

America May Not Perish: The Italian-American Fight against the Ku Klux Klan in the
Mahoning Valley

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America May Not Perish: The Italian-American Fight against the Ku Klux Klan in the Mahoning Valley

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Abstract

Previous studies on the Italian-American reaction to the Ku Klux Klan in Niles, Ohio primarily discussed the Knights of the Flaming Circle, an anti-Klan organization whose efforts and activities news writers well documented in local papers. Some completed oral interviews of those who experienced the presence of the Klan to supplement the information obtained from newspaper accounts. However, most of these interviews took place in the 1980s, nearly sixty years after the riot between the Knights of the Flaming Circle and the Klan. Furthermore, the age of the interviewees limited the validity of the oral histories.

Only one local newspaper, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, provided an account of the events in the Mahoning Valley through the perspective of Italian-Americans. The newspaper, written in Italian, had scarcely been analyzed for research. It contained valuable information regarding Italian-American attitudes toward the Klan, the United States, and the Mahoning Valley. Most importantly, the newspaper provided evidence of another Italian reaction to the Klan, separate from the Knights of the Flaming Circle. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* called Italian-Americans to participate in the American political process and prove their American citizenship by contributing to Niles society.

Il Cittadino Italo-Americano served as the most significant primary source to determine the Italian-American reaction to the Ku Klux Klan. Information gathered from other local newspapers, oral histories, census data, and secondary literature supplemented that obtained from *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*. Using these sources, the study proved that another Italian-American reaction against the Klan existed. These Italians were politically active, literate, educated, and considered themselves American citizens.

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Introduction

L'America non puo perire, translated as, America may not perish, exemplified the sentiment of a group of Italian-Americans living in Mahoning and Trumbull County, Ohio during the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. The statement appeared in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, the local Italian newspaper in Youngstown, Ohio. The articles in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* expressed the attitudes, beliefs, and values held by the newspaper's contributors regarding their new residence in the United States. While members of the Ku Klux Klan viewed their efforts as attempts to save America from demoralization, Italians in the Mahoning Valley claimed that the Klan violated the Constitution and the principles that formed the basis for America's social, economic, and political systems. These Italians believed that America would crumble if the influence of the Ku Klux Klan persisted.¹ Tensions between Klan members and Italian-Americans gradually increased in Mahoning and Trumbull County throughout 1924. Finally, the conflict ignited in Niles, Ohio on November 1, 1924. The Niles riot attracted national attention and represented the situation plaguing many cities and towns throughout the United States.

Previous studies on the tensions between the Klan and Italian-Americans in the Mahoning Valley analyzed the reaction of the Knights of the Flaming Circle, an anti-Klan organization composed of Italian and Irish immigrants. Some of the most active members of the Knights of the Flaming Circle lived in Niles' East End, such as brothers James and Joseph Jennings. The Jennings family was Italian and owned the Jennings Athletic Club, an establishment for gambling, bootlegging, and athletic training. The

¹ "Gli Ebrei e il Klan," *Youngstown (Ohio) Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 23 December 1922, p. 6.

Jennings Athletic Club was not the only speakeasy and gambling establishment in the East Side. By the 1920s, gambling and bootlegging characterized the East End of Niles. As a result of these illegal activities, Protestant ministers demanded stronger enforcement of prohibition and gambling regulations which affected businesses in the East End.² Unlike the efforts presented in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, the Knights of the Flaming Circle utilized any means necessary, often extreme, to combat the Klan in order to protect their businesses and values.

Niles and Youngstown were two cities in Ohio among several within the Mahoning Valley that experienced a re-emergence of the Ku Klux Klan. The cities mentioned in this study either fall under the jurisdiction of Mahoning County or Trumbull County. Trumbull County lies just north of Mahoning County, and both compose the north eastern part of Ohio that borders Pennsylvania. The cities in Mahoning and Trumbull County are part of the Mahoning Valley, which became a hotbed of Klan activity in the 1920s.

Niles and Youngstown, like many other industrial American cities, experienced sudden changes at the turn of the century. The first of these changes was a dramatic growth of industry. Beginning around 1900, several American cities underwent a second industrial revolution that required extensive human labor. Cities, such as Buffalo, Youngstown, and Chicago developed industry that attracted workers from all over the world. The Mahoning Valley experienced similar industrial changes that spurred growth. In 1900 the largest steel company in the area, the Youngstown Iron Sheet and Tube Company, formed. Other industries followed and soon Niles, along with other

² William D. Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio's Mahoning Valley* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1990), 67, 122.

surrounding towns and cities, was the location of several large steel mills.³ Most of the business surrounding Niles was part of or associated with the iron or steel industry. The Niles Fire Brick Company, begun in 1872, produced firebrick used to line furnaces in the iron and steel industry.⁴ All of these industries rose quickly and altered the landscape in which they existed.



Fifteenth Census of the United States, Map, Population, 1930, Reports by states showing the composition and characteristics for counties, cities, and townships or other minor civil divisions, Vol. III, Part 2, Montana-Wyoming, retrieved from www.census.gov (Washington, D.C., 1932), 456.

³ William D. Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio's Mahoning Valley* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1990), 17.

⁴ Martha I. Pallante, "To Work and Live: Brickyard Laborers, Immigration, and Assimilation in an Ohio Town, 1890-1925," *Northeast of Ohio Journal of History* 2 (Fall 2003): 6.

An increase in immigration to the United States resulted as a consequence of industrial development. The largest influx of immigrants arrived between 1890 and 1920 and consisted mostly of southern and eastern Europeans. These individuals left their homelands for several reasons, but most importantly in search of economic security. News of the prosperity of the United States reached Europe and motivated many to seek opportunity across the Atlantic. After their arrival to Ellis Island, immigrants either chose to stay in New York City or branch out to one of the many newly emerging industrial centers.⁵ As a result of increased immigration, American cities grew remarkably in population within a short period. For example, between 1900 and 1920 the population of Niles tripled in size.⁶ This growth altered the population landscape by combining people of different cultures and values.

The technological, social, and industrial change that bombarded the United States prompted concern from native-born residents. Many were certain that these changes would stimulate the moral disintegration of the United States. In several American cities, these fears stimulated a reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan gained strength in cities such as Indianapolis, Chicago, and Buffalo. The Klan also gained strength in Niles and Youngstown in response to the increasing foreign population. Prior to the influx of immigrants, Welsh and Germans composed the majority of the population of Niles. As more and more eastern and southern Europeans arrived in Niles, Welsh and Germans became alarmed due to the differences in cultural values and behaviors. The new immigrants practiced different religions, spoke distinct languages, and observed unique customs that frightened and confused those who had never come into contact with other

⁵ Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (New York: HaperCollins Publishers, 1992; HarperPerennial, 1993), xiii-xvi.

⁶ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 18.

cultures.⁷ Thus industrialization and immigration combined to forever modify American society in small towns and large cities.

The American landscape of the early twentieth century and immigration are topics frequently studied by historians. However, historical interpretations of immigration to the United States failed to develop until the 1950s. Prior to 1950, most historians interpreted immigration through an assimilationist perspective. Assimilationists, such as Phyllis H. Williams, believed that the only way to deal with immigrants was to teach them how to be white Protestant Americans.⁸ Therefore, historical accounts exhibited assimilation tendencies and portrayed the immigrants' culture negatively.

The 1950s brought a decline in assimilation theory and launched the melting pot concept. Following the trends of other American historians in the 1950s, writers of immigration history advocated consensus. These historians recognized that American culture altered with the addition of each immigrant group. Thus, the idea was that eventually all Americans would exhibit the same characteristics. Supporters of the melting pot theory recognized that not everyone fit into the white Protestant category; however, they believed that as American society adjusted to each immigrant group a common society would develop. Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* displayed characteristics of the melting pot model but also began to exhibit the effect American culture had on immigrants. While Handlin recognized that immigrants altered the United States he also focused on how America changed immigrants.⁹

⁷ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 19-20.

⁸ Phyllis H. Williams, *South Italian Folkways in Europe and America: A Handbook for Social Workers, Visiting Nurses, School Teachers, and Physicians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938).

⁹ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1951).

By the 1960s, historians gradually abandoned the melting pot theory in favor of cultural pluralism. Cultural pluralists argued that immigrants were different from Americans, and it was not necessary for them to blend into American culture. In *Italians in Chicago 1880-1930*, Humbert Nelli contended that immigrants survived and prospered in American society while maintaining their ethnicity and original culture.¹⁰ Cultural pluralists recognized the differences in ethnicities and viewed those as cultural survivals.

The most recent trend in immigration history, multiculturalism, succeeded cultural pluralism. Multiculturalists claimed that immigrants retained their cultural characteristics but also changed since their arrival to the United States. Immigrants noticed their change in attitude and behavior upon return to their home land after a decade or more of being away. Thus immigrants were different than their ethnic counterparts who never left their country of origin. Multiculturalists further argued that the change that occurred within immigrants was the result of their own doing. Thomas Kessner's *The Golden Door* demonstrated how the ethnic background of Italians and Jews altered the means through which they achieved occupational success in the United States.¹¹

This study will argue in favor of multiculturalism. Italian-Americans in Niles were different from their relatives or friends in southern Italy. Their residence for thirty years caused that change. However, the methods utilized by Italians to adapt to new situations in Niles came from their Italian background. Their observation of Italian Catholic *feste*, attendance of Italian Catholic churches, and production of wine along with

¹⁰ Humbert S. Nelli, *Italians in Chicago 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility*, The Urban Life in America Series, ed. Richard C. Wade (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1970).

¹¹ Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Mobility in New York City 1880-1915*, The Urban Life in America Series, ed. Richard C. Wade (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1977), 23.

other Italian foods symbolized the love and respect they retained for southern Italy. However, at the same time they appreciated and admired the American values of individuality, independence, and democracy. The Italians in the Mahoning Valley considered themselves American citizens and initiated action to defend their society from the damaging effects of the Ku Klux Klan.

The first section of this study describes the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States, particularly Niles. The topics regarding the Klan addressed in this chapter include the social trends that stimulated nationalist thought, the beliefs and values of the Klan, the tactics utilized by the Klan to gain power, and the characteristics of the Klan specific to Niles and the Mahoning Valley. A solid understanding of the beliefs and tactics of the Klan is necessary to comprehend the root of tensions between Klan members and immigrants, particularly Italian-Americans in this case.

The second section discusses the arrival of Italian Americans to Niles. Reasons for migrating, time of arrival, transplantation of customs, and community involvement compose this chapter. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* provides evidence of community involvement in Niles and some indication of the reasons behind Italian migration. Other information regarding Italian customs and beliefs derives from previous studies on other Italian communities throughout the United States. An understanding of the customs and traditions practiced by Italian-Americans provides a basis for considering the differences between Italian Catholics and white Protestants. Furthermore, such an understanding allows for an explanation as to why Italian immigrants reacted as they did in certain situations.

The increase in tensions between the Ku Klux Klan and Italian-Americans composes the third section. It is in this section that the attitudes of each group toward the other are analyzed. The section begins with the 1923 election of Harvey Kistler, mayor of Niles during the 1924 riot. The Klan backed Kistler during the 1923 mayoral election. Prior studies on the Italian-American community in Niles have been unable to display the immigrants' understanding of the democratic voting process in the United States. However, evidence in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* proves that many Italians in Niles and the surrounding area were more knowledgeable about the American political system than even Klan members of the time believed. Political tensions between Klan and anti-Klan factions occurred within the community due to the presence of heavy campaign advertisements for the 1924 presidential and state elections.

Finally, the fifth section explains the Niles riot and the events immediately leading to the riot. Why did such a violent riot occur when each group repeatedly stressed the importance of maintaining peace? Why did Mayor Kistler refuse to cancel the Klan parade after several pleas on the part of Niles' citizens for him to do so? Though these questions are difficult to answer, understanding the events of the riot helps to speculate on such issues. This section includes consequences and results of the riot. Evidence exists to prove that the Italians involved in the production of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* considered themselves American citizens, and, as a result, they reacted as any citizen would in a situation where forces threaten the American values of individuality, independence, and democracy.

Chapter One: One Hundred Percent Americanism

Picturing the United States in the 1920s often conjures up images of flappers, Model T Fords, music, money, and entertainment. However, underneath the flashy facade of the Roaring Twenties lie crises and instabilities. Prior to the First World War, southern and eastern Europeans left home for the United States in droves. Owners of American industry took advantage of this cheap labor and hired southern and eastern Europeans as laborers. These immigrants not only brought their personal belongings but also their cultural habits and values which concerned many native born Americans. During World War I, America's involvement temporarily halted European immigration.

America's need for factory workers to supplement the traditional workforce during the war stimulated the migration of African Americans from southern states to northern and midwestern cities. This migration became known as the Great Migration and African Americans discovered that northern cities were not accepting of the African American community. Racism in the form of segregation and discrimination flourished in the north and combined with other illnesses characteristic of northern cities such as poverty, pollution, and drinking. After World War I, European immigration to the United States resumed; however, the war triggered recurring feelings of nativism among many Americans. Skepticism regarding European immigrants' loyalty to the United States caused numerous Americans to advocate and celebrate those of American birth over those of foreign birth.

These sudden societal changes prompted the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan. According to Kathleen M. Blee, while societal changes contributed to the initial spark of the Klan, financial opportunities along with a strong market system fostered its continued

expansion in the 1920s.¹ Unlike the Klan of the Reconstruction Era, the 1920s Klan emphasized principles related to moralism, fraternalism, nationalism, and Protestantism, all important values of American society. In response to the increase in the number of immigrants in the United States, Klan members advocated one hundred percent Americanism. Those who fell into the category of one hundred percent Americanism were white Protestants of native origin. Klan members considered those who did not embody such characteristics as un-American. It was the Klan of the 1920s that focused energy on proving the uselessness of immigrants, Catholics, and Jews to American society. One hundred percent Americanism represented the Klan's preference for a society composed of native born whites.

The Ku Klux Klan was an American institution that promoted the principles valued by many United States citizens. These principles included religion, public education, and democracy. A lack of morality became an issue for many Americans in the 1910s and 1920s who feared that technological and societal advancements destroyed wholesome American culture. Public transportation and the production of vehicles allowed people to experience events outside of the home such as amusement parks, theaters, and dance halls. While the Klan did not oppose the presence of such establishments, the organization made efforts to limit the hours of operation, often with respect to religious values, and to regulate the influence of these establishments on youth. For example, the Klan pushed for the closing of theaters on Sundays in observance of the Sabbath.

¹ Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 18.

The most significant change at the turn of the century was the increase in the immigration of southern and eastern Europeans to the United States. An influx of people from different religious and cultural backgrounds spurred feelings of white supremacy and hatred of certain religions and ethnic backgrounds. These feelings were common among native born Americans who believed that incorporating immigrants into American society destroyed racial and religious purity.² Though anti-immigrant policies served as key tenets of Klan beliefs, this was not the first time such anti-immigrant attitudes influenced legislation. In the 1850s the Know Nothing movement, a nativist American political party, attempted to reduce immigration and naturalization but experienced little success. Know Nothings reacted to the presence of Irish Catholic immigrants in the United States by claiming that Irish immigrants rejected American values and remained under the control of the Pope in Rome. A few decades later Chinese immigrants attracted similar anti-immigrant sentiment. The government responded to American claims that Chinese immigrants took jobs away from native-born Americans by passing the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act which barred skilled and unskilled Chinese laborers from entering the United States.

