro-American movement in the city but other factors merit discussion. The concept of “100% Americanism” brought forth the interpretation that being American consisted of being part of a certain religious orientation (Protestantism) which created a sociocultural spiritual bond to other Americans. El Paso historian Owen White argues that religious intolerance was a major influence in the city’s apparent social disaccord. The ill feelings stemmed from rising tensions between Catholics and Protestants in the city that nearly boiled over in late 1921. If it were not for the intervention of Mayor Charles Davis III, the “imminent religious riot” would have gone into full effect. The mayor convened twenty-eight citizens representing all denominations in the city to prevent violent confrontation. To his credit, and for sake of the entire city, the plan succeeded and a blood bath was just averted in this near religious battle.

El Paso during this period was plagued with various social ills as defined by reformist concepts propagated at the national level. Temperance was key to maintaining social order and to secure an ideal American family structure so enforcement not just maintenance of the 18th Amendment was vital for those striving for the betterment of American society. El Paso appeared to be right on the battlefront of this war on alcohol. For instance, the prohibition laws were consistently broken on the borderland as the international boundary was a porous conduit from a “wet” country to the south to the “dry” one in the north. The problem with illegal importation of alcohol and drugs into the country was a daily occurrence as arrests on the
international boundary attest. For instance, in April 1920 Jose Maria Apodaca was arrested for allegedly selling tequila to a couple of teenage boys, Homer Patterson and Lance Threadgill. The boys, apparently impaired by the drink, attacked “druggist” W.E. Casteel and were apprehended where they then pointed out Mr. Apodaca as the tequila salesman. On the same report there appears one Luis Galvin also held for selling 16 cases of tequila. Bond set for each at $750. 17

Alcohol was not the only illegal substance being smuggled through El Paso ports of entry, legal and clandestine alike. “Marihuana,” “morphin,” and even cocaine as was in the case that came before Judge A.J.W. Schmid also in April 1920. Stella Smiley “a negresse” and Leonora Jordan “also a negresse” were being held on $750 bond for breaking U.S. liquor and drug laws by attempting to smuggle cocaine into the country from Mexico. 18 From these records it can be inferred that in the recent period before the KKK showed up in El Paso prohibition laws were under heavy assault. These arrests support the concern that the binational region of El Paso/Ciudad Juarez aided immorality and debauchery in the area. Moreover, the dimension of illegality that international smuggling further helped categorize El Paso as a city in need of reform.

The conflation of all the above mentioned factors into one morally-guided ideology, coupled with the nationalist fervor gaining momentum in the country, provided the impetus for reformists to seek a “cleansing” of the El Paso borderland region. The movement would seek to remove the “evils” from the community as was being done in other cities. In fact, the “Sun City” had begun to wage war against corruption for years under the guidance of morally-centered El Pasoans such as Mayor Tom Lea. Lea had won a major battle against corruption when he defeated the city’s political machine and its election-swaying “Mexican vote” in 1915. 19 Sides were being taken to wage battle for control of El Paso’s soul as one side sought to purge the city of “evil” using a moralistic approach based on middle-class values while the other leaned towards the side of tolerance. The latter sought to maintain an existing social order, “evils” included, as it recognized the need to maintain a vital balance within a binationally-based economic context. Unbeknownst to most El Pasoans at that exact moment a formidable group promoting moral change across the country apparently set its eyes on the remote border city.

Although the rumors had been circulating about since the summer of 1921 the Ku Klux Klan kept a low profile in the city. The Dallas News and The New York World reported in September 1921 that one C.M. Kellogg, a resident of El Paso, who was either King Kleagle for the realm of New Mexico or a paid organizer for the Klan had set things in motion in the city. Kellogg, the supposed organizer, left town but was due back in order to hold a formal celebration in honor of the El Paso Frontier chapter. The Sun City made part of what the Klan called the realm of New Mexico so if the rumors were correct then Kellogg was the King Kleagle of the region and all El Paso and New Mexico members fell under his jurisdiction. 20

On September 25, 1921 The El Paso Times working on the Dallas News/The New York World lead found that mail addressed to William Simmons “King Kleagle of the KKK” was being delivered to the Sheldon Hotel but was not collected as of yet. Simmons, the “King Kleagle” or head organizer for the Klan in a state, was in fact the Imperial Wizard of the KKK the one person considered the chief executive of the organization in the country. 21 Perhaps the Klan avoided being noticed in order to maintain its “invisibility” while it gained momentum in the community hence the reason why the mail was not being collected. This strategy might have prevented preemptive attacks to the fledgling structure but by late fall 1921 the Klan seemed prepared to advance its agenda.

On September 3-4, 1921 the El Paso Herald reported that El Paso had organized a KKK chapter but that
there had been no official announcement.  Two weeks later the *El Paso Herald* once again printed an article stating that the Klan had organized in the city “3 to 4 weeks ago” and that a parade had been planned for when the unknown organizer returned to the city on an unannounced date. Upon hearing this, the Chief of Police Peyton J. Edwards spoke out against the Klan stating that he was against any organization that promoted lawlessness and that he would do all that was within his power to stop its activities. Furthermore, becoming aware of the ceremony near Kern Place, the Chief of Police sent out a stiff warning to all Klansmen stating that those caught in regalia would be arrested on the spot and that any police officer known to be a member of the Klan would be fired immediately. As for the KKK’s auxiliary law enforcement capabilities, the chief said that the El Paso police force was capable of protecting its citizenry without help. The city council quickly moved to block KKK activities in the city even before they started. An ordinance was voted on and all council members went in favor of the anti-Klan, although not specifically noted in the wording, ordinance prohibiting the “assembly or meeting at any place within the city of El Paso, not being a private residence” of “two or more persons, masked or disguised for the purpose of concealing their identity.” Moreover, all planned mass meetings were required to get permits with at least 3 members signing petition from the chief of police at which time the chief had the authority to inspect the membership rolls of those organizations. A fine of $200 would be assessed to all those not abiding by the ordinance. Sheriff Ordoñez sent out a message to the Klan saying that all those attempting to parade masked would be jailed and that he had been assured by county attorney Will Pelphrey that state law would hold all of them accountable.

Despite the anti-Klan response from city officials, active recruiting had begun in El Paso as several prominent members of the community received offers to join. Acting mayor R.C. Semple was one of these people as well as most of the city council members. It was not known if any agreed to join the then 300 member El Paso Frontier Klan. When asked if he had been approached to join Semple answered, “I consider that a personal question and refuse to answer.” Although the answer was ambiguous, it was later learned that the mayor had declined the invitation and the recruiter had just left without further word. Victor C. Moore city attorney and member of the Trinity Methodist Church was also approached by the “hooded knights.” There was no mention if Moore declined or accepted.

