

# **International National Socialists” parallelism of activities of American nationalists – German-American Bund and Ku Klux Klan until 1945**

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**Abstract.** Founding Fathers of the country, which was to become United States of America presenting their Declaration of Independence paved the ground for creation of modern democracy. The political and social power vested upon the people thus became a creation of their minds and result of their actions. However, Founding Fathers did not expect that a challenge to their view of the country may appear in American democracy. More than one hundred years later in a small city of Pulaski, a challenging idea appeared, formed amongst citizens, who demanded a different perspective on democracy to be realized on local and nationwide levels. Their beliefs gained a firm support especially during the Great Crisis, when social tensions prevailed.

**Keywords:** Ku Klux Klan, American, Nationalism, History, Racism, Race, Multiculturalism, Nativism, Immigration.

## **1. Introduction**

The aim of proposal is to present the results of academic research on comparative analysis of the two of American national organizations active in the same period of time. The analysis was conducted based on main program assumptions and selected activities undertaken by both German American Bund and Ku Klux Klan until their final dissolution. Based on the analysis outcome, similarities and differences in grounding ideas of mentioned fraternities will be outlined accompanied with a description of their impact on social and political relations present in the country of that time. The answers relating to problems should provide an outline of the state of the American society and reasons hidden behind creation of radical movements existing in the US in a described period of time. Proposed presentation may also open a discussion on social integration theories in the twentieth century United States of America that were the result of society state and ground for state and federal legislation.

Worse economic conditions drive people to fringe political parties. Perhaps Father Coughlin of radio evangelism made overtures to radical groups like the KKK in an effort to consolidate power, and Hitler attacks later, allowing the Bund and KKK to consolidate their gains before the outbreak of war.

## **2. A Short Synopsis of Main Assumptions of Nazi Ideology with Connotation to Ku Klux Klan and German-American Bund**

### **2.1. Renouncement of Democracy and Authoritarian Ruling**

According to the Nazi concept of the totalitarian state, the individual derives his entire significance from the position which is assigned to him by the state. The individual counts for nothing. He has significance only through his position in the Volks gemeins chaft as assigned to him by the leader. This concept is expressed in the Nazi slogan Deutschland muss leben auch wenn wir sterben mussen, which means Germany must live even though we must die. This was a basic tenet of the Hitler Youth which was adopted and taught by the Bund to its youth. According to the Nazi theory of pan-Germanism, the adoption of a foreign citizenship by a person of German birth with entailment of the allegiance to that state is virtually unthinkable. If a German becomes a citizen of a foreign state his primary allegiance must always be to the “Folk” and the German Reich. This concept of citizenship which was taught to its members by the Bund’s speakers and publications is in direct conflict with unqualified allegiance to the United States and renunciation of allegiance to any other foreign power, prince or potentate as required by American naturalization law. It was glorified by the Bund through the slogan, Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fuehrer.

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The political and economic principle of National Socialism are diametrically opposed to those of American democracy. Each of its basic tenets is the antithesis of its counterpart in American political organization. As stated by Adolf Hitler, "two worlds stand opposed to each other, the world of National Socialism and the world of Democracy one of these two must succumb."

Wherever it has attained the power, National Socialism practiced by the Nazi Party and the German-American Bund denied and abrogated the basic rights, such as those guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. By decree of February 26, 1933, the following civil rights, modeled on American Bill of Rights, then existent in Germany, were abrogated: the freedom of speech and written expression, the right of private property, the inviolability of personal liberty, the right of free assembly, the inviolability of the home and the privacy of postal, telegraphic and telephonic communications. Under the Nazi system parliamentary government is abolished and there are no free elections. The people have only the right to approve the selections made by the Fuehrer and to approve by plebiscites, acts of the Fuehrer which usually have already taken place. There is no system of checks or balances and all executive, legislative and judicial functions are united in the Fuehrer who is the supreme law giver. In the vital conflict between the Nazi Ideology and the fundamentals of American Democracy, the Bund preferred the German National Socialist form of government to the constitutional democratic government of the United States and looked forward to its ultimate adoption in this country and it ridiculed Democracy as a decaying form of government. It undertook to promulgate, foster and teach the principles, philosophy, rituals, insignia, procedures, songs, slogans and government of the Nazi Party of Germany in the United States; and to form and have ready the nucleus of a German National Socialist Government in the United States in the event an opportunity to establish such a government should ever present itself. As part of its National Socialist program, it openly advocated the Nazi doctrine of denying equal political and economic rights and privileges to Jews and Afro-Americans. From 1936 through 1941, the Bund maintained and exercised its control and discipline over its members, among other ways, by the issuance of Bund Commands signed by the Leader. The members were ordered and directed to comply with these commands completely and unhesitatingly. The most notorious of these were commands Nos. 35 and 37 which advocated and directed non-compliance with the Alien Registration and Selective Training and Service Acts of 1940.