The elements of fraternalism and nationalism appealed to citizens of the United States, for those were values that they believed were embedded in the Constitution. Thus the Klan's ability to capitalize on those values and make them the central factor of their program broadened their appeal. Klan gatherings celebrated the racial and religious privileges of white Protestants, thus creating feelings of pride among members.³ Since societal changes caused confusion for Americans, they sought comfort in knowing that

² Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 17-19.

³ Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 1.

the Ku Klux Klan wanted to reduce the influence of unwelcome changes and morally improve American society. That so many Americans displayed concern about their society explains the popularity of the Klan which resulted in its reemergence in the 1920s, a decade characterized as one of significant change.⁴ Since many Americans desired to combat change by returning society to what it was like before urbanization, immigration, and industrialization, the Klan had a significant impact on individuals both within and outside of the organization.

While fraternalism and nationalism appealed to a large percentage of Americans, the Klan's emphasis on motherhood and the home echoed the family values held by citizens of the United States since the Revolutionary period. Few Americans disagreed on the necessity for female purity and a stable home environment. Klansmen believed that mothers were responsible for raising strong, white, Protestant men. The survival of the United States relied on the direction of these men. According to Blee, motherhood sustained the United States, a nation driven by Protestant males.⁵ The Klan's emphasis on motherhood was not much different from the importance that immigrants placed on motherhood. Many different cultures considered mothers caretakers and educators. Therefore, not all Klan principles were outrageous or alien concepts. Italian immigrants placed similar value on the mother of the house. Italian children respected and adored their mother at all times.

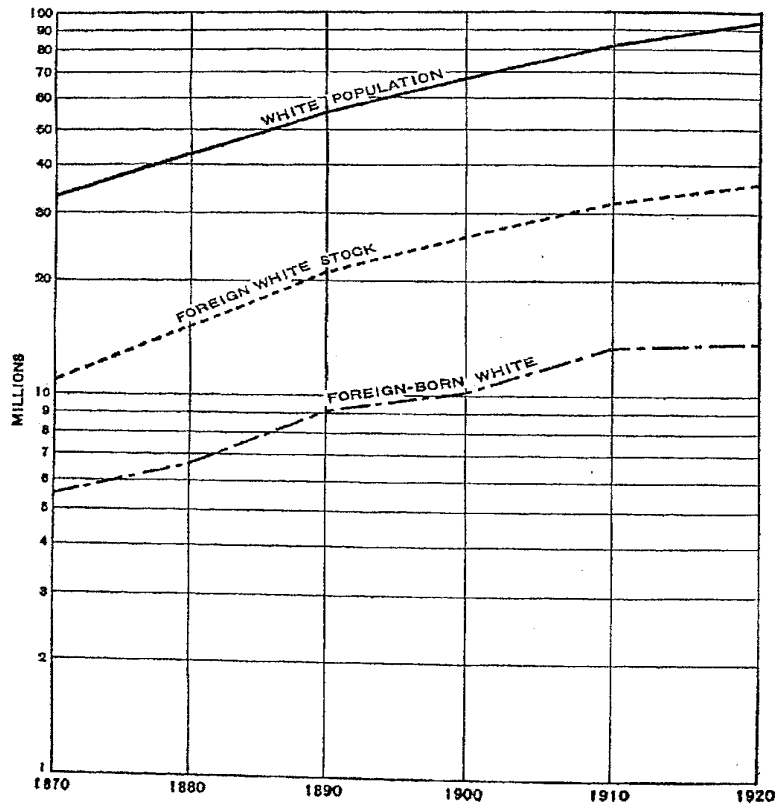
The home was a symbol treasured by Klansmen, and it coincided with motherhood. The Klan considered the home a symbol of Americanism. It was in the

⁴ Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930*, The Urban Life in America Series, ed. Richard C. Wade, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1967; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1977), xv.

⁵ Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 46.

home that parents taught American values to their children without external interference from immigrants, gamblers, or blacks. The home provided protection from these outside forces and reinforced Protestant morals. Klansmen did not view attacks on the home lightly for the home was the only location of total refuge from damaging societal developments. Gambling, alcohol consumption, and the presence of foreigners made the outside world a dangerous place for children.⁶ Thus, the home was the origin of moral teaching which included lessons in integrity, modesty, persistence, and chastity.

CHART I.—RATE OF GROWTH OF WHITE POPULATION, FOREIGN WHITE STOCK, AND FOREIGN-BORN WHITE: 1870-1920
[Logarithmic scale]



Bureau of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Immigrants and their Children*, vol. 7, Census Monographs, retrieved from www.census.gov (Washington, D.C., 1927), 8.

⁶ Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 46-47.

Increased immigration occurred simultaneously with a rapidly growing native white population. Therefore, the combination of the increase in the two population groups caused a boom in the total population of the United States. Americans in the early twentieth century believed that the foreign-born population increased at an alarming rate compared to native population growth. According to a chart in the 1920 census depicting rate of population growth for the white population, the foreign white stock population, and the foreign-born white population, the rate of increase for each of these groups within a seventy year period occurred at consistent rates.⁷ Unfortunately, native born whites failed to notice the extensive increase in their own population. The arrival of varying cultures in the United States blinded Americans from noticing their own growth. Furthermore, the proliferation of the native white population that occurred alongside the immigrant upsurge allowed the native population to overshadow the immigrant population, thus providing a large population basis for the expansion of the Klan.

Consistent with the rest of the United States, Trumbull County, and Niles, in particular, experienced significant population growth between 1900 and 1930. The total population for Trumbull County was 46,501 in 1900, 52,766 in 1910, 83,920 in 1920, and 123,063 in 1930. The largest percentage increase in population, 59 percent, occurred between 1910 and 1920.⁸ Niles experienced similar leaps in population growth. The total population of Niles was 8,361 in 1910, 13,080 in 1920, and 16,314 in 1930. Therefore,

⁷ Bureau of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, Immigrants and their Children, vol. 7, Census Monographs, retrieved from www.census.gov (Washington, D.C., 1927), 8.

⁸ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Number and Distribution of Inhabitants, vol. 1, retrieved from www.census.gov (Washington, D.C., 1931), 841.

between 1910 and 1920 the population increased by 36 percent.⁹ This percentage increase was not as large as the percentage growth in all of Trumbull County between 1910 and 1920. However, the population percentage rise in Niles, between 1920 and 1930, was 20 percent.

Despite the increase of the immigrant population in Trumbull County and Niles, the native population maintained the greater percentage of the total population due to its correlative pattern of growth. In 1920, the native white percentage of the total population in Trumbull County was 82 percent. The total foreign-born white percentage was 16.7. The foreign born white percentage in 1920 was 2 percent greater than in 1910 while the native born white percentage was 2 percent lower in 1910. The total foreign-born white percentage was 16.7, and immigrants of Italian origin composed an even less percentage of the population. Niles contained a higher foreign born percentage than in Trumbull County. The native-born residents of Niles comprised 75 percent of the total population. Therefore, foreign-born inhabitants made up nearly 25 percent of the total population in Niles. In 1920, 9 percent of Niles' population was Italian born immigrants.¹⁰

The advantage of percentage for the native born population assisted the Klan in achieving a stronghold in many areas throughout the United States. The total population of the foreign-born only comprised about a quarter of the population in Niles. Therefore, Klan ideals naturally found acceptance in a greater portion of the population. While the foreign population composed enough of the greater populace to raise concern for native whites, it was not large enough to prevent the spread of the Klan.

⁹ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Number and Distribution of Inhabitants, vol. 1, retrieved from www.census.gov (Washington, D. C., 1931), 861.

¹⁰ Bureau of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population by States, vol. 3, retrieved from www.census.gov (Washington, D.C.), 783, 788.

Colonel William J. Simmons reinstated the new Klan in 1915 and became the first imperial wizard after being district organizer of the Woodmen of the World, an American fraternal society. Simmons realized the appeal of a secret society to Americans who wanted to belong to an order that supported their values. He resurrected the Klan hoping that its secret rituals and restricted membership would attract Americans. Similar to the Reconstruction Klan, the 1920s Klan remained anonymous behind white masks and robes. Incorporated into Klan activity were parades, picnics, and other communal gatherings that showcased the fraternal values of the society.¹¹ Advertising these values made the Klan appealing to Americans and motivated them to join the organization.

The reemergence of the Klan began at local levels before expanding nationwide. Revivals occurred in areas scattered throughout the United States, but it was not until the 1920s that the Ku Klux Klan gained national attention. In the fall of 1921, Rowland Thomas published an article on the violent features of the Klan which led to an investigation of the Klan by the United States House of Representatives. The investigation served as an advertisement for the Ku Klux Klan and attracted the interest of those who were unaware of the Klan's values and practices. Besides drawing national attention, the investigation brought forth new Klan leadership. Hiram Evans, exalted cyclops of the Dallas Klan, viewed deficiencies in Simmons's leadership that limited the potential power of the Klan. Evans, along with two others, devised a plan to limit Simmons's power within the Klan hierarchy. In November of 1922, Evans became the

¹¹ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 2.

new imperial wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.¹² With Hiram Evans as imperial wizard, the Klan rapidly gained popularity throughout the United States.

Certain areas in some states were hotbeds of Klan activity such as those in Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio. Indiana had the highest Klan membership of any state while Ohio ranked second. The Ohio Klan began in Cincinnati in late 1920. From Cincinnati, the Klan spread northward through Ohio. Kleagle D. E. Glosner began the Youngstown, Ohio chapter of the Klan in 1921. By 1922, leadership shifted to Colonel E. A. Gunder. Gunder replaced Glosner as kleagle of the Youngstown chapter and served under Clyde W. Osborne, grand dragon of Ohio.¹³

The Klan in Youngstown and Niles was fairly active. Estimates regarding Klan membership in the Mahoning Valley hover between ten thousand and seventeen thousand members. The secrecy of the Klan limited the accuracy of such estimates because of the difficulty in finding Klan rosters.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the Klan was a popular organization in Niles and Youngstown in the early 1920s. As with other cities, Niles' citizens faced challenges related to the population growth that resulted from industrialization. Besides being a venue in which people could voice their fears, the Klan offered incentives to members. Members received group support, a sense of purpose, and opportunities for vertical movement within the Klan hierarchy.¹⁵ Thus, by belonging to the Klan, members believed they were combating their fears by assisting in enforcing the law and upholding the principles of the Constitution.

¹² Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 7-14.

¹³ Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 164-167.

¹⁴ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 80.

¹⁵ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 87-88.

Numerous Mahoning Valley citizens viewed the Klan negatively; however, many believed that preventing Klan meetings would only irritate the Klan and amplify their potential damage. As a result, citizens agreed to allow the Klan to meet in hopes that the popularity of the organization would fade away.¹⁶ However, many Mahoning Valley citizens related to Klan principles and associated membership in the Klan with the duties of Protestants to uphold Christian morals. The Klan stated its association with Protestantism in its principles; however, public support of the Klan by some Protestant churches also contributed to the Klan's success. In 1922, Reverend A. C. Archibald of the First Baptist Church responded to the presence of the Klan in Youngstown. In his statement he agreed with Klan principles but opposed the violent methods, issuance of hatred, and public bigotry characteristic of Klan practice. Unfortunately, Klan members frequently utilized such practices. The Klan took advantage of the fears and prejudices many held towards immigrants, particularly Italians and Jews in order to increase membership and popularity.¹⁷ As a result, individuals joined the Klan uninformed about the entirety of its agenda and only realized the extent of the Klan's hatred toward immigrants after joining.

The tactics utilized by the 1920s Klan to accomplish goals differed from those used by the Reconstruction Klan. Though violence was a factor in methods utilized by Klan members in the 1920s, it did not occur in the same form as with the Reconstruction Klan. The Klan of the Reconstruction period lynched or assaulted individuals and groups they opposed. Usually the Klan reserved these violent attacks for blacks, the target group of the post Civil War Klan. After the Civil War, the South experienced difficulty

¹⁶ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 32.

¹⁷ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 31-32.

adjusting to the abolition of slavery. The Klan developed as a reaction to freed blacks and consisted of rural white men. Furthermore, the Reconstruction Klan formed its basis in the rural South.

The 1920s Klan differed from the Reconstruction Klan in nearly every way. 1920s Klansmen issued threats of violence both written and oral.¹⁸ Other differences involved location, composition, and tactics. The 1920s Klan emerged in northeastern and midwestern cities and consisted of white middle class men and women. Members of the 1920s Klan presented the possibility for violence but did not act upon it or necessarily want to act upon it. The threat of violence allowed Klan members to instill fear on those who they considered moral violators without breaking the law by committing assault. The 1920s Klan replaced violent attacks with verbal and oral insults directed toward immigrants, African Americans, Catholics, and Jews.

One such tactic to induce fear was cross burning. This activity was characteristic of the Reconstruction Klan as well, for it was the symbol of the Ku Klux Klan. Lighting fiery crosses served a dual purpose. Klansmen utilized the crosses as warning symbols to anti-Klan forces; the fiery crosses also provided entertainment and symbols of unity for Klansmen. In April of 1923, the first recorded evidence of cross burning occurred in Niles. The Klan placed three burning crosses on three different locations, Spring Road, Deforest Road, and Hartzell Avenue.¹⁹ These burnings characterized the presence of the Klan in Niles throughout 1923 and 1924.

As the Klan gained prominence and power in 1924, they directed cross burnings at the Catholic and immigrant population in Niles. The *Niles Evening Register* reported a

¹⁸ Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 81.

¹⁹ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 71.

fiery cross in front of the Knights of Columbus building, on the corner of North Main Street and Helen Avenue. The Knights of Columbus was a Catholic fraternal organization, primarily composed of Italian Catholics. It provided support to its members both emotionally and materially. James Jennings, an Italian-American, called the police to report another cross burning in his backyard.²⁰ The Jennings, known for the Jennings Athletic Club, made money through gambling and bootlegging in Niles' East End. The Klan, as an organization for moral reform, targeted areas of illegal activity. Both of these burnings occurred on New Year's Day in 1924 to send a warning to Catholics and immigrants, each considered law breaking and unpatriotic citizens by Klan members.

The primary tactic utilized by the 1920s Klan was involvement in politics, and the Youngstown chapter of the Klan experienced moderate success in local politics between 1922 and 1925. Through local politics, the Mahoning Valley Klan pushed for issues related to anti-immigration, law enforcement, and public education. The Ohio Klan never fully accomplished statewide success due to lack of statewide support, but several areas in Ohio experienced the election of Klan backed mayors, police chiefs, and school board members.²¹ The Mahoning Valley was an area of strong Klan support, but that support was not consistent with all areas in Ohio. Likely, the Mahoning Valley's reliance on an industrial economy and therefore an immigrant workforce fostered the reemergence and growth of the Klan in that area.