Through these first hectic days of Klan activity *The El Paso Times* printed several stories depicting the KKK in a bad light. The publication had begun its public sentiment shaping agenda in an attempt to impede the Klan’s emergence in the city. *The El Paso Times* published an array of anti-Klan articles detailing the group’s questionable activities across the country in practically every edition of the publication in September 1921. Meanwhile, the Klan sympathizing people of El Paso were hard at work to ease the Invisible Empire’s move into the city.

A known fact of the era was the Protestant church’s relationship to the Klan which became a proven strategy in other areas of the country where the KKK expansion came to fruition. It was not uncommon for Klansmen to make a “surprise” visit during Sunday services in full regalia and make monetary donations to the congregation. The Klan made it clear that they wanted the Protestant clergy on their side figuring that this spiritual alliance would sway the Protestant population in their favor helping especially in the recruitment of new members.

In El Paso, the Klan appears to have found a sympathetic embrace from the Trinity Methodist Church
headed by Reverend P.R. Knickerbocker.  

Reverend Knickerbocker had come to Trinity Methodist in 1916 with a flamboyant and outspoken personality second to none.  

From the Trinity pulpit eloquent orations condemning the immorality of the borderland especially the Mexican side resounded from the lips of the colorful minister. One of his sermons went so far one time suggesting that Ciudad Juarez should be bombarded with artillery from the Franklin Mountains in order to destroy what he called the “gate to Hell.”  

Although this may appear as an exaggeration, oral history documented by UTEP student Edward F. Sherman in 1958 puts Trinity Methodist Church in the middle of Klan activity in El Paso. According to an interview conducted by Sherman with El Paso county attorney W.H. Fryer, the church basement served as the initial meeting place for the Frontier Klan before they moved on to Oddfellows Hall on Santa Fe Street. The first Klan initiations apparently occurred here in 1921 having as one of the recruits none other than former El Paso mayor Tom Lea. Lea paid his $10 membership fee and was given his “knight shirt” a membership he later resigned. The former mayor would later become an ardent anti-Klansman helping to oust the Klan from El Paso.  

At least a couple of Trinity Methodist Church members were apparently part of, or at least partial to, the El Paso Frontier chapter of the Invisible Nation adding support to a connection of the church to the secretive organization. When comparing a membership list of Trinity Methodist Church with a list of names signed by pro-Klan men wanting to participate in an unmasked parade to be held in El Paso in February 1923 there are apparently two men that belong to both Robert H. “Bob” Oliver and J. Mack Crawford of the Southwestern Planing Mill.  

The El Paso Herald appeared to be supportive of the arrival of the Ku Klux Klan to the Sun City and printed many stories that portray the KKK as a moralistic organization intent on bringing order to a dis-integrating American/El Paso society. For example, on July 20, 1921 the El Paso Herald printed an article condemning the investigation the Texas State Legislature was conducting on the Klan’s activities. The article argued that the Klan was justified in carrying out law enforcement when the state’s apparatus was not doing its job. So then if the Klan was to be investigated then it would only be fair to have the state law enforcement agencies investigated as well.  

Yet another indication of the El Paso Herald’s pro-Klan stance comes from the publication’s editor H.D. Slater. Historian Owen White recounted that Slater, the El Paso Herald editor, was a fervent moralist seeking to cleanse the city of the decadence that characterized not only the US-Mexico borderland but the country as a whole. Slater made no effort to conceal his approval of the aims, although not the means, the group sought in the binational urban sprawl. This man’s moralistic ideology played a strong hand on what would be printed in this publication. In a July 20, 1921 interview in his own publication Slater asserted that he sympathized with the aims the KKK had for El Paso but that he was highly critical of the way the organization was carrying out its agenda calling the wearing of masks to hide their identities as “cowardly” and much unlike what the bold Western man of the past had been in taming the wild frontier.  

Finally, on November 4, 1921 the Frontier Klan of El Paso made its official appearance. In an unsigned letter to The El Paso Times, the KKK outlined its intentions for the city: “to make El Paso a better and cleaner city both morally and materially. It is our purpose to make our city a better place in which to live and rear our children.” The Klan, it continued did not promote “lawlessness, racial prejudice, or religious intolerance.” The intention was not to become a law enforcement entity but would come to the help of existing law enforcement if needed. The organization, the letter stated, was made up of prominent El Paso leaders worth
in the vicinity of $16 million. The letter to *The El Paso Times* appears to have a more carefully articulated tone in an effort to get on the “good” side of a more liberal-minded audience. The effort to make a point that the organization was composed of economically well-to-do citizens aims at presenting the El Paso Klan as being composed of persons in the city’s business sector; a group of established economic elite that would not attempt to disrupt the financial stability in the community. The letter’s attempt to present a sense of tolerance likewise aims to create an air of internationalism, cosmopolitanism, in other words a character compatible to the city’s demographic makeup and its situation near an international boundary thus in a way acknowledging El Paso and Juarez’ relationship in a binational economic system.

The KKK followed up with an unsigned communication to the El Paso Herald the following day and in an article titled “What is wrong with El Paso? Ku Klux Klan sets out its reasons for forming here” the organization outlined the reasons why the Invisible Nation came to the El Paso borderland. At the top of the list was the immorality that “open houses of prostitution” propagated in the city. The communication contended that there were “500 streetwalkers in the best neighborhoods” and that these women supported one thousand men. The list goes onto mention auto theft, burglaries, smuggling, and trafficking of illegal substances.

The letter to the *El Paso Herald* appears to take aim at the moral aspect afflicting the city. The list of grievances puts prostitution as well as the ill side effects the profession brings as it expands its negative influence onto distinct facets of social life. The norms relating to gender are inverted as the female worker is now the provider for the male and so by extension claiming that this was destabilizing the “natural” order. There also is an embedded “othering” tactic in the letter as one of the pointed out wrongs is the appearance of streetwalkers in what was deemed by the Klan as the “good” neighborhoods of the city. The implication was not that there was a problem of prostitution in El Paso but that the sex workers were “not staying in their place” in the “bad” areas of town. A moralistic view would have said that prostitution should not be present anywhere in the city regardless of where it may be either the “bad” or “good” areas.

Estimates of total Klan membership, including both men and women, in El Paso at the time were in the thousands. The sheer number of Klansmen and women was not the most unsettling or fascinating part of the ordeal. What brought uneasiness and caused more psychological distress for El Pasoans was the uncertainty of who was part of organization. The invisibility of the Klan members not only made the organization a disconcerting social entity but a formidable political force as well. For example, in the spring of 1922 the school board elections came with little if any indication of trouble. Little did El Paso know that these elections would set motion to phase one of the political activities of the El Paso KKK.