From the time of its inception as the Teutonia Society the object of the Bund was the promulgation of the German National Socialist World Concept. Originally, this object was served by efforts to assist Hitler in his rise to power in Germany. Members were urged to join the NSDAP and membership dues for the Party were paid through Teutonia, Friends of the Hitler Movement, and the Friends of New Germany and remitted to Germany. During this period receipts and dues stamps were issued by the Bund Leader. As early as April 5, 1923, a collection to aid Hitler financially was taken up among the members. The receipt of this money was acknowledged by a personal letter from Adolf Hitler. Following this incident all members were required to give at least one week's salary a year to further his cause. In appreciation of its efforts the Fuehrer sent an inscribed and autographed copy of *Mein Kampf*. After Nazis assumed control of the German Government in 1933, the main purpose of the organization became the extension of the world philosophy of National Socialism to the entire German-American element in the United States. The main principle of National Socialism as exemplified by the Nazi Party and promulgated by the Bund through its speakers, publications were the Fuehrer principle (leadership principle) the racial superiority of Germans, the principle of the elite class, the principle of the totalitarian state, and the principle of pan-Germanism. The Bund adopted all of these principles, and its members were taught to, and did in fact, consider themselves bound by them. Although a written set of organization concepts was published by the Bund in 1937, it never was adopted by the Bund or its members, who considered it fully American and not suited to the purposes of the organization. Actually, the Bund was conducted in accordance with the so-called leadership principle under which unquestioned obedience is owed to the leader. Furthermore it was believed that Fuehrer arises from the people through the strength of his own personality and genius. He is supposed to embody, represent and execute the will of the people. His decisions are always right and unquestioned. He has absolute and unlimited authority and while there are sub-leaders, who are selected rather than elected, they are responsible to and derive their authority from him. The Bund taught and instilled in the minds of its members the fact that, under the leadership principle all persons of German extraction, as members of the German volk owed obedience, loyalty and allegiance to the leader of the German nation, Adolf Hitler, regardless of their American citizenship.

Ku Klux Klan viewed itself as a patriotic-democratic fraternity. Patriotic democracy was achieved by placing American flags inside schools and churches. Klan's conflict with democracy had been clearly on

record in Klansman's Manual published in 1926: *The military form of government must and will be preserved for the sake of true, patriotic Americanism, because it is the only form of government that gives any guarantee of success. Both experience and history demonstrate the fallacy and futility of a so-called democratic form of government for any such movement as the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. We must avoid the fate of the other organizations that have split on the rock of democracy.*

## **2.2. Racism and Discrimination**

The Nazi concept of racial supremacy is based upon the Volksgemeinschaft community. The Folk is a racial concept according to which Germans are endowed with superior qualities and characteristics which destine them to leadership in the world. This concept was taught to and instilled in the minds of the members of the Bund through speeches of its leaders, its various publications, and propaganda material obtained from abroad and distributed at meetings.

Race supremacy was an effect of radicalism in the face of believers of the idea of racial equality and amalgamatic concepts. Racial segregation was sanctioned since the verdict of the Plessy vs. Ferguson case. In 1916 Madison Grant in his elaboration *Passing of the Great Race* warned against contamination of Anglo-Saxon traditions. Since that time racial supremacy became a very popular theme among radical organizations. The intolerance toward various minorities or racism is a characteristic of pre-theoretical resistance and rebellion to oppressive social conditions. The American Nazis and Klan members tried to use minorities as scapegoats for society's problems.

Leaders of American Nazi organizations shared Hitler's distorted view of the United States and of the 8 million Americans of German stock who lived there. They thought it was their duty to "rescue" their Aryan brothers from the insidious influence of American culture, Jews, and communists. They expected, ignoring the extent of intermarriage and the variety of American political and racial opinion, that German Americans would heed their cry en masse. According to the German-American Bund stricter race laws and prohibition of subversive organizations should be enacted. A typical chant of German Bund called for "Jew free America", immigration quotas and Asiatic exclusion. Fritz Kuhn, Fuehrer of the German American Bund, demanded a "thorough cleansing of the Hollywood film industry of all alien, subversive elements." After Hitler said in his speech a year prior to the *Welt-Dienst* issue Hitler spoke out against Hollywood. Said it was a center of anti-Nazism, democracy and communism, could not be tolerated any longer.