The 1920s Klan established a preference for Republican candidates; however, in some instances Klansmen endorsed Democratic nominees. The primary requirement for backing a candidate was the assurance that the candidate would enact Klan principles

²⁰ "Burn Fiery Crosses Tuesday Morning," *Niles Evening Register*, 2 January 1924, p. 1.

²¹ Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 168.

while in office. The Klan realized that the only way to change or enforce law was through the government. Therefore, by endorsing candidates the Klan gained an influential position in local government. In some cases, once elected to office, Klan-backed political leaders served as puppets for the Klan. With involvement in local politics, the Klan influenced mayoral appointments, police force assignments, and school board majorities.

The Klan obtained influence in Niles politics during the 1923 election when Democratic nominee Harvey C. Kistler defeated the Republican candidate Charles Crow. Despite Crow's previous experience as mayor for four terms, Kistler, who was endorsed by the Klan, won by roughly 250 votes.²² The election was a victory for the Klan in Niles because Kistler provided the connection they needed to clean up Niles' society and enforce constitutional law. Under Kistler the Klan hoped to initiate civic developments, economic improvements, and law enforcement.

Niles was not the only city in the Mahoning Valley that saw the political success of the Ku Klux Klan. Youngstown, the largest neighboring city to Niles, also experienced the selection of a Klan endorsed mayor during the 1923 mayoral election. After interviewing several candidates for mayor, the Klan selected Charles F. Scheible. Placing full endorsement behind one Klan endorsed candidate strengthened the Klan's influence in the election and ensured that the campaign issues would involve moral, social, and economic improvement. In 1923, Scheible defeated Thomas Muldoon and William J. Williams, both candidates not aligned with the Klan.²³

Klan endorsed candidates achieved success in other cities surrounding Niles. In Warren, John H. Marshall was the Republican candidate supported by the Klan who ran

²² "Klan Wins in Bitter Fight at Niles Polls," 6 November 1923.

²³ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 40-52.

against Democrat John McBride in the 1923 election. Not only did Marshall win the majority of votes during the mayoral election, but so did three of four Klan backed councilmen.²⁴ Struthers and Campbell were also areas of Klan activity. Girard, one of the smaller cities in the Mahoning Valley, boasted strong Klan support. Citizens of Girard willingly received the Klan message and took pride in that fact that Girard was a dry city.²⁵

By 1923, the influence of the Klan in local politics was incredibly strong despite the high percentages of immigrants in these areas. According to interview transcripts the Klan did not go so far as to force individuals to vote for the Klan-endorsed candidate. However, individuals against the Klan, primarily immigrants, remained divided by ethnicity. Irish Catholics did not join with Italian Catholics for political strength. Each ethnic group focused on each other's differences instead of the fact that they all had one commonality in being immigrants. For example, Italian-Americans voted for Italian-American candidates. The rivalry among ethnic groups prevented them from gaining a place in politics allowing the Klan to benefit from the fragmenting of ethnic groups and maintain the support of a greater percentage of the population.²⁶ In newspapers, the Klan referenced immigrants as a monolithic group without differentiating Irish from Italians. Neither Irish nor Italians thought of themselves as merely immigrants. Though Irish and Italians were Catholic, they practiced the religion differently and did not want to be characterized as part of the same group.

²⁴ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 60-64.

²⁵ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 72-76.

²⁶ Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, 8 May 1984, interview 311, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Archives and Special Collections, Maag Library, Youngstown, Oh, 10.

The fact that Klan power spread through several cities in the Mahoning Valley made efforts to ignore or avoid the message and activities of the Klan impossible. Italian Americans living in the Mahoning Valley recalled the difficulties in trying to evade the Klan. The Klan dominated the sheriff, the prosecutor, the judge, the mayor, the chief of police, and some policemen.²⁷ According to an interview of Nicola Criscione by William Jenkins, the Klan dominated Girard, Youngstown, Canfield, North Lima, as well as other cities. Criscione remembered the presence of Klan power in the Mahoning Valley, particularly Girard, as an Italian American.

Like, for instance, Girard, you couldn't go through Girard. They called it the "Holy City." Every time you went through Girard, even if you spit on the sidewalk, they would throw you in jail. If you weren't a Klansman, or if you were an ethnic group, they would throw you in jail.²⁸

The Klan infiltrated several aspects of society in the Mahoning Valley. School boards, police forces, and local governments all included Klan representation. The immigrants in Niles not only met bigotry in their own city but also could not travel to neighboring cities without facing discrimination on the part of the Klan. Therefore, the possibility to escape from Klan intolerance continued to shrink as 1924 progressed.

Political involvement allowed the Klan to enforce the prohibition laws which Klansmen considered important to the upkeep of the moral community. The passage of the Eighteenth Amendment which prohibited the sale, production, and transportation of alcohol in the United States affected Americans from 1920 until 1933. The Klan ardently believed in the enforcement of prohibition, for many Americans considered alcohol consumption a factor in the disintegration of American culture. Many, particularly those

²⁷ Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, 11-12.

²⁸ Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, 6.

concerned about the moral fiber of America, viewed saloons as the root of inappropriate and destructive behavior. The most significant problem regarding alcohol was that individuals bought it at saloons. Working class immigrants often appreciated a cold drink and socialization after a long day of work. Proponents of prohibition blamed immigrants' alcohol consumption for urban evils such as poverty, labor uprisings, and idleness. Saloons enticed people to miss Sunday service and, as meeting places, presented possibilities for scuffles and disagreements.²⁹

Prohibition brought about the illegal consumption, production, and transportation of alcohol, known as bootlegging. Many people, Italian-Americans as an example, produced wine and were accustomed to drinking it as a part of their culture. The Klan considered any production of alcohol unacceptable. Since the Klan infiltrated local government and the police force, they conducted house raids in search of home-made alcohol. Criscione recalled the dry squads. Each dry squad had a nameless search warrant that allowed them to knock on the door and search anyone's home. At times, members of the dry squad planted whiskey in the home, then fined the members of the household for having it. Criscione stated how important it was to watch the dry squad during the house search to prevent such incidents from occurring. The fine was \$1,000 and included a trip to the mayor's court in Canfield, another city in the Mahoning Valley.³⁰ Members of the dry squads took advantage of the law and arrested many innocent people. As a result, Niles citizens' distrust of the government, police force, and the Klan increased.

Newspapers served as the communication portal through which the Klan spread its message and notified members about Klan supported political candidates. For the

²⁹ Donna DeBlasio, "The Immigrant and the Trolley Park in Youngstown, Ohio, 1899-1945," *Rethinking History* 5:1 (2001): 76, 83.

³⁰ Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, 7.

Youngstown chapter of the Klan that newspaper was *The Citizen*, which began weekly publication in 1914 under the ownership of D. Webster Brown. Though at first Brown utilized the newspaper to criticize the secret and violent tactics of the Klan, he soon realized the capabilities of the Klan as a manager for moral reform. If some Italian-Americans lacked interaction with Klan members and did not know of Klan beliefs and values, a brief read of *The Citizen* would make clear the anti-immigrant ideals of the Ku Klux Klan. During 1923, *The Citizen* became the primary newspaper in assisting in the removal of Mayor Reese from office on the grounds that he was not tough enough on prohibition. From then on *The Citizen* announced its intent to support law enforcement and community improvement in Youngstown.³¹ The impact of *The Citizen* in the Mahoning Valley was most significant in encouraging individuals to join the Klan. The publishers and editors ensured that the structural organization of the paper and the messages in the articles were appealing to Americans. Americans read the paper and sympathized with the issues discussed within it.

It was apparent by August 1923 that *The Citizen* had a relationship with the Klan in Youngstown. Weekly publications first criticized Catholics, specifically the Catholic Church for its allegiance to the Pope. Gradually industrialization continued to increase the number of immigrants in the city, who became the target of the Klan in articles and editorials published in *The Citizen*.³² For the remainder of 1923 and through the winter, spring, and summer of 1924, the front page of the paper listed the title as the *Youngstown Citizen*. In the beginning of September 1924 the publishers initiated a new title and composition for the newspaper. The publishers printed the title as *The Citizen* on the front

³¹ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 37.

³² Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 38.

page with an image of a bald eagle and American flag in the background. They also printed the words “one flag, one country, one law, one school” underneath the main title.³³ This statement reflected the Klan’s emphasis on patriotism, public education, and the Constitution. On the top left corner of the front page the publishers printed the statement “one hundred percent American,” and on the top right they printed “one hundred percent Protestant.”³⁴ These two statements were the two primary tenets of the Klan.

By the summer of 1924, Klan-based criticisms of Catholicism and the Vatican became harsher. *The Citizen* published Klansmen’s attitudes regarding Catholics. An article on July 12, 1924, compared illiteracy rates between papal nations and Protestant nations. According to the article, the statistics came from the United States Bureau of Education. The article claimed that the average illiteracy rate for papal nations was 45 percent while for Protestant nations it was only 5 percent.³⁵ It was likely that illiteracy rates were lower in some European nations than others; however, the Klan incorrectly utilized this evidence as proof of the intellectual and moral ineptitude of papal nations. *The Citizen* displayed the statistics without explaining the economic, political, or social reasons why some countries have higher illiteracy rates than others. The purpose of including the statistics was not to educate, but to draw immediate negative attention to Catholic countries.

Klansmen also criticized Catholicism as paganism. *The Citizen* published a portion of “Development of Christian Doctrine,” an essay written by Cardinal Newman that discussed the elements of Catholicism believed to originate from Pagan customs.

³³ *The Citizen*, 6 September 1924, p. 1.

³⁴ *The Citizen*, 6 September 1924, p. 1.

³⁵ Clark-Kenery Debate, “Romanism and Illiteracy,” *The Citizen*, 12 July 1924, p. 1.

Such elements included incense, candles, temples, and holy water. *The Citizen* encouraged readers to discover proof of the pagan nature of Catholicism by checking out “The Two Babylons,” by Professor Hyslop at the library.³⁶ Klansmen further criticized Roman Catholics for not supporting public schools in the United States. According to *The Citizen*, Roman Catholics failed to realize the necessity of public schools to the sustenance of democracy.³⁷

The Klan utilized the pages of *The Citizen* to broadcast its beliefs, issues, events, and politics. Those who read the newspaper were fully aware of the principles that it stood for as well as the times and locations of upcoming Klan gatherings. In every weekly publication the editors reserved space for “A Klansman’s Creed.” These statements were a list of the beliefs that every Klansman devoted himself to. There were eighteen declarations listed in the creed. A few of them included:

I believe in just laws and liberty.
I believe in the upholding of the Constitution of these United States.
I do not believe in mob violence but do believe that laws should be enacted to prevent the causes of mob violence.
I believe in the limitations of foreign immigration.
I am a native-born American citizen and I believe my rights in this country are superior to those of foreigners.³⁸

It was not unusual that such statements appealed to a majority of Americans. The declarations were not written in a violent or rude manner. The fact that they echoed the values shared by mainstream America was what drew in so many supporters to the Klan. Most native-born Americans who read the creed would have related its assertions to their own feelings of fear and defense for their country’s systems and religion. The influx of

³⁶ “Is Romanism Paganism?” *The Citizen*, 12 July 1924, p. 8.

³⁷ “Spigots and Bigots,” *the Citizen*, 19 July 1924, p. 1.

³⁸ “A Klansman’s Creed,” *The Citizen*, 14 June 1924, p. 4.

immigrants caused many to inaccurately consider that the arrival of different cultures and religions would challenge their rights as Americans. Thus *The Citizen* was a means of drawing in supporters. Americans related to the principles of the Klan and found common fears and interests.

Patriotic statements occurred in conjunction with issuances of Klan beliefs and values. Klansmen targeted these patriotic statements to those who sought to exhibit national devotion by inaccurately displaying the unpatriotic nature of immigrants. Klansmen insisted that immigrants retained dedication to the flag of their original country and, as a result, never developed devotion for the American flag. According to Klansmen, loyalty to the American flag differentiated one hundred percent Americans from foreigners. The Klan encouraged citizens to display respect to the flag by standing up and removing hats.³⁹ Since the Klan placed so much emphasis on American patriotism, native born whites who sought means to showcase patriotic devotion viewed Klan membership as a way to act upon such dedication.

Another element of appeal for Americans reading Klan newspapers was the overall sincerity and morality of the published statements. Klansmen disguised the bigotry of their beliefs by encouraging kindness to fellow citizens. Of course, fellow citizens were other Klansmen, not Irish or Italian immigrants. Such statements reinforced the Klan's fraternalism and its emphasis on the Protestant faith. A poem by W. H. Stevens provided a good example of this tactic and appeared in the *Citizen*. Two of the verses went as follows:

Do that little deed of kindness
To your brother in the Klan;

³⁹ "Respect the Flag," *The Citizen*, 28 June 1924, p. 1.

He may be a bit downhearted,
Cheer him up whene'er you can.

Remember, as you do your duty
To your brother Klansmen all,
Your life will e'er increase in beauty
Till you hear the final call.⁴⁰

Other elements in the *Citizen* that appealed to Americans were statements publicizing necessary social improvements. The *Citizen* listed challenges that the Klan determined to face. Reform commentary included statistics to rouse fear over the possible failure of American social and economic systems. On June 21, 1924, the editors of the *Citizen* included an article titled "The Challenge." This article called to attention the lack of church influence in education.

Here is our challenge: We have ten million un-churched homes in the U.S.A...One half of the 25,000,000 children in the U.S.A are prevented by law from hearing the Bible read in school. Seven out of ten children in the U.S.A. are not enrolled in any Sunday school or parochial school.⁴¹

This statement displayed how the Klan advocated Bible reading in public schools but also wanted to keep a separation between church and state. The Klan considered religious education an integral part of the public education system. The division between church and state, advocated by Klansmen, applied to government power. Part of the problem Klansmen had with Italian and Irish immigrants was their orientation to the Catholic Church. Klansmen feared the power of the Pope and remained skeptical of Catholics' loyalty to the United States.

The Citizen also always announced upcoming Klan outings near and far, and reflected on them so as to imply that those unable to attend missed a wonderful and

⁴⁰ "Do it Now," *The Citizen*, 28 June 1924, p. 7.

⁴¹ "The Challenge," *The Citizen*, 21 June 1924, p. 5.

joyous experience. Local Klan gatherings usually took place at Idora Park. However, for national outings, Klansmen from New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and other states arrived and needed accommodations. The 1924 Fourth of July celebration located near Long Branch, Realm of New Jersey was particularly large for it included the Tri-state district, Eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. Klansmen never announced the exact location of a gathering for it would break the rules of secrecy that the Klan followed. Therefore, the Klan frequently announced gatherings but restricted attendance to Klansmen. The Fourth of July celebration anticipated the arrival of thousands of visiting Klansmen. However, this celebration was unique in that it displayed the support of the Klan through the creation of supporting groups. Women of the Ku Klux Klan and the Junior Order of the Ku Klux Klan joined in the celebration. These two groups formed in partnership with the Klan and extended Klan influence by involving women and young men.⁴² The extensiveness of this celebration proved the popularity and distribution of the Klan in 1924.