As was mentioned above, one of the most pressing issues for the Klan, not only in El Paso but all over the country, was the perceived “infiltration” of Catholic ideology into the most vital Americanization institute in the United States. In the nation-building processes observed across the country the school system is perhaps the most important socializing agent enculturating all children into the American way of life so in order to promulgate and maintain an American way of life the education received by the children must be of the “American” type. In the minds of radical reformists, such as those found in the Klan, the leading belief was that the idea of 100% Americanism was in danger and so it was their duty to preserve the Americanization process intact against any and all perceived enemies.

The 1922 El Paso school board election ballot consisted of C.S. Ward, S.J. Isaacks, Dr. J.H. Gambrell, Dr.
J.B. Brady, W.H. Burges, and U.S. Stewart. It is fair to say that the list was composed of respected men who had a solid position in the community. The El Paso Herald referred to W.H. Burges, U.S. Stewart, and Dr. J.B. Brady as the “opposition school board” this label is perplexing to say the least. When the unsigned communications were sent to the El Paso Herald and The El Paso Times in late 1921 it was explicitly made known that the Frontier Klan was composed of influential El Pasoans the only problem was that these well-to-do residents wore a veil of invisibility, an anonymous “mask” keeping their identity a mystery not unlike the white disguise concealing the Klansmen at the March 1922 meeting near Kern Place. The city elites divided into anti-Klan and pro-Klan factions so if the El Paso Herald referred to these men as the “opposition” and the publication printed articles sympathetic to the Klan then certain assumptions can be made, albeit with some reservations. At that particular moment in April 1922 the residents of El Paso were oblivious to a person’s ideological-politico inclinations but it appears that the El Paso Herald had inside information and knew that Klan candidates were running in the school board election. So when Ward, Isaacks, and Gambrell won the election, most of El Paso had not known of their affiliation to the local Klan but the El Paso Herald apparently had known from the start. Ward, Isaacks, and Gambrell had denied connections to the local Klan but The El Paso Times took it upon itself to expose them. Isaacks was in fact, the publication charged, the Exalted Cyclops of Frontier Klan No. 100.

The actions taken by the Klan-dominated school board found unfavorable views from The El Paso Times as the publication claimed that the board used “bigotry” and “religious intolerance” when deciding whether to renew contracts for employees in the district. Two principals, Miss M.J. Gallagher at Alamo School and Mrs. Culligan at Grandview School, and a truancy officer Mr. J.M. Cevallos, all Catholics, did not receive a renewal for the upcoming 1923-1924 school year. Even though, there were protests and petitions signed on behalf of the three employees, the initial voting stood and none were reinstated. The Klan had achieved one of its central goals to oust the Catholic infiltration of the schools. Then again The El Paso Times may have overstated the school board’s apparent “anti-Catholic” actions. The record of actions taken by the Klan, at least in renewing employee contacts, does not demonstrate religious intolerance.

For instance, when confronted with such accusations the Klan members denied the use of religious intolerance in making their decisions regarding the school district. In the school board minutes for June 5, 1923, Isaacks pointed out that of the forty-seven total school district employees, including teachers and principals, whose contracts were not renewed only three were Catholics. Interpreting the numbers quantitatively puts the accusations of religious prejudice into question. The religious intolerant characteristics of the Klan cannot be readily said were the driving factors in these cases. The demographics of those not reelected to their jobs is not known but looking at the information available Mr. Cevallos, inferring from his surname, was the only Mexican Catholic whose employment was not renewed while the two principals Miss Gallagher and Mrs. Culligan, again inferring from their last names, were Anglo American Catholics. Two out of the three were white American so it would be quite subjective to say that racial bias and religious intolerance were the central motives for the actions taken. More information would be needed to make a more informed analysis of the 1921-1922 El Paso school board employment practices.

With the success of the 1922 school board election the Frontier Klan sensed that the city’s political scope was at a favorable state. The election had legitimately placed the group into power so there was a good chance that the city government elections could also be within reach. By the February 1923 Democratic
primary elections in the city the Invisible Nation was no longer hidden from the anti-Klan force that by now had fomented in El Paso. The Frontier Klan itself felt confident as it planned a parade for downtown El Paso with some of its local members taking part in the celebration in street clothes and unmasked.

Since not all El Paso Klansmen were willing to go out in public and advertise their membership, the parade numbers were increased by the participation of East Texas Klansmen that had already arrived in the city for the event.  

By this time *The El Paso Times* was still demonstrating a staunch anti-Klan stance while the *El Paso Herald* had become more ambiguous not overtly projecting positive or negative views. The United City Ticket, as the *El Paso Herald* called the anti-Klan group, was led by State Senator Richard M. Dudley, a wealthy contractor originally from Kentucky. The anti-Klan candidate, a cosmopolitan worldly personality, was adored by citizens all across the borderland on both the Mexican and the U. S. side. Not only fluent in, but also holding highly articulate language skills, Spanish, “Dick” Dudley, as he was affectionately called, often referred to himself as “Mexican” or a son of Chihuahua or “Chihuahuense.” Senator Dudley found the situation back home in El Paso so precarious that he decided to come back and take on the KKK head on.  

Information on P. E. Gardner, the pro-Klan candidate, in the newspapers is sketchy at best. The details given by *The El Paso Times*, subjective and politically motivated, portray a complex man who aimed at achieving goals through any and all means possible not excluding the use of shady maneuvers. Especially nearing the 1923 primaries the assault on the *klandidate* was relentless. The publication reported on the questionable character of P.E. Gardner accusing the *klandidate* of conducting illegalities while working as an attorney in the city. The actions in question, *The El Paso Times* said, included issuance of blank bonds to attract clients and even the intimidation of a rape victim to ensure the supposed attacker, one of his clients, his freedom.  

Former El Paso mayor and former Klansman Tom Lea expanded on the character defamation plot by going on record stating that P.E. Gardner was not a member of the El Paso Bar Association because the other lawyers on the bar did not believe “he is ethical and honorable enough to belong to it.” Gardner had in fact applied but was not accepted.  