## **3. Return to Traditional Values and Use of Morality**

Totalitarian ideology provides a means to control individuals in every important aspect of their lives. The emphasis on community, ethics, and traditional values in the German-American Bund and Klan literature provides means to control the behavior of people. The existing order is viewed as immoral and too individualistic. A return to a sense of community and morality is needed to achieve a better society. According to Klan concepts short dresses and dances in social clubs were forbidden. One of the examples of Klan activities against unmoral people was a case of a man living with a dreadful woman. After disobeying the ultimatum given by Klan the man was made redundant shortly after and was forced to move out of the town due to rise of the rental fees of his apartment. Another problem was Prohibition. Due to XVIII amendment selling and manufacturing of alcohol was illegal. However, this procedure was often an additional source of income for many poor farmers. Addiction to alcohol was also assumed to be the grounding foundation of prostitution. In El Paso, Texas in one of local newspapers – The Herald, Klan mentioned public houses and prostitutes as forces of evil.

### **3.1. Sense of Community**

The aim of the Klan was to unite all men of a white race, residents of the USA over the age of eighteen who did not have any loyalty to another government or country, institution or sect, loyalty to any authority, person or people. At the beginning of the second Ku Klux Klan it was designed to be solely men organization. However as time progressed American women believing in the idea of pure Americanism also wished to attend organization similar to Klan. There existed two such organizations: Ladies of the Invisible Empire and Grand League of Protestant Women. However, none of them had an endorsement of William Simmons or Hiram Evans, two of most influential Klan leaders. Eventually, William Simmons, the original creator of the second Klan decided, supposedly to gain more income, to accept women and established organization known as Kamelia. The WKKK or Women's Ku Klux Klan was another auxiliary of the Klan. It was officially accepted in June 1923 by Hiram Evans with the inception of organization's statute. Analysis of

the WKKK is sparse, but some studies estimate the WKKK had over 4 million members by 1925. In Indiana it is estimated 32% of white native-born women were members of the WKKK. Their work was largely promulgated through networks in the Protestant Church and a variety of "vice squad organizations". The technique of using lurid and disturbing sexual imagery and often false accusations of sexual offenses was a key element of the WKKK. Women membership was only accepted in the case of applicant not being Catholics, socialists, being over eighteen years old and of American citizenship. Women members of the Klan acted in public life, instructed families about Protestant education and ideas, promoted ideas of racial superiority and sex equality. They also actively helped the poor through numerous charity activities. Ku Klux Klan had also many other auxiliaries intended to join white American populations. Among them were: The Junior Ku Klux Klan was for white, Protestant, native American boys aged 12 to 18. The Tri-K Girls was for white, Protestant, American born girls aged 12 to 18. The American Crusaders was open to white, Protestant, naturalized American citizens of foreign birth. The Ku Klux Kiddies was for pre-teens.

Paralleling the set-up of the Nazi Party in Germany, the Bund had its Youth Group functioning the same as the Hitlerjugend in the Fatherland. This group was educated in the principles of National Socialism, the leadership principle and supremacy of their German blood, both in the United States, and in Germany through trips sponsored and paid for by the Volksbund fuer das Deutschtum in Auslands (VDA). This organization was subject to the control of the Nazi Party and maintained contact with German elements in foreign countries, disseminating through them pro-German propaganda. The Bund maintained its own schools in major cities for the purpose of perpetuating the German language, customs, and culture through the younger children of German blood and descent. The history of Bund owned schools begun with the visit of Severin Winterscheidt, National Bund Press Chief, in Germany in 1936, when he was permitted to attend the official Nazi propaganda school conducted by Heinz Spanknoebel, former national leader of the Friends of New Germany, which was open only to members of the Party. At this school he received training in Nazi ideology and propaganda methods, which he was assigned to transmit to the Bund leaders in schools conducted by him following his return to the United States. Upon the instructions of Fritz Kuhn, Bund leader, such schools were conducted in the New York area and attendance of local leaders was compulsory. These leaders were instructed to convey the knowledge gained through these courses to their units at membership meetings. Following the completion of these courses, Winterscheidt was ordered to take a trip to all Bund posts to make speeches regarding the subject matter of his courses, thus conveying it to leaders and members in all parts of the country. Children of German descent were urged to join the Youth Group for special training in National Socialism. Books for these schools were furnished through the consulates, or VDA American representative, Carl Orgell. The Youth Group was the training ground for future Ordnungs Dienst leaders of the Bund. German-American Bund tried also to socialize Germanic people in The United States. At Ebling's Casino in the Bronx, at Fesel's Pavilion in Suffern and in many beer and dance halls in Buffalo, Milwaukee, and Chicago, the Bund held beer evenings, coffee hours, comradeship meetings; showed movies made in Berlin; sponsored soccer, tennis, hockey, swimming, and ski teams; went to the mountains for martial drill and hiking; and paraded in honor of Hitler's birthday. There were lectures on Nazi art and music. "Patronize Aryan stores" handouts were distributed in front of Jewish-owned establishments.