The Klan meeting held in Canfield provided evidence that Klansmen did not seek political endeavors surreptitiously. Political action was one element of the 1920s Klan that defied the secrecy component. Pronouncement of Klan-endorsed candidates notified all citizens, not only Klansmen and women. Therefore, all citizens knew which candidates received Klan support and influence. Citizens not only knew which candidates were Klan endorsed, but also the beliefs and platforms the candidates backed. The Canfield meeting also signified the Youngstown Klan's growth in power. Political involvement of the Klan in Youngstown peaked in 1923 and 1924.

⁴² "Klan July 4th Celebration," *The Citizen*, 28 June 1924, p. 5.

On the night of Friday August 2, 1924, one thousand people attended a meeting in Canfield to discuss the political primaries. Fred Warnock, former mayor of Youngstown, was the main speaker. He encouraged all to participate in the primary for it was an opportunity to weed out those incapable of accomplishing Klan objectives.⁴³ Sam Morris, Klan secretary, and Colonel E. A. Watkins, campaign manager, encouraged the endorsed candidates to attend the August 2 meeting in Canfield. Ten candidates introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their intentions. All candidates spoke in favor of enforcing prohibition laws, pursuing a clean campaign, guarding economic interests, permitting open Bibles in schools, and protecting the purity of women. The only female candidate was Mrs. Irene Leonard, secretary of the Ladies of the Ku Klux Klan. Samuel G. Evalson, candidate for state senator, was the only candidate to verbally state his Klan association. During his brief introduction he stated, "I am running on the Klan ticket, and I am proud of the Klan endorsement."⁴⁴

Other evidence exists in the *Citizen* that confirms the Klan's increasing influence in the Mahoning Valley. On August 2, 1924, the *Citizen* announced the Klan's acquisition of more farm land. The Klan Farm previously only consisted of the Wetmore Farm; however, the Klan acquired an adjoining farm that increased the size of the Klan Farm. The Klan Farm served as the center of Klan activity in the Mahoning County. Officers of the Klan as well as a new co-organization of the Klan, the Klavaliars, planned to construct buildings on the farmland. The Klan expected that every Klansmen and Klanswomen would assist the Farm movement.⁴⁵ The Klavaliars consisted of 500 trained men whose purpose was to uphold the integrity of the Klan and assist in Klan

⁴³ "Klan Candidates at Canfield," *The Citizen*, 2 August 1924, p. 1.

⁴⁴ "Klan Candidates at Canfield," *The Citizen*, 2 August 1924, p. 1.

⁴⁵ "The Klan Farm Undertaking," *The Citizen*, 2 August, p. 1.

undertakings, such as the development of the Klan Farm. On July 9, 1924, Klavaliars swore allegiance to the Klan during a meeting in Canfield.⁴⁶

Until mid-1924, when tensions between the Klan and Italian Americans were strongest, the material within *The Citizen* remained relatively free of criticisms toward immigrants and Catholics. Articles existed that explained the inferiority of such groups, but the writers created them in such a way that seemed logical to persons reading the article. According to Klansmen, there was a correlation between Catholicism and consumption of alcohol. The analysis of this relationship appeared frequently in *The Citizen*. Klansmen seemed to believe that all Catholics and immigrants were law breaking citizens who could not control alcohol consumption. The Klan criticized Dr. Butler from Columbia University for being anti-Klan and anti-prohibition. Of course, the Klan explained that Butler's wife, Kate La Montague, came from a wine making family, and her influence was to blame for Butler's immoral and illogical behavior. It was not mentioned in the article whether or not Butler's wife was Catholic; however, she did come from a French family.⁴⁷ The purpose for putting the article in *The Citizen* was to draw a correlation between alcohol consumption and Europeans. It was another example of the Klan's attempt to display the moral shortcomings of individuals not associated with the Klan.

The Klan continued to expand in the Mahoning Valley and increased the tension between Klansmen and anti-Klan groups. In late July 1924 *The Citizen* announced that the Youngstown branch of the Ladies of the Ku Klux Klan received their charter from state headquarters on July 22, 1924. At the Rayen-Wood auditorium Mrs. Alexander,

⁴⁶ "The Farm and Klavaliars," *The Citizen*, 12 July 1924, p. 1.

⁴⁷ "Butler's Wife's Relatives," *The Citizen*, 5 July 1924, p. 1.

secretary of the state organization, presented the ladies with the charter. The auxiliary of the Ku Klux Klan elected Mrs. W. O. Hawkins, wife of Rev. W. O. Hawkins of Epworth M. E. church, as Cyclops of the organization. They also elected Mrs. Irene Leonard, Klan endorsed candidate for representative, as secretary.⁴⁸ That Youngstown had enough women involved in the Klan to begin a branch of the Ladies of the Ku Klux Klan signified the growing presence of the Klan in the Mahoning Valley.

As the Klan gained strength throughout the United States, it also received disapproval from some fellow Protestants who believed in the Klan's message but did not believe in the Klan's use of secrecy. Senator Belle Kearney of Mississippi claimed to support many of the Klan's principles but opposed the organization for its use of secrecy. The *Christian Monitor* published the interview with Miss Kearney which *The Citizen* chose to respond to. In its response, *The Citizen* appreciated Miss Kearney's statement despite her public disapproval of the Klan. The Klan reacted to Protestants' doubts regarding secrecy by stating that the Klan was actually a non-secret organization who nationally publicized its ideals. Membership lists were the only portion of the Klan that utilized the element of secrecy.⁴⁹

Evidence of the Klan's weaknesses occurred simultaneously at the peak of the Klan's power in the United States and the Mahoning Valley. Concern about the Klan's emphasis on secrecy discouraged many Protestants from joining. Coincidentally, some Protestants only realized the bigoted nature of the Klan after joining the organization. Individuals outside of the organization viewed the Klan as an association based on fraternalism, patriotism, and moral integrity. However, Protestants experienced a

⁴⁸ "K.K.K. Branch Gets Charter," *The Citizen*, 26 July 1924, p. 1.

⁴⁹ "The Secrecy of the Klan," *The Citizen*, 26 July 1924, p. 1.

different side of the Klan after membership. Gradually, many Klansmen realized they no longer agreed on the methods utilized by the Klan. Lack of support coincided with rising anti-Klan sentiment from immigrants and Catholics. No longer willing to let the Klan control society, these groups combated one hundred percent Americanism physically and politically. In some areas, such as Niles, citizens acknowledged the efforts of anti-Klan forces as the main contributor to the Klan's demise.

Chapter Two: For Daily Bread

Between 1880 and 1925 a mass migration of individuals from Italy to the United States occurred which altered the landscape of small towns and cities across the continent. Similar to other immigrant groups, Italians arrived seeking economic opportunity and the American ideal, the prospect to acquire savings and home ownership. America was the land of plenty; however, for many Italians, the reality of America did not compare to the image in their dreams. Italians faced obstacles in employment, social organization, language, and education. Despite being continually discriminated against, many Italians believed they were better off in the United States than in Italy. In America, Italians could accomplish goals never considered possible in Italy. Italians came to Ohio in search of daily bread, and, in the case of many, they found so much more.¹

Prior to 1871 and unification, northern and southern Italy were separate entities. Southern Italy was continuously under foreign leadership. The Normans were the first outside power to conquer the Franks and Greeks of southern Italy and incorporate the South into the Norman monarchy.² After Norman rule, southern Italy continued to experience varying foreign rulers and became a location of warfare where foreign rulers fought for possession of the kingdom of Naples. The variation in southern leadership resulted in an unstable economy and political system. As a result, southern Italy remained under feudalism long after the rest of Europe.³ Under feudalism, farmers, termed serfs, did not own land. Instead, they answered to the lord who owned the land. When feudalism came to an end in the South, farmers had problems purchasing land. Since the

¹ "La Risposta," *Il Cittadino-Italo Americano*, 9 August 1924, p. 1.

² Tommaso Astarita, *Between Salt Water and Holy Water: A History of Southern Italy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 22.

³ Astarita, *Between Salt Water and Holy Water*, 82-83.

wealthy owned the majority; many remained tenants. Thus, the history of southern Italy was a constant battle for economic, political, and social stability.

Northern Italy spurred Risorgimento or Italian unification in the early nineteenth century. At that time, several states composed Italy. They included Piedmont, Venetia, Parma, Modena, Romagna, Tuscany, the Papal States, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies which included the island of Sicily and southern Italy. Foreign governments or the papacy controlled all but one of these states, Piedmont. The forces of the Risorgimento sought to liberate Italy from foreign rule and establish one unified nation. After several attempts and long battles, northern Italy joined with the southern part to form a united nation in 1861. Giuseppe Garibaldi and his army released the area south of Rome, also known as the Mezzogiorno, from Bourbon rule. After Garibaldi's successful campaign, he presented his conquests to Victor Emmanuel II, king of Piedmont. Upon Garibaldi's presentation of conquests to the king of Piedmont, the Mezzogiorno officially became part of the same Italian kingdom as the North, thus forming a unified Italy.⁴ Most Italians, from both the North and the South, favored unification because they believed a unified Italy presented a stronger force to other European nations. Furthermore, all hoped for a larger and more powerful Italian economy to participate in the global market. However, Italian unification did not immediately meet these expectations and, as a result, anger, distrust, and misunderstanding festered between the North and South.

Unlike northern Italy, southern Italy struggled with Risorgimento. Southern Italian peasants, once excited about unification, realized the economic inferiority of the Mezzogiorno in comparison to the North. Northern Italy had a more developed

⁴ Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992; HarperPerennial, 1993), 31-32.

infrastructure, an established economy, and industry, whereas southern Italy still relied on an agricultural economy. The elite in the South acquired greater authority after unification which made it difficult for farmers to obtain land. Landowners, either remaining feudal aristocracy or newly developed middle class, owned the majority of the land in Southern Italy. Peasants then were left with rented plots of land which they had to rely on to produce enough food to maintain a subsistence lifestyle. Furthermore, the elite established connections with the police and local governments to excuse themselves from paying taxes.⁵

Poverty flourished in the Mezzogiorno and the phrase “ladro governo,” meaning thief of a government, expressed the attitudes of southern Italian peasants to the new government.⁶ Southern Italian peasants distrusted any educated person or organization with the capability to deceive them. This included Catholic priests for they were educated by the Church. The combination of poverty, famine, and distrust of government caused southern peasants to exit Italy in droves after unification. Southern peasants paid taxes to the Italian government but did not see any infrastructural improvements in the Mezzogiorno. As a result, peasants held little hope of economic and social improvement in southern Italy and sought better opportunities elsewhere. Therefore, it is not surprising that nearly 80 percent of those who migrated from Italy were from the Mezzogiorno.⁷

Italians exited Italy in droves between 1870 and 1925. Common places of migration for Italians were the United States, Argentina, and Brazil. It was not until 1900 that the number of Italian emigrants to the United States surpassed the number of Italians

⁵ Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 62-63.

⁶ Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 64.

⁷ Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, xiv.

arriving in Argentina and Brazil.⁸ The highest rate of Italian emigration to the United States occurred in 1913. In that year, 376,776 of the total 872,598 Italian emigrants went to America.⁹ Millions arrived in the United States until the establishment of immigration restrictions in 1924 which slowed the rate of immigration. The National Origins Act of 1924 confined the number of immigrants allowed to enter the United States. The government established a predetermined number of Italians allowed into the United States, which could not exceed 2% of the number of Italians already living in the United States in 1890. This same formula applied to other ethnic groups, but particularly to those from southern and eastern Europe.

Though all immigrant groups in the United States repatriated, Italians did so at a higher rate. Between 1902 and 1914, about 300,000 to 400,000 Italians left the United States for home. According to Robert F. Foerster, Harvard historian, 1908 was the peak year for Italian repatriation. In that year, approximately 240,877 Italian immigrants returned to Italy.¹⁰ According to Betty Boyd Caroli, understanding Italian adaptation to the United States requires a comprehension of Italian repatriation. For many Italians, the question was not how to adapt but rather whether or not to stay.¹¹ Those who did not choose to remain in America did not put effort into adaptation. Therefore, those who chose to stay were better prepared and more willing to become full functioning American citizens, as was the case for Italians in the Mahoning Valley.

Italian immigrants began arriving in Niles as early as 1880 and continued to arrive through the early 1920s. The majority of the Italian immigrants in Niles were from the

⁸ Betty Boyd Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States, 1900-1914* (New York: Center for Migration Studies of New York, Inc., 1973), 39.

⁹ Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States*, 38.

¹⁰ Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States*, 10.

¹¹ Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States*, 5.

Mezzogiorno, particularly the province of Avelino. They arrived seeking relief from the poverty, hunger, and unemployment experienced in their southern Italian village or town. Some of the earliest Italians to arrive in Niles came from a small village called Bagnoli-Irpino located east of Naples.¹² Italian immigrants arrived in Niles slowly at first. However, once immigrants spread the word about Niles to family and friends in Italy, the numbers quickly increased. Before long, Italians composed the highest percentage of the foreign born population in Niles.

By 1920, census data shows that the foreign born population in Niles made up 25 percent of the total population and consisted of 3,256 individuals. Of the 3,256 foreign born whites, 1,165 were born in Italy. No other first generation immigrant group in Niles came close in numbers to the Italian born population. The total population of those born in England was the second largest immigrant group to the Italian born. That group consisted of 431 individuals. Those of Italian birth made up 36 percent of the entire foreign born population. The second largest foreign born group, those of English birth, only comprised 13 percent of the foreign born population.¹³ Therefore, Italian immigrants in Niles clearly represented the greatest component of the foreign population and those statistics do not include second generation Italian immigrants. The population of those with Italian heritage would be much greater and compose a larger percentage of the total population.

The passage of immigration restrictions in 1924 halted the dramatic flow of foreign born into the United States. Evidence of the consequences of the immigrant restrictions was apparent in a comparison of population statistics for Niles between 1920

¹² Pallante, "To Work and Live," 5.

¹³ Bureau of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, Population, vol. 3, 794-796.

and 1930. According to census data, the percentage of the foreign born white population decreased to 20 percent. There was only a minimal increase in the number of foreign born in Niles from 3,256 in 1920 to 3,295 in 1930. Despite these changes, the Italian born population remained 36 percent of the entire foreign born white population in Niles.¹⁴

Census data concerning the native white population of foreign or mixed parentage shows the proliferation of the Italian population in Niles. By 1930, 88 percent of the native white population was of foreign or mixed parentage. Of these 5,987 individuals, 2,218 were of Italian heritage. Thus, 37 percent of those of foreign or mixed parentage came from Italian families. Furthermore, 17 percent of the entire native white population (foreign, mixed, and native parentage) was of Italian heritage. The next largest group of foreign parentage consisted of those of Hungarian heritage, and this group only consisted of 428 individuals.¹⁵ Though those of Italian heritage did not compose the majority of the Niles population, they clearly made up the greatest percentage of native whites with foreign or mixed parentage, which was important for two reasons. First, the increase in Italian population illustrated the permanence of Italian migration to Niles. Second, Italian-Americans held a significant percentage of the entire population and could influence Niles government and society.

Southern Italians in Niles came from similar backgrounds as other Southern Italians located in various American cities. Growing up in a small Italian village was comparable for all Italians whether they were from Bagnoli-Irpino or not. They shared common foodways, religious traditions, familial principles, and moral values.