*The El Paso Times* fought an all out campaign against the Klan, declaring in a February 2, 1923 article that “Fight on Gardner and KKK vital to welfare of El Paso prominent citizens declare.” Continuing on this campaign *The El Paso Times* printed a two page spread the day of the election presenting an all capital letters message that said the following “DO YOUR DUTY AS A CITIZEN” referring to the El Paso electorate, “Vote the Dudley ticket straight” and “Vote for him today.” The front page headline of this particular issue read “6500 Cheer Plea to Doom KKK.” Prominent El Pasoans such as District Attorney C.L. Vowell pleaded for unity against what was portrayed as an oppressive force with the rallying call “Let’s stand for freedom.”  

By putting the mayoral candidates on polar opposites in the February 1923 campaign in El Paso, the publication reminded the public of the importance the upcoming elections for city government and the repercussions the outcome would have on the city’s social balance.

The United City Ticket presented a balanced portrait of its mayoral candidate walking a proverbial tightrope in pointing out Dudley’s bicultural makeup. The mix of southern gentleman and American Mexican elite businessman with a grandfatherly jovial personality made Dudley the “correct” vote for El Paso, a city also characterized by a complex make up. A fervent anti-Klansman, Dudley was the antithesis to the xeno-
phobic anti-immigrant wave engulfing 1920s America. “Dick” left no doubt as to his feelings as he openly repudiated all possible intentions of the Klan seeking to endorse his ticket. Further demonstrating his position regarding the KKK, Dudley’s campaign effort included the publishing of an anti-Klan paper called the Greater El Paso. The anti-Klan United City Ticket made sure the electorate knew who the candidates were and printed short bios of all its candidates for the 1923 democratic primaries in an effort to be visible and translucent which was in contrast to those that “hid behind masks and questionable ideologies.” In his own words Dudley stated that there was nothing he held against individual Klansmen, some perhaps he even knew personally, but to him the KKK ideology and belief system were absolutely something he could not stand for. A very good example of Dudley’s nature was shown during a chicken dinner held at Orchard Park Methodist Church Community Hall in honor of the candidates. Mrs. Gardner, wife of Klansman mayoral candidate P.E. Gardner, in a somewhat comedic and friendly gesture, challenged “Dick” Dudley to a wishbone pulling contest. The winner she proclaimed would be the one left with the short end. Perhaps foretelling of the election outcome a few weeks later, Dudley pulled the short end winning the friendly contest. Following the event The El Paso Times optimistically printed an article with the title “Mrs. Gardner pulls wishbone with Senator Dudley and sees P.E.’s hopes go glimmering.” The “fortune” would be correct.

The primary results showed how the smear campaign against all things Klan effectively thwarted the rising political influence the organization had in the city. The morning of February 25, 1923 awoke with the headlines reading a triumphant cheer “DUDLEY BEATS KKK BY 2120.” Richard M. Dudley defeated P.E. Gardner in the election 7572 votes to 5452 votes respectively. The message to the entire nation, The El Paso Times exclaimed, was that “El Paso [is] not a KKK town.” The overall results may have been for the anti-Klan ticket but two Klansmen did get elected to city government including Billy McSain to City Tax Assessor who joined A.R. Webb who held the County Treasurer position. Two other Klansmen, R. E. Ross and Roy M. Walker, candidates for alderman, were close enough in the results for a run-off to be held later that year. In a demonstration of class and optimism, P.E. Gardner, the pro-Klan mayoral candidate, stated at 11 pm election night after conceding defeat, that, “I was fighting for a good cause which is never lost. We have not started to fight yet.” Even with the bulk of the results going against it, the local Klan called this a “partial victory” and something to build on for the future. Dudley took his victory and described it in a utopian tone, “[I] regard my nomination as the most convincing evidence that the El Paso spirit, the spirit of peace and harmony among neighbors of mutual helpfulness and confidence, the spirit that has made our city great is still the spirit that animates the hearts of all true El Pasoans and true El Pasoans are in the vast majority here.” When Dick Dudley mentioned “the spirit of peace and harmony among neighbors of mutual helpfulness and confidence” he may have been referring to actual next door neighbors in El Paso but perhaps he was referring to the socio-cultural relationship that existed between El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico; a binational relationship beneficial to both cities especially in economic terms.

In contrast the rhetoric propagated by the Frontier Klan and its sympathizers had been impregnated with anti-Ciudad Juarez sentiment. The Klan even sought to keep El Pasoans from going into to Juarez a place it deemed as morally problematic, an “infected” place leading to the downfall of El Paso, a place where the devil was making his last stand. Owen White stated that “From every point of view it seems to us that the
city election of 1923...was the most important one ever in El Paso.” A Klan victory would have been “almost [an] irreparable disaster to our city,” White continued. From a social religious standpoint, “It would have brought about a local war of religious intolerance, the bad effects of which on business and social conditions, it is impossible to estimate.”

If this proclamation held any semblance of truth then the primary election of 1923 involved a deeply complex social, cultural, economic balance that could only be appreciated by those that held not only a “love” for the multi-cultural landscape of the city. It can also be stated that these individuals held a level of social and cultural capital that allowed them not only to perceive but to understand the uniqueness of a binational border community such as the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez metroplex. The very existence of El Paso was intrinsically linked to the connectedness with its sister city in Mexico at different levels. Likewise, the relationship between the racial-cultural groups within the city was one forged through not only economic ties between the classes but there were also familial, sanguine connections that somehow made El Paso one extended kinship network transcending the socially-constructed racial divides. The “outsider” moralistic reformer may have had good ideas about bringing what it believed to be betterment but was unaware of the complex “soul” of a community on the fringes of the empire making use of all the limited resources and accepting all the social cultural nuances to achieve success in this marginal place.

With the defeat in the February 1923 primary the once rising movement became utterly deflated. The momentum gone and identities pretty much exposed, the quiet storm washing the Far West Texas desert lost its cloak of invisibility. The “scary” aura was gone now that the men behind the mask turned out to be “inoffensive” locals. El Pasoans would now engage the Invisible Nation without the level of fear that was felt in the previous months. Even with this exposure, The El Paso Times did not relent on its attack keeping El Pasoans informed on the precarious situation the national KKK was under. The Ku Klux Klan was vulnerable now that leadership of the organization at the national level was being contested as the two leaders, William J. Simmons and Dr. H.W. Evans, went at each other for control of the KKK.

The anti-Klan establishment in El Paso took no chances and geared itself for the April 1923 school board elections. The prior year the Invisible Nation had “snuck” into office without the city’s knowledge until it was already “too late.” This time the city prepared to counter with the use of the latest scientific research in urban electoral behavior. The anti-Klan organization was led by Dr. H.F. Deady who used strategic plotting of the city’s voter tendency concentration in order to get the anti-Klan voters to come out and vote.