### **3.2. Use of Militarism or Violence**

The Bund established a uniformed corps called the Ordnungs Dienst patterned after the Schutzstaffel of the Nazi Party in Germany. In fact, the first uniformed group of the Teutonia Society – Bund predecessor - was called the Sturm Abteilung of the Nazi movement. In the beginning, the uniforms were identical to those of the corresponding group of the NSDAP but from time to time they were modified to become less obviously German. The alleged purpose of this group was to maintain order and to act as a protective body at large gatherings. However, it was in fact the most militant arm of the Bund, and although unarmed, was drilled in military formations using the commands set out in Party Regulations for the SA in Germany. Ordnungs Dienst members were instructed in the use of their uniform belts as weapons. It was trained in the distribution of National Socialist propaganda, the dissemination of Nazi philosophy, and the solicitation of new members. Some units required an oath of allegiance to Hitler, while others required a pledge of absolute obedience to the leadership principle. Joseph Schuster was the First National Leader of the organization.

The Ku Klux Klan on the other hand also established a militant organization called the Black Legion which was active especially in the Midwestern territories of the US. Rather than wearing white robes, the Legion wore black uniforms reminiscent of pirates. The organization was founded by William Shepard in east central Ohio. The group's total membership was estimated between 20,000 and 30,000, centered in

Detroit, though the Legion was also highly active in Ohio, and one of its self-described leaders, Virgil Effinger lived and worked in Lima, Ohio. The Associate Press described the organization on May 31, 1936, "as a group of loosely federated night-riding bands operating in several States without central discipline or common purpose beyond the enforcement by lash and pistol of individual leaders' notions of "Americanism." The death of Charles Poole, kidnapped and murdered in southwest Detroit, caused authorities to finally arrest and successfully try and convict a group of twelve men, thereby ending the reign of the Black Legion.

### 3.3. Attitude towards Religions

According to Klan doctrine the Bible was perceived as a factual and unchangeable word of God. However, despite seeing itself as a Christian fraternity, Klan acted willingly against Catholics and other religions, Jews mainly. Catholics appeared on the American soil as immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. In 1920 Catholics amounted to 36% of the whole American society. According to Klan leaders, organization was not against the religion but against the bureaucratic institution, who could be a rival of any form of government. The Pope was seen as an autocrat, who has been often influential in political matters. Catholics were believed to be fanatics, who given a chance can revive the chain of tyranny, revive Inquisition and burn stakes as it used to be in old times. Jews attacked by the Klan were mostly members of the first or second generation that still preserved most of their traditions. The Semite was usually portrayed as a merchandiser not as a pioneer, the founder of the country and nation.

### 3.4. Attitude towards Political and Economical Systems

In Klan's view Bolsheviks were associated with Jews. This concept was firstly introduced by Ruben Sawyer, the creator of British Israelism, who became later a Klan lecturer. Bolsheviks were aiming at destruction of the government and financial magnates controlling Christians. Klan took on a strong anti-communist stance after government introduction of laws and actions aimed at tracing communists in the US. The creation of the investigative department – GID in the Department of Justice by Attorney General Mitchel Palmer even hastened anti-communist actions. One of such violent actions was a capture of communist leader Ida Couch Hazlett during a speech in Madison City, Iowa. Klan members forced Mrs. Hazlett using tortures harassment to move out of the city. Bolsheviks were also hated due to their connections with Afro-Americans who trusted in communist ideologies of social equality and justice. Communists on the other hand offered their hand in the fight of Afro-Americans for their rights. In 1925 close collaboration of Afro-Americans and American communists resulted in the establishment of American Negro Labor Congress. Klan was also strongly anti-unionist fraternity.

On February 20, 1939 German-American Bund leader Fritz Kuhn, in his address to a Bund rally in Madison Square Garden said: "We, the German-American Bund, organized as American citizens with American ideals and determined to protect ourselves, our homes, our wives and children against the slimy conspirators who would change this glorious republic into the inferno of a Bolshevik paradise..."

## 4. Conclusion

Summarizing, worse economic conditions drive people to fringe political parties. Thus before the outbreak of the second world war the two distinctly different yet radical movements joined efforts to gain their own goals. German American Bund, mandated by the Third Reich officially trying to protect the German traditions and culture overseas implemented the Nazi ideas on American soil. Ku Klux Klan on the other hand with a support of Nazis was able to survive during the economic crisis and gain more members.

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