Throughout the United States, Italians tried to recreate the Italian village setting by

¹⁴ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, Reports by States, vol. 3, part 2, Montana-Wyoming, retrieved from www.census.gov (Washington, D.C., 1932), 493.

¹⁵ *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, vol. 3, part 2 Montana-Wyoming, 493, 507.

preparing Italian cuisine, celebrating Italian *feste*, utilizing Italian language in the home, and maintaining Italian kin connections. In attempts to recreate the Italian village, Italians actually created a method of adaptation to the United States. Adaptation involved relying on ethnic or cultural ties to not only adjust but become participants in a new society. The recreated village was very different from the village Italians migrated from because it combined Italian and American culture. Italians only realized their preference for America upon a return to the Italian village. Therefore, the life Italians created in the United States was distinct from the life experienced in the Old World. However, during the adaptation process, Italians maintained elements of their ethnic culture and relied on fellow Italians to become functioning American citizens.¹⁶

Italians adapted to American culture by relying on two basic institutions that represented life in Italy: popular religion and the domus. Both of these institutions influenced Southern Italian morals and values. Robert Anthony Orsi studied the Italian celebration of the Madonna of Mt. Carmel on East 115th Street in New York City's Italian Harlem. Through this study Orsi utilized the characteristics of Italian popular religion and the domus to develop notions regarding Italian rituals and values.¹⁷ The domus and popular religion assisted and hampered Italian immigrants' ability to adapt to American society. Both institutions provided support for newly migrated Italian families while simultaneously creating a division between the Italian-American community and American society. For example, reliance on the domus prevented Italians from seeking the help of social services and eventually caused tensions among Italian family members

¹⁶ Humbert S. Nelli, *Italians in Chicago 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility*, The Urban Life in America Series, ed. Richard C. Wade (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1970), 10.

¹⁷ Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), xvii.

as the children of first generation Italian immigrants exhibited American characteristics that conflicted with the values of the *domus*.

Orsi defined popular religion as the religion that exists outside of the established church. Southern Italians relied on a set of religious values that did not correspond to the theology of the Catholic Church. Southern Italians' distrust of clergy in the Old World motivated them to develop a religious belief system that combined Catholicism and superstition. Similar distrust of priests existed among Italians in Niles. Italians suspected priests because of their education and their ability to exploit uneducated Italian peasants; however, they did not hold similar feelings of suspicion toward the Pope who retained their connection to the Catholic Church.¹⁸ Italians did not consider the Pope a threat because of his distant presence. Italian priests interacted with and could directly exploit Italian peasants whereas the Pope merely served as the figurehead of the Catholic Church. Therefore, Italian-Americans believed the Pope could not personally exploit them.

Feste, or celebrations, represented the values of the Italian community and their adoration of the Madonna and Catholic saints. Italians participated in *feste* to reinforce community ties and establish unity. The *feste* also involved superstitions. Italian vendors sold wax replicas of internal organs or human limbs to Italian immigrants participating in the *feste* of the Madonna. Immigrants purchased a wax replica that represented the afflicted part of the body. They then presented this replica to the Madonna with the belief that She cured the body ailment.¹⁹ The presentation of the wax replica, though based on superstition, served the same purpose as a prayer for help. Italians believed that giving

¹⁸ Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, 8 May 1984, O. H. 311, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 15.

¹⁹ Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, 3.

the Madonna a replica of the injured body part specified the type of assistance needed. It would not make sense to offer a reproduction of a human heart if the body part suffering was the head. The replicas then served as a means for communication with the Madonna during religious celebrations.

Along with wax replicas, vendors sold charms utilized to cure the evil eye. The evil eye was a syndrome based in witchcraft beliefs similar to jealousy. Individuals cursed with the evil eye desired another's personal characteristics or material belongings but were unaware of the affliction. Methods used to cure evil eye combined aspects of magic with Catholic elements such as crosses, palms, and alter candles.²⁰ Outsiders considered Southern Italians' beliefs in superstitions with distaste. Irish Catholics did not deem Italians as worthy Catholics, and Protestants viewed Italians' faith in superstitions as pagan worship. Southern Italian popular religion reflected Italians' reliance on individual faith and the Italian community to address social problems. Rather than seeking assistance from the Catholic Church, which proved itself untrustworthy in the past, Italians relied on their faith-based community.²¹ Due to the fact that churches were traditionally places of support, it was unusual that Italians went to the community for immediate aid. However, once again this behavior reaffirms Italian distrust of the clergy.

The other institution discussed by Orsi, the *domus*, also served as an indicator of the values and morals held by Italian Americans. The *domus* was a social unit that included immediate family, friends, extended family, and the surrounding Italian community. This unit provided a foundation on which moral judgment developed. Italians respected and relied on the *domus* so extensively that it was incorporated into

²⁰ Jan Brögger, *Montevarese: A Study of Peasant Society and Culture in Southern Italy* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1971), 139-140.

²¹ Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, 3-4.

Italian popular religion.²² Since the domus was also a unit of socialization, members of the same domus participated in Italian *feste* together. Therefore, *feste* were not only occasions for religious celebration but also opportunities for socialization.

Responsibility to the domus was the top priority in Italian life. All other responsibilities such as work, recreation, or education fell second to the survival of the domus. Blood relatives comprised the first level of the domus; Italians were faithful first to those of blood kin. Gradually, the domus expanded to include extended family and friends, both old and new. The domus was a fictive network for Italians considered non-blood relations part of the domus. Priests, social workers, employment bosses, and school teachers were not part of the domus. The domus was the first responsibility; all those individuals and people outside of the domus came second.²³

Respect, *rispetto*, was the basic element of the domus-centered society. *Rispetto* determined how Italians judged and interacted with people within and outside of the domus. Since the domus was the top priority for Italian immigrants, they supported politicians and laws that upheld the strength of the domus. Italians rejected American laws that negatively impacted the domus, and, if external sources threatened the domus, they fought against those sources fiercely.²⁴ Since Italians placed primary loyalty to the domus, Americans were unsuccessful in attempts to force Italians to assimilate to American standards. However, Italian immigrants did effectively incorporate themselves into American culture. Italians took the initiative to complete this incorporation. As a result, Italian immigrants developed a unique culture that combined elements from the Old World, such as the domus, with facets of American culture. Gradually, their

²² Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, xx.

²³ Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, 82-90.

²⁴ Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, 92-102.

protection of the domus extended to include a defense of American cultural elements. Italians stood up for their American values when outside forces threatened the permanence of those values.

Italians exhibited their acceptance of American values by working hard to improve their economic standing. In an investigation of Italians living in Chicago, Humbert S. Nelli discovered that home ownership was an essential goal for the Italian family, and a reason for why all family members worked. Though many Italians achieved economic mobility, some Italian families remained tenants in a working class Italian community long after they acquired the means to purchase land in a suburban neighborhood. Often it was only the intrusion of undesirable factors in the Italian community that prompted residents to leave. Italian ties to the domus provided a compelling reason for an Italian family to remain in the community even if the family's financial situation permitted relocation to a middle class neighborhood.²⁵ Southern Italians started the economic upward climb shortly after their arrival in Chicago. Italians' economic climb began with an understanding of the importance of education. At first, Italian parents utilized children as workers to supplement the family income; therefore, they did not view education as a necessity. Gradually, this mentality altered as Italians recognized the association between higher education and economic mobility. In addition to education, Italian immigrants penetrated American politics, public employment, and labor unions. Nelli contended that by 1920 Italians accomplished the jump into American society. Throughout the 1920s, reliance on Italian based social services declined as Italian

²⁵ Nelli, *Italians in Chicago 1880-1930*, 44-53.

immigrants developed confidence in American banks, newspapers, hospitals, and social organizations.²⁶

By 1920, the Italians living in Niles considered themselves American citizens and participants in American economics, politics, and society. However, as was the case with other groups of Italians in various cities, Niles Italians created ethnic societies, newspapers, neighborhoods, and churches to ease into American society and maintain part of their ethnic identity. One such organization that assisted Italian acculturation was the Order of the Sons of Italy. The Sons of Italy was a fraternal mutual aid society that assisted Italian immigrants with funeral expenses and sick benefits. Prior to the development of the Sons of Italy, Italian mutual aid societies numbered roughly three thousand throughout the United States and were all distinct. Between 1915 and 1920, when immigration rates peaked, Dr. Vincenzo Sellaro, an Italian physician, developed the idea of a unified Italian fraternal organization. He founded the Order of the Sons of Italy, which he designed to meet the social and insurance needs of its members, and took up the title "Supreme Venerable." After its foundation, the Sons of Italy established lodges in cities throughout the United States, and by 1922 the order consisted of roughly thirteen hundred lodges.²⁷

Due to extensive Italian interest, the Sons of Italy established a lodge in the Mahoning Valley in 1920. Lodge S' Antonio provided economic and social assistance as well as opportunities for socialization and entertainment to Italian immigrants in northeast Ohio. Similar to the Ku Klux Klan, the Sons of Italy celebrated Italian events with picnics, parades, and gatherings. Columbus Day was always a day of great

²⁶ Nelli, *Italians in Chicago 1880-1930*, 87.

²⁷ Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 139-140.

celebration for Italians and a day that the Sons of Italy enjoyed as an organization. While Columbus Day was a day of celebration for all Americans, the Sons of Italy celebrated other events unknown to Americans. In 1924, the Sons of Italy commemorated the fifty-fourth anniversary of the re-annexation of Rome to the Kingdom of Italy and the fourth anniversary of Lodge S' Antonio. The Sons of Italy invited all to attend the picnic in order to celebrate the removal of Rome from the papacy on September 10, 1870.²⁸ This celebration exhibited both Italian affection for Italy and cynicism toward the Catholic Church's power. Italians celebrated the release of papal power over Rome because it symbolized the final unification of all the Italian states into one nation.

The Sons of Italy provided insurance opportunities for Italians, but did not eliminate the desire for Italian societies specific to the regions Italians originated from. These societies provided means of social organization for Italian immigrants. Italian societies organized picnics, parades, and flag dedication ceremonies that displayed appreciation not only for Italy but also for the United States. For example, the Society of M. S. Duca of Abruzzi held an annual celebration in honor of the Fourth of July. In 1924, members of the Society of Duca of Abruzzi and other Italian immigrants from the area met at Brier Hill Park in Youngstown. Despite, poor weather in the afternoon, approximately 2,000 people remained at the park to enjoy the sport competitions and dancing.²⁹ The fact that Italian societies celebrated American holidays demonstrates their adaptation to the United States. Italians observed and commemorated American holidays through the Italian society.

²⁸ "Sons of Italy," *Youngstown Citizen* 23 August 1924, p. 7.

²⁹ "Pic-nic della Duca degli Abruzzi," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* 12 July 1924, p. 3. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

Members of Italian societies also demonstrated American patriotism through flag dedication ceremonies. During the height of tensions between immigrants and the Ku Klux Klan in Niles, Italian societies held a flag service that encouraged law abidance on the part of all Italian Americans. Nearly 1200 members of Italian societies attended the flag service held at the Niles McKinley Memorial auditorium on October 26, 1924. Society San Filippo Niri of Niles dedicated two new flags; one was an American flag while the other was a banner that included the San Filippo Niri emblem. However, more important than the dedication of American flags was the message given by the main speaker G. P. Gilmore, Warren attorney. He advised all Niles citizens to respect the law and practice abiding by it. He appealed to the community of Niles by encouraging the mutual cooperation of citizens to work together, live together, and obey the law together.³⁰

What made the October 26 flag service so unique was the obvious effort on the part of Niles Italians to display their dedication to American society despite constant assertions by Klan members that Italians were not American citizens. Ciro Saulino, a citizen of Youngstown, spoke to the audience in Italian about the privileges Italians enjoyed in the United States and advocated law abidance among all citizens. Members of Italian societies displayed further appreciation for American opportunities by including 14 American flags in the parade. The parade proceeded as follows:

A large American flag carried by girls headed the parade. The Moose band from Sharon and the Mt. Carmel band from Girard furnished the music for the marchers. The services in the Memorial were closed by the band playing the Star Spangled Banner, followed by the Royal March of Italy.³¹

³⁰ "Law Observance Urged by Speaker at Flag Service," *Niles Daily Times* 27 October 1924, p. 1.

³¹ "Law Observance Urged by Speaker at Flag Service," *Niles Daily Times* 27 October 1924, p. 1.

Italians in Niles also took the initiative to establish a Catholic church of their own. Prior to 1906, Niles' Italians attended mass at St. Stephen, an Irish Catholic parish. As the Italian community developed in Niles, it began to express a desire for an Italian Catholic church. Italians appealed the bishop for an Italian parish, and in 1906, he appointed Father Vito Franco to establish Our Lady of Mount Carmel.³² Appealing to the bishop for a separate Italian Catholic parish illustrated the agency and collective unity of the Italian population in Niles. Furthermore, Our Lady of Mount Carmel served socialization purposes similar to the Italian societies. Through the church, Italians celebrated *feste*, practiced the Catholic faith, and strengthened ties to the *domus*.

Niles Italians enjoyed the opportunities available in the United States. They retained their cultural heritage and were willing to share their traditions with other Niles citizens. These Italians viewed themselves as active members of not only the community of Niles but the entire Mahoning Valley. Italian-Americans in Niles pursued goals of home ownership and individual entrepreneurship. Furthermore, as evidenced in oral histories, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, and census data, a portion made efforts to learn how to read and write as well as speak English. Though naturalization rates for Italians in Niles did not break 50 percent, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* represented attempts by a part of the Italian-American population to explain the necessity in achieving citizenship to fully participate in American politics and society.³³

The Fifteenth Population Census of the City of Niles provided statistics on Italian-American involvement in the community through home ownership, English speaking

³² Pallante, "To Live and Work," 11.

³³ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, 1930, Trumbull County, City of Niles, Microcopy 626 (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration Microform Publications, 2002).

ability, educational achievement, naturalization, and employment. A database of the first generation Italian-American population at voting age by 1923, displayed the involvement of these individuals in Niles. The study analyzed only Italians twenty-one years old and over in order to determine the extent of potential Italian voter participation during the 1923 mayoral election. Voting age Italian-Americans who achieved naturalization by 1923 were potential voters during the election. Though the majority of Italians resided in the third ward, the database included information on all four wards. The second ward contained the second highest percentage of Italians, followed by the first ward and finally the fourth ward. Most of the Italians in Niles resided in neighborhoods with other Italians. However, some mixing of ethnicities occurred.³⁴

In terms of home ownership, by 1930 more than fifty percent of Italian families in each ward owned homes. In the third ward, with the highest percent of Italian population, approximately 60 percent of Italian families owned homes while 27 percent rented and 13 percent were boarders. Roughly 65 percent of all Italian-American families in Niles, including all wards, were property owners.³⁵ In comparison to the rate of home ownership for foreign-born whites in other urban areas of Ohio, the rate of property possession for Italian-Americans in Niles was about 7 percent higher. The gap was even greater between Niles Italians and Italians throughout the entire United States. Only 48 percent of Italian-American families in the United States were home owners. Finally, the

³⁴ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, 1930, Trumbull County, City of Niles, Microcopy 626 (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration Microform Publications, 2002). A database was created of the information gathered from the census that only analyzed the male and female Italian-born in Niles from all four wards. Furthermore, statistics were gathered on the Italians twenty-one years old and over in 1923.