The anti-Klan ticket, a list of names that had been brought forth earlier, included Mrs. M.A. Warner, Mrs. John A. Wright, Wyeth Doak, and J.H. McBroom. The pro-Klan camp on the other hand scrambled to reorganize after defeat in the Democratic primary. Taking the Klan’s recent success, at least prior to the February primary, it was not credible to the anti-Klan establishment that the group would pass by such an important election. Passing up the April 1923 El Paso school board election was out of character compared to the actions that had been taken by the organization in the prior year and half it had been in the city.

This late minute “ruse,” as the anti-Klan described the pro-Klan’s actions, was perceived to be an elaborate political strategy by the Frontier Klan in order to maintain control of the school board. The thought might have been that if the voting public knew of the identity of the Klan ticket then the advantage “invisibility” gave the group in a now vastly hostile and apathetic environment, especially after the primary election defeats, would be lost. Furthermore, the anti-Klan faction feared the use of write-in votes as this tactic would
keep the pro-Klan candidates “invisible” to most voters. In the minds of the anti-Klan group this “invisibility” could create a sense of confidence within the anti-Klan community and prompt them to skip the ballot box altogether. This would then ensure the possibility of another “sneak” win for the Frontier Klan. 68

By April 7, 1923 the day of the election The El Paso Times reported that Dr. Felix P. Miller would be on the ticket while rumored Klan candidate J.A. Borders would also run for reelection as both had filed last minute applications to get on the school board election ballot. The El Paso Times was not taking chances and spelled out in bold letters the names and affiliations of all school board candidates. The Ballot consisted of Wyeth Doak, James A. Borders-Klan supported, J.H. McBroom, Mrs. John H. Wright, Dr. F.P. Miller-Klan supported, and Mrs. Milton H. Warner. The election pitted “open” candidates versus “those that hide behind pillow slips and sheets.” In this “last desperate stand of the Klan in El Paso” the coalesced anti-Klan forces would give no glimpse of hope to the despised organization. 69 The day of the election came and the anti-Klan investments had paid off for them. From the start the Klan saw its vie for maintaining control of the El Paso schools slip away. 70

Early returns reported by the El Paso Herald showed an interesting voting pattern. Unofficial observations stated that most of the votes by around noon election day had been cast by women and by this time the anti-Klan candidates were already ahead. 71 The election did not get any better for the Klan-supported candidates as the “scientific” methods of the opposition brought out 9000 voters to the ballot box. All KKK candidates were defeated across the county school elections. The final results had Mrs. Warner getting 5033 votes, Mr. McBroom 4952 votes, Mrs. Wright 4952 votes, Mr. Doak 4840 votes, Mr. Borders 3908 votes, and Dr. Miller 3880 votes. 72 Now that the schools were “liberated” from the Invisible Nation’s “occupation” the Frontier Klan lost most of its influence in El Paso.

Frontier Klan No. 100 had a meteoric existence in the El Paso sociopolitical landscape which lasted all of about 18 months from its rumored appearance in the fall of 1921 to the April 1923 school board elections. The incredible speed with which the Klan achieved widespread success in the El Paso region was only matched by its just as sudden disappearance from the scene. Although there were remnants of the Klan chapter in later years, the strength it achieved in 1922 was never again attained. 73

Klansmen and their families left El Paso after the defeat as the organization and its individual members had been characterized as destabilizing forces that did not fit into the city’s Philadelphian idealization. 74 The incoming mayor quickly sought to cleanse the city of its “KKK infiltration” “firing and hiring” as he best saw fit and gaining some friends and enemies in the process. 75 Information on the inner dynamics of the local Klan had been gathered by a “rat” placed inside the chapter by the anti-Klan faction. In a letter sent by the local Klan chapter to the El Paso Herald, it said that kladd, N.L. Bayless, the “rat,” received $125 a month from a local detective agency for intelligence work while he carried out his duties within the organization. The Klan caught the “rat” but not before he had passed on the list of all Klansmen in El Paso and New Mexico. Bayless was banned from the city although he refused to leave. In a twist of irony the “invisible” group had been infiltrated by an even more elusive and deceptive agent; one of its own had used the “ invisibility training” he had received in the Klan to expose its identity. 76

The factors leading to the Klan’s ousting in 1920s El Paso are far too complex to explain in a simple fashion. The uniqueness of El Paso as a border community with strong familial ties within its vast multi-ethnic population on both sides of the international boundary, a history bound to constant socio-cultural
exchange, and perhaps most importantly an economic reliance on binational consumerism merits explanations from distinct angles to even begin to scratch the surface of this historical phenomenon. The Ku Klux Klan cannot be readily characterized as an organization bent solely on promoting white racial supremacy, at least in 1920s El Paso, although there are those that are quick to give this hastened explication for the actions of the multi-layered social entity. Racialized violence, for instance, was but a part of the overall approach taken and used as a strategic action depending on the needs in certain contexts. Fundamentalist within the organization definitely engaged in race hate acts of violence but the intellectuals within the movement saw a bigger picture where social decay came from distinct social sectors. The latter understood that the ethnic, religious, and economic aspects of this decay were all intertwined in a complex manner while the former conflated all the factors indiscriminately. The intolerant and racist interpretations of what caused moral decay, at least in the initial stages of expansion, were held by the fundamentalist section of the Ku Klux Klan. As was seen in 1920s El Paso, the Klan’s “target” was not the city’s ethnic community. Its sights were focused on the local business elite establishment. These elites, in the mind of the recently-arrived moral authoritarian group, were to blame for the multi-faceted immorality overrunning the El Paso borderland region. The social degradation stemmed from “ills” bore on both sides of the border and as such these needed to be contained on one side and extinguished on the other. The current social order, or disorder, benefitted the established political and economic elites so it was in the established business elites’ interest to maintain the environment unchanged. In other words, tolerance of immorality was vital in maintaining a profitable context. Unlike other cities across the U.S. this “immorality” was not necessarily a byproduct of rapid social change created, for instance, by urbanization but had actually been a part of the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez international metropolitan area since the very beginning.