³⁵ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, 1930, Trumbull County, City of Niles, Microcopy 626 (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration Microform Publications, 2002).

percentage of ownership among Italian families in Niles drastically differed from ownership percentages for foreign-born white families in New York City. Whereas 65 percent of Niles' Italian families owned homes, only 21 percent of foreign-born white families owned a home in New York City.³⁶ These statistics revealed that Italian families in Niles achieved slightly higher rates of home ownership in comparison to foreign-born white families in other urban areas in Ohio. Niles' Italian families also displayed higher percentages of home ownership in comparison to Italian families throughout the United States. However, the most remarkable difference was in home ownership percentages in Niles and New York City. Therefore, the statistics indicated that the society in which immigrants settled influenced the ability or inability for home ownership.

Home ownership represented permanence, economic success, and adaptation. Italians able to own homes achieved enough economic security to afford the costs associated with home ownership. In addition, Italian-Americans who purchased homes in Niles made the decision to remain in the United States. In that decision, they also put more effort into becoming functioning citizens. The remarkable factor in Italian home ownership was that it happened in less than fifteen years after arriving to America. Of all voting age Italians in the third ward, the most frequent year for immigration was 1913. Most arrived in the United States with minimal economic security and yet gained enough economic stability after migration to purchase a home in America by 1930 if not earlier.

³⁶ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, Special Report on Foreign-born White Families by Country of Birth of Head with an Appendix Giving Statistics for Mexican, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese Families, vol. 6, supplement, retrieved from www.census.gov (Washington, D.C., 1933), 7, 47, 133.

³⁷ Consequently, the number of Italians residing in Niles dramatically increased since first generation Italians obtained the financial security to remain in Niles and raise children.

The ability to own a home tied into employment. As evident from employment statistics from the second and third ward, 61 percent of voting age Italians were employed. Of the 39 percent who listed occupation as “none” only 1 percent included working age men. The rest included women, and of the 909 Italians in the second and third ward, only 6 women had occupations that collected wages. Of the 61 percent of Italians that were employed, 7 percent were business owners. Some owned shoe repair shops while others owned groceries. Those were the two most common types of private business among Italian-Americans in Niles. The steel industry was the most common place of employment for wage earning Italians. Some industries listed Italians as foremen while most were laborers. Employment trends among Italian-Americans in Niles reflected similar employment trends among other immigrant groups and in some instances native-born whites. Opportunities for women in the workplace were limited and the steel industry employed the majority of workers in the Mahoning Valley because of its prevalence.³⁸ Niles Italians were integrated into the economy of the Mahoning Valley as was apparent from their rates of employment, and, therefore, had a motive to not only remain in the area but become active participants, socially and politically.

³⁷ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, 1930, Trumbull County, City of Niles, Microcopy 626 (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration Microform Publications, 2002).

³⁸ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, 1930, Trumbull County, City of Niles, Microcopy 626 (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration Microform Publications, 2002).

Most Italians began in labor positions in factories such as the Niles Firebrick Company. However, Italian laborers at the Niles Firebrick Company were more successful than their counterparts in other industries. In the case of the Niles Firebrick Company, the owners and management recruited laborers from the province Avelino. Newly arrived laborers to the Niles Fire Brick wrote back to friends and brothers in Italy telling them about the job security and high wages. These stories made the prospect of migrating to Niles for employment more appealing and made the recruiting process easier for Niles Fire Brick management.³⁹ The Niles Firebrick Company was also unique in that it provided opportunities for job advancement among Italian-American employees. Those Italian employees able to speak English and read and write held skilled positions and worked at the plant every day. Even the unskilled employees at Niles Fire Brick received a greater percentage of wages than at other factories where Italian laborers composed the lowest levels of labor at the lowest wages.⁴⁰ The situation for Italian laborers at the Fire Brick Company was not common in Niles or the United States, for it was rare for companies to offer benefits to Italian laborers. Thus, the Fire Brick Company's eagerness to hire the friends and brothers of employees while providing employees higher wages and opportunities for vertical movement through the company, offered a reason for Italian immigrants to establish a home in Niles. Italian immigrants chose their residence based on employment. Therefore, the benefits of working at the Niles Fire Brick provided ample incentive to establish an Italian community in Niles.

In some instances, Italian immigrants recommended a brother or friend for hire to their employer. This was one method in which extended Italian families migrated to the

³⁹ Pallante, "To Work and Live," 7.

⁴⁰ Pallante, "To Work and Live," 9.

United States over a period of time. For example, Michale Patrone's father, Louie Patrone, an Italian from Bagnoli Irpino, received word from Lawrence Pallante, one of the first Italians to migrate to Niles, about job opportunities at the Niles Fire Brick. Louie Patrone decided to migrate to Niles as a result of Pallante's recommendation.⁴¹ Other Italians first found jobs through the assistance of a padrone. Padrones were middle men who communicated with the factory and the boss to find employees. Employees found by the padrone then collected a portion of the employee's monthly check to pay to the boss.⁴²

Some Italian Americans gained the opportunity to hold higher positions, but in some instances, employers required Italians to change their last names in order to sound more English or American. This was an effort on the part of employers to Americanize immigrants. Therefore, employers wanted those in higher positions to be or at least sound American. Advances in employment also caused tensions, particularly between Irish and Italians, because Irish Americans believed their longer residence in the United States placed them in a class above the Italians who arrived much later.⁴³ Thus this conflict provided another example of how difficult it was for different ethnicities to cooperate socially and politically. However, the arrival of the Klan in Niles also presented Irish and Italians with a reason for collaborating toward a unified effort, the removal of the Klan from the Mahoning Valley.

⁴¹ Michael Patrone, interview by Matt Butts, 6 February 1990, O. H. 1402, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 4-5.

⁴² Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, 8 May 1984, O. H. 311, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 21-22.

⁴³ Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, 8 May 1984, O. H. 311, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 21.

Related to employment advancement was the ability to speak English. The percentage of English speaking Italian-Americans twenty-one years old and over in Niles was 74 percent.⁴⁴ This statistic included only Italian-born males and females who were twenty-one years old in 1923 from all four wards. English speaking ability percentages for Italian-Americans in Niles lagged behind statistics gathered on the United States. However, the statistics on ability to speak English in the United States analyzed the foreign-born white population ten years old and over. Therefore, those statistics examined a wider group. In all of the United States, 93 percent of foreign-born whites ten years old and over were able to speak English while the percentage was 84 for Italian-born.⁴⁵ The percentage of English speaking ability was lower for Italian-Americans in Niles; however, since the groups analyzed were different the statistics did not show a direct correlation. Nevertheless, Italian-Americans in Niles did not show the same percentages of English speaking ability as their counterparts in the United States.

The ability to speak English reflected the effort on behalf of Italian-Americans to incorporate themselves into American society, and it was imperative if Italians intended to communicate with fellow employees. Some Italians in Niles, such as Lorenzo Russo, learned English within the workplace and studied the language after work hours at home. Italians took an active role in learning the English language hoping thereby doing so, it would improve their economic and social position in the United States.⁴⁶ Italian parents

⁴⁴ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, 1930, Trumbull County, City of Niles, Microcopy 626 (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration Microform Publications, 2002).

⁴⁵ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, vol. 2, chapter 14, General Report Statistics by Subject, retrieved from www.census.gov (Washington, D.C., 1933), 1351.

⁴⁶ Lorenzo Russo, interview by James Allgren, 14 December 1993, O. H. 1606, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 9-10. Also Anne Marie Macali, interview by Marcelle Wilson, 25 October 1994, O. H. 1589, transcript, Youngstown

frequently forced their children to learn English by refusing to speak Italian in the home. Some Italian Americans recalled their fathers speaking perfect English while more often than not their mothers maintained a heavy accent and spoke a little bit of Italian.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, Italian parents wanted their children to learn English because doing so improved their social and economic standing.

The publishers of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* also knew the importance of English speaking ability and listed advertisements for night classes open to men and women seeking to learn the English language. One particular announcement advertised for English classes offered two nights a week at the Rayen school building from 7:30 until 9:00 in the evening. The classes cost \$3.00 for twelve lessons, including test books. A Ms. Clarke from Columbus, Ohio taught the English courses.⁴⁸ Evening classes allowed those who worked during the day to learn how to read and write English. Italian immigrants with those capabilities achieved higher wage positions in industry and were more likely to obtain professional positions in the medical or law fields.

Oral histories provided evidence that first generation Italians in Niles pushed their children to obtain an education. Many first generation Italians migrated to the United States with minimal education, only two to three years of schooling. Italian immigrants recognized the obstacles that resulted from not having an education. Consequently, first generation Italians encouraged their children to take advantage of the educational opportunities in the United States. According to Michael Patrone, all of his siblings

State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 3. Other oral histories also provided similar evidence regarding English speaking ability in Italian-American homes.

⁴⁷ Donald R. Pallante, interview by James Allgren, 5 November 1993, O. H. 1603, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 2.

⁴⁸ "Scuola Serale Publica per Uomini e Donna," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 9 December 1922, p. 2. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

graduated from high school. In regards to the importance his parents placed on education

Patrone stated:

Oh yeah. They thought they'd make their kids go to school. They said, "You got to get an education, because we didn't have any. We didn't have that opportunity. If you're going to get ahead in the world, you have to get an education." When they got in trouble in school, we had the truant officer come right over at the house, and they'd talk to the parents. They'd let them know that the kids didn't come to school. When that kid come home, boy, he got it!⁴⁹

The ability to read and write provided the possibility for economic advancement.

Italians with reading and writing capabilities could become foremen, private business

owners, or professionals. Those who had to quit school early in order to work to

supplement family income learned to teach themselves how to read and write English.

Literacy percentages for Italians in the United States and Ohio were higher than those in

Niles; however, once again the group analyzed included those ten years old and over.⁵⁰

Only 57 percent of the Italian voting age population in Niles had the ability to read and

write, for some only in Italian.⁵¹ The difference in percentages did not negate the efforts

on the part of the editors of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* to use the newspaper to

advocate literacy among immigrants.

A portion of the Italian-American population in Niles certainly recognized the

barrier illiteracy presented. Utilizing *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, these Italians

addressed the problems associated with illiteracy in the United States and encouraged all

⁴⁹ Michael Patrone, interview by Matt Butts, 12-13. Also Margaret Pallante, interview by Marcelle Wilson, 26 October 1994, O. H. 1590, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 3. These education trends were common among most of oral interviews.

⁵⁰ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, vol. 2, General Report Statistics by Subject, chapter 14, Inability to Speak English, retrieved from www.census.gov (Washington, D.C., 1933), 1351, 1359.

⁵¹ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, 1930, Trumbull County, City of Niles, Microcopy 626 (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration Microform Publications, 2002).

Italian-Americans to recognize and appreciate the advantages literacy provided.

According to the writer in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, only literate individuals knew how to best use natural resources to advance a society. Without literacy, individuals wasted these sources. The author continued to discuss the importance of literacy particularly for immigrants. A translation of a portion of the article went as follows:

Illiteracy is not only an obstacle to the completion of the duties of the citizens, but it slows the industrial and agricultural progress of the nation. For the illiterate the possibility to read the newspapers and to establish instructive discussion with one's own neighbor is taken away. The illiterate foreigner is subject to the necessity to think in the limits of the old world. He is subject to be deceived and exploited because of his ignorance. As much as the illiterate farmer, he is confined behind the wall of medieval obscurity. He lives in the days of primordial agriculture.⁵²

Census data from 1930 for Niles displayed a percentage of naturalization for Italians which was lower than the percentage of naturalization for Italians in Ohio and the United States. Less than half of the Italian-American population in Niles was naturalized, only 44 percent.⁵³ The percentage of naturalized Italian-Americans in Ohio was slightly higher at 49 percent. Both of these percentages fall short of the rate of naturalization for foreign-born whites in the United States which was 60 percent.⁵⁴ All percentages only included individuals twenty-one years old and over. The lower naturalization percentage for Italians in Niles did not alter the fact that many Italian-Americans resented the Klan for being an organization that limited the rights of some citizens.

⁵² "Il Problema dell'analfabetismo in America," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 14 June 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

⁵³ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, 1930, Trumbull County, City of Niles, Microcopy 626 (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration Microform Publications, 2002).

⁵⁴ Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Population, vol. 2, General Report Statistics by Subject, chapter 8, Citizenship of Foreign Born, retrieved from www.census.gov (Washington, D.C., 1933), 408, 433.

After Kistler's election in 1923, a section of the Italian-American community in Niles realized the only way to combat the Klan was through political action. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* presented efforts to encourage citizenship and voting. A slightly greater percentage of aliens among Italians in Niles did not discourage the editors of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* from educating Italian-Americans on the American political system and the necessity in utilizing that system to pursue immigrant interests. In the summer of 1924, the Italian-American Citizen Political Association of the Mahoning County formed to represent the Italian-American voting population. By October 1924, the association boasted a membership of 1,000 Italian-Americans.⁵⁵ Clearly, these Italian-Americans recognized the value of participation in American politics.

Though a portion of the Italian community in Niles proved themselves to be American citizens through literacy, education, naturalization, and political action, there was another group of Italian-Americans who failed to advertise similar adaptation efforts. These Italians, such as the Jennings family, participated in activities, namely gambling and bootlegging, that conflicted with the values held by Protestant Americans. Most Italians entered the United States with a general distrust of government as a result of experiencing difficulties with the government in Italy. Consequently, this distrust either provoked appreciation for the American democratic process, as was the case with *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, or indifference toward law enforcement, as was the case with East End bootleggers. Those who lived in the East End, such as Frank McDermott, remembered enjoying gambling and corn whiskey made by Sonny Jim.⁵⁶ Thus, Italian

⁵⁵ "Italian-American Citizen Political Association of Mahoning County," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 11 October 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

⁵⁶ Frank McDermott, interview by Stephen Papalas, 8 December 1982, O. H. 217, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 2-3.

immigrants adapted to their new society in different ways. Klansmen focused on the Italian community that engaged in activities considered inexcusable in a reform society.

According to *The Citizen* many asked, “How long does it take to make an American of a foreigner?” The Imperial Wizard responded with this statement.

A certificate of naturalization does not make an American. It is not until a foreigner has learned to share our mental inheritance, has a correct conception of our government, has accepted our basis of religion, has learned to speak our tongue and think out thought that he can possibly fulfill his duties as a citizen of our nation. The only requirement of Americanism is to become an American.⁵⁷

The Imperial Wizard went on to deny acknowledgement of a foreigner as American after serving for the United States Army in the First World War. While Klansmen honored and respected the foreigner’s service in the army, it did not make a foreigner an American citizen. The foreigner remained restricted by his own foreign thoughts and, as a result, could not benefit from American democracy.