Whatever factors came into play in this battle, the community held off the encroachment of the hooded knights of Frontier Klan No. 100 and gained its “liberation” with an all out counter attack led by a cross section of citizens from all walks of life. El Paso made use of all its social, cultural, and familial history to combat a perceived enemy that had materialized out of thin air, an “invisible stranger” that for better or for worst had come to instill its own brand of community on the population. Established norms won out in the end and the border city on the banks of the Rio Grande held on to its unique and complexity-laden soul.
ENDNOTES

1. El Paso Herald Post, March 11-12, 1922; Michael Newton describes the burning of a cross on the side of a mountain or other high ground as one of the symbolic rituals announcing the arrival of the KKK in a community. Michael Newton, The Ku Klux Klan: History, Organization, Language, Influence, and Activities of America's Most Notorious Secret Society. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2007). The historiography on the KKK activities in communities across the United States is vast and well-researched and has produced a wealth of information on the inner dynamics of the secretive organization. For example, historian Leonard Moore's Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928 (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) tells of the immense success and the eventual downfall of the KKK in that state. The Indiana Klan took its initial steps in the community of Evansville in the fall of 1920 and rose to prominence in state-wide political affairs including the office of state governor in 1924 before its meteoric decline a year later. Moore contends that between 1/3 and ¼ of all Protestant white males joined the Indiana Klan in the period between 1922 and 1925. Women and children were also took part making the KKK the largest organization of its kind in the state.

Shawn Lay brings forth several arguments in an attempt to answer the guiding questions in his work. In relation to the question of why the Klan came to El Paso, the author argues that even though El Paso has historically maintained relative racial harmony in the years right before the establishing of a KKK chapter there had been a significant number of destabilizing events. The Mexican Revolution contributed to the antagonistic atmosphere that slowly built up into what Lay refers to as an intolerant state. Shawn Lay, War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan: A Study of Intolerance in a Border City (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1985).

Other works analyzing the local level we find works such as historian Shawn Lay's Hooded Knights of the Niagara: The Ku Klux Klan in Buffalo, New York where the author provides an analysis of the problems the Klansmen faced, the actions they took to ameliorate them, and the social characteristics of the members rather than taking a top-down approach. William D. Jenkins' Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio's Mahoning Valley presents a narrative of the group's presence in Youngstown, Ohio and the success the Klan achieved at the local level gaining control of the school board, the office of mayor, and getting several seats in the city council. The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics by Arnold S. Rice further provides proof of the KKK's successes in local politics across the country. The Klan, Rice contends, not only got members elected to office because of its tactics to sway the electorate but because it was in fact “the electorate.” The “secretive organization,” needless to say, has been historically and structurally researched extensively. Specifically looking at the community of El Paso, Texas there is limited literature covering Ku Klux Klan Frontier Chapter No. 100 which was the number assigned to the El Paso chapter. The literature on the KKK in El Paso has been limited to a few brief details in distinct works on the topic. Following this trend, a superficial mention is found in works such as Charles C. Alexander’s The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest and Wyn C. Wade's The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America. The authors appear to be conscious of the KKK’s significant presence in cities such as El Paso stating that the group wielded considerable power in local politics but at best there only exists one or two sentences in the entire work that mention El Paso and its KKK past. Of the limited sources available on the topic War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan: A Study of Intolerance in a Border City by historian Shawn Lay presents the most thorough examination. The author analyzes the Ku Klux Klan's presence in El Paso in the early 1920's primarily by focusing on the local aspect of the organization's activities while paying less attention to the relation of these actions to the wider movement occurring in the country at this time. War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan provides a
highly detailed narrative of the Klan’s short stint in El Paso following a chronological approach as well as making use of a thematically-based tactic to support its arguments. The literature on 1920s Frontier Klan No. 100, as was mentioned, is limited to say the least so the intent is to contribute to the historiography of the KKK presence in El Paso, Texas during the Progressive Era. For further information on the KKK’s inner dynamics and culture see Michael Newton, The Ku Klux Klan: History, Organization, Language, Influence, and Activities of America’s Most Notorious Secret Society. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2007); Kathleen Blee, Women of the Klan (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Martin Gatlin, The Ku Klux Klan: A Guide to an American Subculture (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2009); Albion Winegar Tourgee argues that earlier incarnation of the KKK sought to ameliorate the South’s defeat in the U.S. Civil War and to secure political control for Southern whites in the region. Albion Winegar Tourgee, The Invisible Empire (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

2. Lay argues that destabilization in racial relations were being felt as the after effects of acts such as Pancho Villa’s raid on Columbus, New Mexico still lingered in the El Paso air. Lay, War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan, 1985, 16-32.


6. On January 6, 1923 The El Paso Times reported that Rabbi Dr. Zielonka of El Paso attacked the “anti-Jew statements” made by the Ku Klux Klan as ignorant to the actual meaning of what “100% Americanism” encompassed. Citing the U.S. Constitution as the basis for his argument, Rabbi Zielonka deconstructed one of the foundational constructs of Ku Klux Klan ideology by pointing out the group’s misinterpretation of a basic American right: freedom of religion. The intolerance projected by the Klan’s version of “100% Americanism” was in the Rabbi’s mind, far from what the founding fathers conceptualized when they envisioned an American nation where all would have the right to religious freedom. The El Paso Times, Jan. 6, 1923, 3.

7. See Oscar J. Martinez, Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands(Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1994) and Paul Ganster and David E. Lorey, The U.S.-Mexican Border into the Twenty-First Century(New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008) for a thorough discussion on the binational relationship observed between American and Mexican cities on the US-Mexico border. The “twin-city” phenomenon has been largely accepted as proof of the symbiotic albeit asymmetrical relationship that creates a transnational urban biosphere. If one city suffers financially the counterpart will feel the shock waves.


11. Cleofas Calleros Papers, 1860-1977, MS231, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

12. Link and McCormick, Progressivism, 1983, 12.


15. The author puts the religious tensions and Mayor Davis’ intervention in late 1921 but research puts the date as mid March 1922. White, Out of the Desert, 1923, 281.

16. The El Paso Times, March 18, 1922, 8; Owen White contends that the KKK “became actively aggressive” seeking to counter the “Catholic infiltration” that was occurring in El Paso schools. The first order of action was to secure control of the school board to have direct influence on the city’s education system. White, Out of the Desert, 1923, 281.

17. The El Paso Morning Times, April 17, 1920, 14; In an ironic twist as case after case of “prohibition violation” is documented in the newspaper an interesting find is that the U.S. was shipping its stock of liquor into Mexico. The liquor being shipped to Mexico in theory could have been making its way back up to the U.S. via land routes. The El Paso Morning Times, April 18, 1920, 12; It appears that a stash place at 915 Chihuahua St. at Room 24B was raided multiple occasions and each time dry agents seized “fresh eggs” or “booze” but the smugglers kept eluding the law. The El Paso Times, Sept. 14, 1921, 8.


19. After defeating Mayor Kelly and “the Ring” Tom Lea called for the criminalization of “Indian Hemp” or marijuana as it was called. The ordinance was to fight against what he deemed as a major factor leading to social degradation. El Paso Herald Post, June 3, 1915, 6.


22. El Paso Herald, September 3-4, 1921, 8.


24. The El Paso Times, Sept. 10, 1921, 3; El Paso Herald, Mar. 11-12, 1922,4.


26. The ordinance was not passed as the draft held possible violations to certain personal and even constitutional rights. But the move proved effective as the Klan canceled its planned parade in El Paso. The El Paso Times, Sept. 25, 1921, Sept. 24, 1921.

27. The El Paso Times, Sept. 16, 1921, Sept. 25, 1921, 1.


30. Author Robert Miller talks of the Klan’s denouncement by the Protestant church during the 1920s even when individual clergymen joined and or were advocates for the organization. Robert M. Miller, “A Note on the Relationship between the Protestant Churches and the Revived Ku Klux Klan,” The Journal of Southern History 22, No. 3 (Aug., 1956): 355-368.; Diggins discusses the Catholic Church’s apparent sympathetic view of Italy’s fascist ideology during the Second World War. The relationship between religious institutions and extremist ideology is not relegated to an American context. John P. Diggins, “American Catholics and Italian Fascism,” Journal of Contemporary History 2, No. 4, (Oct. 1967), 52-68.

31. Along with the cash a list of Klan principles was given to the clergy in these arranged “surprise” appearances. The clergy could become members without paying the initial fee or $10 and could continue being members without paying dues. Among the roles they filled were that of traveling orators and chaplains for local chapters. Nancy McLean, Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan(New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 15, 76, 77, 78; Historian Shawn Lay states that many of El Paso’s Protestant clergy were either part of the Frontier Klan or were at least sympathetic for its cause. Lay,
Prior to the arrival of the Klan to El Paso the Protestant church was creating waves in an effort to cleanse the city. In March of 1919 a discussion was held at First Presbyterian where suggestions were presented by El Paso’s powerful men as to how to go by “getting Hell out” of the Sun City. The list is impressive as those in attendance included Judge W.D. Howe, Mayor Charles Davis III, General Robert Lee Howze, Sheriff Orndorff, James S. Black editor of The El Paso Times, and Chief of Police J. R. Montgomery. El Paso Herald, March 13, 1919, 22.

33. Early on Reverend Knickerbocker staged a symbolic burial of “John Barley Corn” an actual casket filled with whisky and beer bottles. Trinity Methodist Church Collection MS248, Box 1, 38, History of Trinity Methodist Church, June 15, 1966.


35. Attorney W.H. Fryer brought an injunction against the Frontier Klan in the summer of 1923 to keep the name of Klan members off the municipal elections that fall. Fryer argued that the men had pledged allegiance to a “foreign nation” by joining the Klan. The injunction failed but the Klan candidates were now identified to the public. Edward F. Sherman, “The Ku Klux Klan and El Paso Politics Following WWII.”[unpublished seminar paper, The University of Texas at El Paso, 1958], 35. C.L.Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, The University of Texas at El Paso Library; The basement was used as a soup kitchen to serve the hungry of El Paso between 1921 and 1922 by the Rev. W.B. Hogg. El Paso Herald Post, Jan. 5, 1937, Clipping from Trinity Methodist Church papers MS 248 box 1 folder 5. Shawn Lay asserts that Fryer held a personal vendetta against the local Klan. Fryer and El Paso Klansman S.J. Isaacks had been law partners but had had a falling out before the KKK arrived in El Paso. When Isaacks joined Fryer made it a point to expose him. The two remained lifelong enemies. Lay, War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan, 1985, 129.

36. Trinity Methodist Church Collection MS248, History research notes, Box 1 folder 7; The El Paso Times, Feb. 22, 1923.

37. El Paso Herald, July 20, 1921, 10; Historian David Romo suggests that the El Paso Herald was partial to the movement presenting the KKK in a good light because of the “high” number of Klansmen on the editorial staff. David D. Romo, Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juarez, 1893-1923 (El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 2005); Lay contends that the El Paso Herald even with its many Klan employees could not be counted on to provide a partial view of the Frontier Klan especially during election time. Lay, War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan, 1985, 119; For example, the front page of the March 7, 1922 El Paso Herald presents the headline “WOMAN HELD AS SLAYER ON KLAN’S INFORMATION” in all bold, capital letters. The article tells of how the KKK had a hand in solving this murder mystery and bringing this otherwise unknown assailant to justice. Two articles on the front page also characterize the Klan as an organization intent on producing morally positive environments in communities across the US. El Paso Herald, March 7, 1922.


41. See Ann R. Gabbert, “Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands: El Paso, 1890–1920,” Journal of the History of Sexuality 12, No. 4 (October 2003): 575-604. The work presents a detailed analysis of El Paso prostitution during this period. The tolerance for this form of employment especially by the established economic elite appears to demonstrate an understanding of the need to maintain the existing order in place through regulation and not a total eradication. The funding generated
by the sexual worker was a vital part of the city’s financial well-being.

42. Calleros interview on August 5, 1958 says that there were approximately 3500 Klansmen in El Paso. Sherman, “The Ku Klux Klan and El Paso Politics Following WWII,” 1958; A women’s auxiliary section of the Klan also existed in the city, the Invisible Eye provided logistical help for the men’s chapter. The El Paso Times, April 7, 1923, 1; The two newspapermen at the Klan meeting near Kern Place mentioned that the total attendance at the ceremony was 1142. El Paso Herald, Mar. 11-12, 1922, 24.

43. Dumenil, Modern Temper, 1995, 235-249; The El Paso anti-Catholic segment was not entirely composed of “Anglo Americans” as the local Mexican American Protestant community celebrated the Klan victory in the school board elections. The victory of “señores” Ward, Gambrel, and Isaacs had been spiritually-guided, according to the publication La Atalaya Bautista, by “Dios que estuvo con los suyos y la candidatura que arriba mencionamos triunfo sobre el enemigo con una mayoría aplastante.” La Atalaya Bautista, Apr. 13, 1922, 2.

44. William Henry (W.H.) Burges, Jr. was among the most important and respected lawyers in the country. Attorney Burges along with his two brothers, Richard F. Burgess, and Alfred R. Burges both also successful lawyers, served the city of El Paso in many public facets standing up for what they deemed as just causes. For instance, W. H. Burges, Jr. represented several Chinese immigrants in their fight against the Chinese Exclusion Act. El Paso Herald Post, no date, clipping in Burges-Perrenot Family Papers 1890-1986, Box 1 folder 1 MS262, Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

45. The Exalted Cyclops is the leader of a local chapter elected by its members for a one year term. Alexander, The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest, 1965, xiv; Isaacks resigned to become a hydra of the realm under the grand dragon, a state council in Dallas which served to settle disputes between Klans in the state, that same year. The El Paso Times, Feb. 17, 1923; El Paso Herald, May 14, 1924, 1.