Native-born Americans ignored the persistent efforts of a portion of the Italian-American population to prove their American loyalty. Although in some instances at lower rates than national and state statistics, the Italians in Niles owned homes, learned English, became educated, and obtained professional jobs. Articles in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* exhibited instances where Italian-Americans displayed patriotism toward the United States and called for Italian participation in American politics. While devotion to the Italian village or province remained, as evidenced in the creation of Italian societies, Italians proudly displayed American flags alongside the flags of the Italian society. Italian immigrants chose to remain in the United States because they appreciated democracy, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

⁵⁷ “The Klan of Tomorrow,” *The Citizen*, 16 October 1924, p. 5.

Chapter Three: Life and Liberty!

After the election of Harvey Kistler as mayor of Niles in 1923, the influence of the Ku Klux Klan in the Mahoning Valley swelled. With police forces, school boards, city councils, and local courts saturated by Klan pressure, those who did not support the Klan quickly saw their opportunity for local participation dwindle. The uncompromising nature of the Klan's principles and positions caused strong reactions from anti-Klan groups. Furthermore, the Klan broadcast its presence by organizing more frequent parades and strengthening its message in *The Citizen*. As a result of the Klan's increasing force, arguments arose that questioned the constitutionality of the Klan. Opponents to the Klan described the organization as one that threatened liberty and destroyed American unity. Therefore, many felt strong opposition toward the Klan and utilized a variety of methods to display dissent.

During the summer of 1924, a dramatic increase in tensions between Klansmen and anti-Klan forces occurred. Anti-Klan groups expressed resistance to the Klan through physical and verbal opposition. What made the situation in Niles unique was the reaction of a portion of the Italian-American population. Evidence exists that proves that the Italian-Americans of the *Il Cittadino* Publishing Company sought to combat the Klan by utilizing the same approach the Klan used to gain power, which was through participation in local politics. As tensions increased through the summer of 1924, these Italians believed the only way to halt the influence of the Klan was to gain a position in the political system by voting for candidates who did not support Klan principles. In order to elect particular candidates, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* called all Italian-Americans to participate in American democracy by gaining citizenship and voting.

Once in political power in Niles, Klansmen utilized that power to push for the principles it advocated, such as enforcement of blue laws and prohibition, regulation of theaters, and Bible reading in public schools. Some of these principles directly affected immigrant populations such as Italian-Americans. Blue laws, which mandated store closings on Sundays, and prohibition, did not violate the rights of American citizens, but how the Klan chose to enforce them did, for example the unannounced police searches of immigrant homes without a specific warrant. Blue laws impacted some immigrant groups' cultural traditions. Italians, in particular, were accustomed to purchasing fresh meat and vegetables daily because many did not own iceboxes. The Sunday meal was important to Italian families, and prior to the enforcement of blue laws, Italians purchased the meat for the meal Sunday morning.¹ The closing of grocery stores on Sunday interfered with Italian customs by making it difficult to prepare a special Sunday meal with fresh ingredients.

Klan claims that Catholics did not support public education did not reflect the actual educational circumstances for most Italian-Americans. According to oral histories, few Italians in Niles attended Catholic schools because the size of the Catholic school limited enrollment. Nicola Criscione attended public school and recalled the indifference teachers displayed toward children of ethnic groups in the classroom. Teachers paid little attention to whether the children from ethnic groups learned or not, but were more concerned over the education of native-born Protestant white children. Immigrants not only faced problems with teachers but also with fellow students. Native-born whites gave

¹ Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, 8 May 1984, O. H. 311, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 23.

harsh nicknames to Italians such as dago, wop, and honkie.² These difficulties presented challenges to the adaptation process for Italian-American students.

The Klan feared Italian-Americans as well as other immigrants because of their unknown culture and their supposed pre-disposition to radicalism and anarchism, as evidenced in statements referring to immigrants as gangsters and out-laws.³ An interview of Donald Pallante revealed his theory regarding the resentment between the Klan and immigrants. Pallante recalled his father's stories about the family's initial move to a Niles neighborhood.

My dad used to tell about when he moved into the neighborhood, he was resented because he moved in Italian. They were not more respected than the Negroes, at that time. I don't resent them being that way because they had to get used to us and we had to get used to them. A lot of Welsh.⁴

The Pallante family resided in a predominantly Welsh neighborhood, and Donald Pallante believed that the customs and religion practiced by his family alarmed their Welsh neighbors. Pallante also mentioned that the Klan feared Italians and other immigrants as potential competitors. Furthermore, as a result of mafia activity in Sicily, native-born whites suspected all Italians of mafia involvement, thus the tendency to think of Italian-Americans as gangsters.⁵ While gambling, bootlegging, and involvement in the mafia characterized some Italians, it did not apply to all. A significant reason for the resentment between Klansmen and immigrants was simply due to ignorance.

² Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, 8 May 1984, O. H. 311, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 24-25.

³ "Shall Rome Dictate?" *The Citizen*, 30 October 1924, p. 1.

⁴ Donald R. Pallante, interview by James Allgren, 5 November 1993, O. H. 1603, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 15-16.

⁵ Donald R. Pallante, interview by James Allgren, 5 November 1993, O. H. 1603, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 15-16.

Klansmen knew about the bootlegging and gambling that occurred in the East Side of Niles and defined all southern and eastern immigrants as participants in those activities. It was true that several Italian-American families took advantage of prohibition to sell wine and whiskey illegally. This was one way in which immigrants participated in American society, albeit outside of the norms of the 1920s. These immigrants did not present themselves as law-abiding citizens who sought acceptance from Protestant Americans. Joseph Jennings Jr. was merely five years old during the Niles riot but recalled the role of the Jennings Athletic Club and Dance Hall as a location of bootlegging activity in the third ward of Niles.

There was good whiskey made by the Italian people and good wine...Its like marijuana, its not legal, people want it, they're going to get it...This was the area where people had the fortitude or the gumption, so to speak, to go ahead and make it and sell it. Things were hard then, Depression, and that was one way of making a dollar. People would come from other parts of the county to come and buy this product. It was illegal and it was good stuff...You got it here at the Jennings' or other places that were bootlegging or where the speakeasy was, you were sure of a good drink of whiskey.⁶

Suspicious of mafia involvement also plagued the East Side. The Jennings Athletic Club in particular faced problems from Black Hand operations. The Black Hand was a method of extortion that began in Sicily but gradually became part of the United States. Black Hand operations targeted successful Italian immigrants in the United States by using threats to demand money. Those who employed Black Hand tactics were immigrants. Therefore, Black Hand methods involved immigrants extorting other immigrants. The Black Hand tactics used against the Jennings involved verbal threats and

⁶ Joseph Jennings Jr., interview by Stephen Papalas, 20 August 1982, O. H. 308, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 8-9.

several bombings of the Jennings Athletic Club. The Jennings refused to succumb to the intimidations and to give money to the individuals involved in the Black Hand operations. According to Joseph Jennings Jr., his family was never involved in organized crime or had any desire to do so.⁷ The experience of the Jennings family illustrated the attempts of some mafia factions to gain control of the East Side. Thus, the fears held by Klansmen that Italian immigrants were involved in the mafia had some legitimacy. Nonetheless, the Klan chose to focus only on the portion of the Italian-American population in Niles that advocated bootlegging and gambling. In order uphold its anti-immigrant principles, the Klan had to capitalize on the faults of the immigrant population.

The Citizen, due to its loyalty to the Klan, published articles and images that displayed the threat Catholics and immigrants posed to American society. During the summer of 1924, these types of images and articles increased in frequency and number. *The Citizen* addressed the power of the Pope in an article that discussed the diplomatic relations between the Pope and France. The article stated, "If the Pope is not a temporal 'prince' why should there be diplomatic relations between the papal court and the governments of the world."⁸ Klansmen believed Catholics were more loyal to the Pope than to the United States.

The Klan's criticisms of ethnic minorities and immigrants prompted defensive reactions. For example, an individual responded to an article published by the *Youngstown Citizen* that included negative remarks regarding the patriotism of John McCormick, an Irish tenor. In the letter to the *Youngstown Citizen*, the respondent, who

⁷ Joseph Jennings Jr., interview by Stephen Papalas, 11-12.

⁸ "Vatican Deplores Suppression of French Envoy," *The Citizen*, 14 June 1924, p. 4.

knew McCormick all his life, defended McCormick, claiming he was a great man, a Catholic, a member of the Knights of Columbus, and a good American. The respondent further praised McCormick for donating all the proceeds he earned from performing concerts around the United States to the Red Cross. At the end of the letter, the respondent made evident his feelings of bitterness and disapproval of the Klan when he stated: "I dare you to publish this in your 100 per cent menace."⁹

Il Cittadino Italo-Americano expressed similar defensive reactions and opposition to the Klan as early as 1922. In one particular article the newspaper applauded the efforts of Jewish Rabbi, Stephen S. Wise, who declared that the Klan was an un-American sect. Rabbi Wise claimed that the Klan did not stand for the Constitution and that there was no place in the United States for Klansmen. According to Rabbi Wise, Jewish immigrants arrived to the United States not to exploit America's wealth but to find peace, security, and a home in a country that publicized its liberty. The author of the article responded to the Rabbi's words strongly. "America ought to not only defend the Catholics and Jews, but the nation, against the Ku Klux Klan. One of the two must perish and America may not perish. Well done Rabbi!"¹⁰ This article displayed one example of how the Klan ironically served as a unifying factor for immigrant groups who ordinarily did not share similar ideology.

In 1922 the strength of the Klan in the Mahoning Valley merely continued to grow. Therefore, Italian-Americans and, in this case, Jewish immigrants quickly identified the Klan as an immediate threat to American society. Italians and Jews migrated from countries with limited liberty. They admired the United States because it

⁹ "A Dare," *Youngstown Citizen*, 21 June 1924, p. 7.

¹⁰ "Gli Ebrei e il Klan," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 23 December 1922, p. 4. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

advertised itself as a land of liberty. In the United States, immigrants had opportunities to achieve goals never imagined in the Old World. Therefore, when the Klan began to question the rights of certain groups to American liberty, many immigrants reacted strongly. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* became the voice for a group of Italian-Americans who attempted to eliminate Klansman's negative perceptions of immigrants by encouraging Italian-Americans to prove their capabilities as American citizens.

The election of Harvey Kistler as mayor of Niles in 1923 increased tensions between Klansmen and anti-Klan groups and heightened immigrants' distrust of the Klan. Harvey Kistler was a business man and longtime resident of Niles. His previous political experience included serving as secretary of the Civil Service Commission. It was not until Kistler announced his intention to run under the Democratic ticket that the general public came to know him. Due to Kistler's limited political experience and minimal campaign publicity, newspapers favored the Republican ticket to win the Niles mayoral election. At the primary election approximately 4,700 Republican voters made their selection for the Republican ticket and felt certain that their choice would be the favored decision among Niles citizens. However, Kistler, with the help of his campaign committee, achieved mayoral victory in Niles.¹¹

Kistler campaigned only minimally prior to the election, and his campaign differed from traditional methods. The "Kistler for Mayor" campaign committee organized a torchlight parade which took place Saturday night before the election. The parade began at 7:30 in the evening, and the committee supplied all attendees with

¹¹ "Niles Democrats Organize to Boost Kistler for Mayor in Hot Campaign," *The Youngstown Vindicator*, 8 September 1923.

banners and pennants to support Kistler.¹² Kistler made no attempt to hide his connection to the Klan which was evident in his campaign strategy to use torchlight parades, a Klan favorite. Furthermore, citizens were well aware of Kistler's relationship to the Klan since local newspapers advertised Kistler as the Klan endorsed candidate during the campaign process.¹³

It was nearly impossible for Italian immigrant and anti-Klan populations in Niles to muster up enough votes to prevent a Klan win in 1923. The Italian-American population faced challenges simply because their population percentage did not compose a majority. Furthermore, the political influence they could hold dwindled due to the reality that many Italians had not yet achieved naturalization. According to Nicola Criscione, bosses and superintendents strongly encouraged workers to vote the same way they did which was traditionally for the Republican ticket. Klansmen did not force other citizens to vote for a particular candidate, but they also did not find it necessary to do so as they already had the support of the greatest percentage of the population. Immigrant groups were too divided by ethnicity to represent a large enough force to contend with Klan supporters.¹⁴

Kistler ran as a reform candidate under the Democratic Party and won the mayoral election with a majority of 330 votes over the Republican candidate, Charles Crow, mayor of Niles and fourth time candidate. Under Crow, gambling and bootlegging occurred in the third ward with minimal police interference. Joseph Jennings Jr. remembered policemen visiting bootlegging establishments and said, "They would come

¹² "Kistler for Mayor Parade Saturday," *The Youngstown Vindicator*

¹³ "Klan Wins in Bitter Fight at Niles Polls," *The Youngstown Vindicator*, 6 November 1923.

¹⁴ Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, 8 May 1984, O. H. 311, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Maag Library Special Collections, Youngstown, Oh., 10.

and get their little half pint or pint or get a little drink. So it wasn't a big sin to have a drink of whiskey in those days."¹⁵ However, during Mayor Crow's last few months in office the new county sheriff, John "Brickey" Thomas, conducted a series of alcohol raids in Niles. The Trumbull County Council of Churches and the Trumbull County Dry Enforcement League were tired of the tolerant Prohibition policies of Niles officials and encouraged Sheriff Thomas to perform the raids. In January of 1923, Sheriff Thomas made thirteen arrests. Those arrested included Jim Jennings, brother of Joseph Jennings Jr., and Joseph Round, son of the Niles police chief. Councilman Vince Lapolla, an Italian-American, bailed the two men out of jail. The courts convicted Round and Jim Jennings of supplying federal agents with liquor. Round received a \$1,000 fine while Jennings received an \$800 fine.¹⁶ Incidents such as this one prompted Prohibitionists in Niles to speak out against Mayor Crow's administration, who they believed catered to the demands of East Side bootleggers and gamblers. Therefore, the election of Kistler occurred at a time when many Niles citizens wanted a crackdown on the illegal activities and corruption occurring in Niles.

Kistler's victory was the first Democratic win in Niles in ten years. More citizens voted during the 1923 mayoral election than at any other time in the history of Niles.¹⁷ The 1923 election aroused concern and excitement among citizens which drew them to the voting booths. Those worried about the immigrant population and alcohol consumption felt it was their duty to vote for the candidate that promised moral reform, while those concerned about the increasing power of the Klan took to the voting booths to limit Klan influence. Chairman of Kistler's campaign committee, O. O. Hewitt,

¹⁵ Joseph Jennings Jr., interview by Stephen Papalas, 10.

¹⁶ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 67.

¹⁷ "Klan Wins in Bitter Fight at Niles Polls," *The Youngstown Vindicator*, 6 November 1923.

described the intensity of the election and the importance that city reform served when he stated:

This has far outgrown the character of a partisan fight. It is a battle between the advocates of a cleaner city and those who are satisfied to have speakeasies and disorderly houses operate almost unhindered...We will welcome the assistance of every man and woman of every race and creed in this effort to make Niles a better place in which to live and rear our children.¹⁸

A breakdown of the votes cast by precinct and ward displayed that Kistler achieved victory in every ward except the third, which the foreign population dominated. In the third ward, Kistler lost to Crow by a vote of 56 to 454.¹⁹ The statistics of the vote count in the third ward displayed the awareness of the immigrant population of the political intentions of Kistler and the Klan endorsement he carried. The third ward contained the highest percentage of Italian-Americans compared to the other wards.²⁰ Therefore, Italian-American and other immigrant voters were aware that Kistler was not a candidate interested in the same principles as the immigrant population. Unfortunately, the naturalized immigrant voter population did not consist of a large enough section of the Niles population to affect the election of a particular candidate.