46. The assurance that now at least three of the board members were Klansmen, and not just sympathizers, comes from The El Paso Times reporting. The name of Dr. J.H. Gambrel appears on the signed petition put forth by the Frontier Klan to the city in seeking to parade in February 1923. The El Paso Times, Feb. 22, 1923, April 4, 1923.


49. Other political successes were achieved in 1922 when recognized Klansmen won general elections including the candidacy for U.S. Senate from El Paso County by pro-Klansman Earle Mayfield. Lay, War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan, 1985, 140.


52. Dudley had come to El Paso by way of Madera, Chihuahua where he had made a fortune constructing railroads for the Mexico and Northwestern Railroad companies among others. The Dudleys were highly regarded in the Mexican community as the various invitations to social and familial events found in the Dudley manuscripts attest. “Ricardo Dudley, Duddley, or Pusley” and his “amable familia” apparently were expected at all these elite parties. Undated clipping from the El Paso Herald in Dudley, Richard M. and Frances Papers Box 2 MS262 C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collection, The University of Texas at El Paso; Undated article from unknown newspaper clipping in Richard M. and Frances Papers Box 1 MS261.
53. Texas Senate resolution April 20, 1923, Dudley, Richard M. and Frances Papers, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, The University of Texas at El Paso.
57. The El Paso Times, Feb. 6, 1923, 5.
58. Dudley, Richard M. and Frances Papers M261 Box 2, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.
60. The El Paso Times, Feb. 25, 1923, 1.
64. White, Out of the Desert, 1923, 282.
65. The 1920 U.S. Census shows that 3747 residents of El Paso identified as coming from mixed parentage. Although this number may seem insignificant in a city with a total population near 78,000 it must be kept in mind that these directly related bi-racial, bi-ethnic individuals were by extension connected to a larger “familial” or kinship network, a demographic pattern we see in other border communities. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States Volume 2, (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1921).
66. The El Paso Times, Apr. 4, 1923, 3. Apparently Simmons wanted to make the KKK more inclusive seeking to establish a women’s organization at the level of the current Klan something that did not sit well with the existing order within the Klan. Evans the Texas Klan leader would have none of it and challenged the Imperial Wizard for the leadership. The El Paso Times, Apr. 5, 1923.
67. The El Paso Times, Apr. 8, 1923, 1.
70. The Invisible Eye, the women’s auxiliary group within the Frontier Klan, got Borders and Miller on the school board ballot and then mobilized via the use of the telephone in order to rally last minute support for the Klan candidates. The El Paso Times, Apr. 7, 1923, 1, 2.; See Kathleen M. Blee, “Women in the 1920s’ Ku Klux Klan Movement” 17, Feminist Studies No. 1 (Spring, 1991): 57-77 for discussion on the roles women played in the Invisible Nation in this era.
71. Around this time of day several “Mexicans” had been seen destroying Klan posters in the city. Apparently these individuals had been hired by the anti-Klan to smear the posters in an effort to sway voting behavior. El Paso Herald, Apr. 7-8, 1923.
72. The El Paso Times, Apr. 8, 1923, 1, 4.; El Paso Herald, Apr. 9, 1923, 14. An interesting observation made here is that The El Paso Times printed the anti-Klan victory on headlining the front page while the El Paso Herald reserved a place for the story on page 14.
73. Richard Dudley lost his battle to stomach cancer early in his second term as mayor of El Paso. The outpouring of grief and admiration from the entire El Paso-Ciudad Juarez borderland was a testament to the extent of the mayor’s charisma. One of those grieving admirers was an unnamed El Paso Klansman who praised Dudley as having been the best mayor the city ever had adding that even though he had been against the anti-Klan candidate in 1923 by 1925 Dick Dudley had won him over. El Paso Herald Post, Apr. 27, 1925. Clipping from Richard Dudley papers Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of El Paso Library; The publication reported that the Frontier Klan was holding an election to select a new Exalted Cyclops to
lead the chapter. Nominees included Bob Oliver, P.E. Gardner, and S.J. Isaacks. The article uses terms such as “brothers” and “brethren” when relating to the KKK members. El Paso Herald, May 14, 1924, 1.


75. The Democratic mayor asked Chief of Police Ben F. Jenkins for his resignation and in his place he put Jay Reeder a Republican. The mayor also let go Police Captain L.J. Robey, who once was set to become a Klansman but backed out, and traffic officer Charles Woods who was accused of anti-Semitic actions on South El Paso Street Jewish businessmen. Undated clipping from an unnamed newspaper in Dudley, Richard M. and Frances Papers, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.; The El Paso Police Department had been “plagued” with Klansmen since it first appeared in the city. El Paso Herald Post, undated clipping, Dudley, Richard M. and Frances Papers, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

76. The chapter kladd is responsible for taking the secret password all members must state in order to gain access to meetings. On this same edition the publication further demonstrated its distancing from the Frontier Klan reporting that the chapter’s desperation had led it to resort to recruitment of local high school ROTC boys. It had also, the Herald stated, that the local Klan was threatening police officers in the El Paso Police Department with exposure if they did not rejoin the chapter. El Paso Herald, May 14, 1924, 1, 4.

77. El Paso Herald, Mar. 13-14, 1920; The El Paso Times, Jan. 28, 1922, 9; Business meetings between Mexican and El Paso business leaders took place to encourage trade to keep the border city in economic stability and or prosperity. Ciudad Juarez businesses especially entertainment venues advertised in El Paso newspapers to lure prospective consumers south of the border. So when a coalition of Protestant ministers met Mayor Davis in October 1922 and suggested early closing of the international bridge at 6 pm the city council and the mayor coincided in turning down the proposal on grounds that it would interfere with business transactions between the two cities. In other words, the political and economic elites on both sides of the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez border conceptualized the twin city complex as one “community” bound to each other by different but very important aspects the most important being business and profitability. The El Paso Times, Oct. 28, 1922, 9.

78. Alexander contends that the KKK’s motivation did not rest solely on racism and nativism but more on moral authoritarianism. Alexander, The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest, 1965, vii.

79. Moore, Citizen Klansmen, 1991, 191; The author argues that in cities across the U.S., businessmen organizations, such as the anti-Klan group in El Paso, “emerged to advocate a definition of community based almost exclusively on the idea of business success, the Klan drew together a powerful cross section of community social groups that were devoted to a more traditional value system.”

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