With the election of Harvey Kistler, opposition to the Klan began to take two forms. Some anti-Klan individuals chose to respond to the Klan radically and physically by forming an organization called the Knights of the Flaming Circle. A dentist, Dr. W. S. McGuigan, declared the formation of the organization and appointed himself “grand supreme monarch” in August 1923. This organization had its roots in Steubenville, Ohio, and mimicked the Klan activity of burning crosses by displaying fiery tires in public

¹⁸ “Kistler Plans Hot Campaign,” *Niles Evening Register*, 10 September 1923.

¹⁹ “Kistler Defeats Crow at Niles,” *The Youngstown Vindicator*, 7 November 1923.

²⁰ Census Bureau, *Fifteenth Census, Population, 1930, Weathersfield Township, Wards 1-4 Niles, Oh.*, National Archives and Records Administration (College Park, Md., 2002).

places. The Knights of the Flaming Circle was not as organized as the Klan; members did not hold offices, pay dues, or meet regularly. The organization held its first public meeting on June 29, 1924, at the East Side Athletic Club which opened with the induction of approximately 400 new members. The Knights of the Flaming Circle drew in much of its membership from Niles' East Side. In fact, James and Joseph Jennings as well as Tony Nigro were leaders of the organization.²¹ Utilizing rebellious tactics, the Knights of the Flaming Circle defended Catholics and the East End from the Klan. The *Niles Evening Register* reported the organization's first tire burning months before its first meeting. On January 2, 1924 the Knights of the Flaming Circle hung a fiery tire from a tree, visible from Church and State Streets. A large crowd gathered around the blazing ring but no one knew any information regarding the organization of the association.²² The initial tire burning was the beginning of more drastic efforts to protect the East End from interference on behalf of the Klan in the form of alcohol raids and anti-Catholic activism.

Another, less publicized, response to the Klan involved the use of opposition tactics very different from those utilized by members of the Knights of the Flaming Circle. The President of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, Celestino Petrarca, utilized the newspaper to encourage other Italian Americans to vote, become literate, and participate in Niles society. Publishing the Italian newspaper was Petrarca's full time job by 1923. His prior occupations included being a salesman for the Mahoning Valley Liquor Company until 1920 when he became a contractor. The newspaper's editor, Mario Guggino, was a salesman for the Agnone Company, a wholesale grocer of imported

²¹ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 120-122.

²² "Burn Flaming Circle in Niles Last Night," *Niles Evening Register*, 3 January 1924, p. 2.

goods.²³ The secretary, Mary Petrarca, was Celestino Petrarca's daughter.²⁴ The staff of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* sought to combat Klan influence by employing the same tactics of political action used by the Klan to gain power. This group of Italian Americans believed that their full participation in the democratic system could tip the political scales out of Klan favor and in turn re-establish a local government that represented the needs of all American citizens, not only a select group.

Records from local newspapers provided evidence of the tensions present between the Ku Klux Klan and ethnic groups. During the summer of 1924 several incidents occurred involving the attempts of anti-Klan factions to stop the Klan from organizing and parading. There were plans for the Klan to hold a parade in Niles on June 21, 1924. On June 10, eleven days prior to the parade, a delegation of Niles citizens opposed to the Klan asked Mayor Kistler to either request Klansmen to parade unmasked or cancel the parade entirely. This incident was not the first time those opposed to the Klan attempted to stop a Klan parade. In early May 1924 anti-Klan factions interrupted a Klan parade by small demonstrations and fights. Therefore, the June 10 delegation appealed to the mayor in an attempt to prevent another outbreak from occurring. In response to the delegation, Kistler stated that he would continue to permit Klan parades until the outbreaks ceased. According to Kistler, not even the Murphy gang, a group of Irish prize fighters, could prevent a Klan parade from occurring.²⁵

Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans paid a visit to the Mahoning Valley prior to the June 21 Klan parade. The Youngstown Klan welcomed Evans with a parade of 7,000 vehicles that followed a route through downtown Youngstown, beginning on Market

²³ *Youngstown Official City Directory* (Akron: The Burch Directory Company, 1920), 524, 857.

²⁴ *Youngstown Official City Directory*, issue 33 (Akron: The Burch Directory Company, 1924), 568, 935.

²⁵ "Oppose Niles Klan Parade," *Youngstown Citizen*, 14 June 1924, p. 8.

Street then eventually heading west toward Canfield, Ohio, where a gathering of Klansmen awaited the Imperial Wizard's arrival. The gathering at the Canfield grounds included music, food, and speeches by Colonel Gunder, Colonel Watkins, and Evans. Klanswomen presented an exhibition drill, while the Welsh choir, Klan band, and Kilties band provided music. Organizations sympathetic to the Klan, such as the Red Robed Riders and the American Crusaders, participated in the parade as well. The Youngstown Klan celebrated the event and claimed that the immensity of the parade proved the power and strength of the Klan in Ohio cities and counties. The *Youngstown Citizen* stated that when evening arrived Klansmen had reached "the end of a perfect day."²⁶

On the contrary, the visit of the Imperial Wizard was hardly a perfect day. Anti-Klan factions were decidedly upset about the flaunting of Klan power in Canfield, and a small group displayed their opposition to the presence of the Imperial Wizard by distributing shingle tacks and "clout" nails along the parade route with the intent of preventing 30,000 Klansmen from making it to Canfield. Though a clever idea, the distribution of tacks did not prevent the nearly 7,000 vehicles from arriving at the Canfield grounds. Local police discovered and arrested the perpetrators, all of which were of Irish descent. One of the accused, twenty-two year old Patrick Robert Corbett, explained to authorities the details of the incident. Corbett picked up five or six men in his truck. One of the men he picked up marked the side of Corbett's truck with the words: "one hundred percent Irish," while another of the men, George Meyer, asked Corbett to make a stop on Commerce Street. Meyer returned to the truck with a package of nails which he claimed he was going to "have fun" with. After exchanging vehicles, the group

²⁶ "Visit of the Imperial Wizard," *Youngstown Citizen*, 21 June 1924, p. 1.

of men placed the nails along the parade route. Police headquarters held all men for prosecution.²⁷

The events during the visit of the Imperial Wizard foreshadowed the violence to come in Niles. As planned, the June 21 Klan parade occurred despite efforts on the part of some Niles citizens to stop it. As feared, anti-Klan factions reacted violently to the occurrence of the Klan parade by destroying American flags and arriving at the location of the parade with a variety of different weapons, ready to attack. In this incident, the *Youngstown Citizen* blamed the Knights of the Flaming Circle. According to an article, headlined “Murderous Attack on Klansmen and Niles, Ohio,” nearly 500 members of the Knights of the Flaming Circle were responsible for physically halting the parade which Mayor Kistler subsequently called off due to fear over possible bloodshed.²⁸

The *Youngstown Citizen* considered the June 21 protest a disgraceful event and an example of the radical and uncivilized nature of the ethnic population in Niles. Editors of the *Youngstown Citizen* placed blame on the police department for waiting upon Kistler’s approval to act upon the rioters and not reacting to the situation earlier. Klansmen questioned the ability of Chief Lincoln Round, Sheriff Thomas, and Mayor Kistler to enforce regulations and maintain order. Despite issues of ineptitude, Niles police arrested 18 rioters; one of the men for whom a warrant was issued was “Dude” Murphy of Girard, Ohio. Murphy had already been implicated in other assault related offenses toward the Klan prior to the June 21 incident.²⁹

Though Murphy appeared to be the only arrest of concern to the *Youngstown Citizen*, several other individuals were responsible for starting the demonstrations on June

²⁷ “Covered Klan Route with Nails,” *Youngstown Citizen*, 21 June 1924, p. 1-2.

²⁸ “Murderous Attack on Klansmen at Niles, Ohio,” *Youngstown Citizen*, 28 June 1924, p. 1.

²⁹ “Murderous Attack on Klansmen at Niles, Ohio,” *Youngstown Citizen*, 28 June 1924, p. 2.

21. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* reported the event with no applause given to those guilty of causing the uprising.

Last Saturday because of the Klan konklave that had to be held in Niles, Ohio, it was a site of serious disorder...Quite a lot of small American flags that were taken from cars were torn and trampled... In the various scuffles there were quite a lot of people suffering from cuts and bruises, and one man left from it in quite a sorry state.³⁰

According to *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, police charged the 18 arrested with desecration of the American flag and shooting firearms on a public roadway. Although the newspaper did not condone the behavior of the Knights of the Flaming Circle, it defended one of those implicated, Patrick Fusco, a lawyer, and portrayed Mayor Kistler unfavorably. Fusco of Niles was one of the 18 men arrested for offending the American flag, and responded by suing Mayor Kistler, Chief of Police Round, and Thomas Lewis for compensation of damages amounting to \$50,000. Fusco claimed that these three individuals joined together to ruin his reputation as a lawyer in Niles. Fusco continued action against Kistler, Round, and Lewis despite Lewis's withdrawal of the order of arrest for the 18 individuals. Kistler decided to go to the governor to complain that the citizens of Niles did not cooperate with authorities. According to *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, Kistler expected the majority of Niles citizens, Klan and anti-Klan, to bear and applaud the masquerade.³¹ Clearly Italian-Americans were not willing to allow a Klan backed government to run the city of Niles. After the June 21 incident the determinations of both Klansmen and those against the Klan to defend what they

³⁰ "Disordini Klanisti in Niles, Ohio," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 28 June 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

³¹ "L'avvuto Fusco di Niles Intenta Causa per Risarcimento di Danni per \$50,000 Contro il Klan," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 28 June 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

perceived were their rights to democracy and liberty intensified. The *Youngstown Citizen* amplified the frequency of articles that placed attacks on immigrants and Catholics.

An example of one such article in *The Citizen* criticized the education of Catholics by questioning the loyalty of Roman Catholics to the public education system in the United States, despite the fact that most Italian-American children attended public school. According to the article, evidence existed that the Roman Catholic Church opposed public education. The *Youngstown Citizen* applied its concern regarding the Roman Catholic support of public education to the political system by questioning the intentions of Al Smith, governor of New York. “Can Al Smith, if he is a devout Roman Catholic, such as he is supposed to be, believe in the separation of church and state, and uphold the public school if doing so is anti-Catholic?”³²

Articles such as these attempted to appeal to prejudices held toward Catholic immigrants by enhancing nativist thought and exhibiting the incompetence of ethnic minorities of Catholic affiliation. However, for those Italian-Americans who sent their children to public schools, tirelessly worked toward learning the English language, and participated in Niles society through employment and organizations, the comments written in the *Youngstown Citizen* and stated by Klansmen were insulting. As a result, some Italian-Americans sought a different approach to combating the Klan than the means used by the Knights of the Flaming Circle. Articles in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* displayed efforts on behalf of the newspaper to display American patriotism and encourage participation in American politics. In 1920, the newspaper proudly advertised having over 30,000 readers and boasted its popularity by stating, “Read *Il*

³² “Spigots and Bigots,” *Youngstown Citizen*, 19 July 1924, p. 1, 8.

“*Cittadino*” the most wide spread and sought after newspaper in Ohio and western Pennsylvania.”³³ There were approximately 3,000 Italian-born immigrants in Trumbull County and 7,000 Italian-born immigrants in Mahoning County according to the 1920 census.³⁴ If all Italian-born immigrants in Trumbull and Mahoning Counties read *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, that accounted for only 10,000 readers. Therefore, the breadth of the newspaper’s circulation expanded beyond Trumbull and Mahoning County. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* was an official source of American political news for Italian immigrants.

Since 1924 was an election year both nationally and locally, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* had a significant amount of information to present to its readers. The newspaper wanted to educate readers on the candidates and the American political system in order to encourage Italian Americans to vote for candidates sympathetic to their principles and situation. As violence continued to intensify in Niles, in the form of bombings and protests, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* gradually came to the acknowledgement that demonstrations and physical outbreaks would not bring an end to Klan presence. Therefore, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* realized that participation in American politics could not only prove Italian Americans’ citizenship, but it could also combat the political power of the Klan.

In terms of educating Italian-Americans on the American voting process, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* included information on Democratic and Republican conventions, updates to the emigration bill, candidates for local positions such as sheriff

³³ *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, front page headline, 10 June 1920, p. 1, 6.

³⁴ Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population by States, vol. 3, Ohio (Washington D. C.), 795-796.

or county commissioner, and appeals to amend the Volstead Act.³⁵ Gradually, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* recognized it could use its position as a means of communication to not only educate Italians on the voting process but to provide some motivation to do so.

On August 9, 1924, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* stated a new purpose for Italian American political involvement. The main heading of the newspaper on this day stated, “Alle Offese dei K.K.K. Gl’italiani Rispondano col Voto,” meaning, “to the insults of the K.K.K. the Italians respond with the vote.” Under this heading, was a list of candidates for several political offices divided into two columns: *i nostri amici* and *i nostri nemici* or our friends and our enemies. The names listed under “our enemies” were sympathetic to the Klan. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* divided up the candidates, which ranged from those running for sheriff to those running for state senator, into easily identifiable lists so that Italian Americans could approach the voting booth knowledgeable about the candidates supportive of their interests.³⁶

Il Cittadino Italo-Americano needed to include the lists of supportive and non-supportive candidates to achieve the goal stated under “La Risposta.” Translated as “The Reply,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* explained its response to the discriminative nature and unconstitutional characteristics of the Klan by utilizing this statement to call all Italians to vote in the upcoming election, “Tuesday the five thousand and two hundred voters and charged Italians will be called to contribute with their vote for top choice

³⁵ A general assessment of the articles discovered in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*. More detailed examples of articles are included in subsequent paragraphs.

³⁶ “Le Due Liste dei Candidati,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 9 August 1924, p.1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

candidates, among who will have to elect for themselves the best men suitable for administering the public.”³⁷

Il Cittadino Italo-Americano included the lists of supportive and non-supportive candidates for Italian-Americans to study before entering the voting booth. The article also provided encouragement for Italians by appealing to unification and brotherhood. “Fellow countrymen will vote united for our friends and not for those who vote to put them out or at least hold them in that land of adoption like slaves.”³⁸ In order to vote for candidates considerate of the immigrant population, Italian-Americans had to be wary of candidates who presented false promises and educate themselves on foreign and domestic policies. One such policy discussed was the bill on emigration. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* explained that this bill prevented fellow Italians from coming to the United States for proper work and for the opportunity to earn one’s own living.³⁹

Il Cittadino Italo-Americano appealed to the desires and motivations held by Italian-Americans which inspired them to migrate to the United States in the first place. It also reminded Italians how the Klan hindered their possibilities to achieve success in their new home.

Italians, our moment has arrived. It arrives without pity. We dry our tears with the vote of thousands and thousands of brothers who without work leave our homeland anxious to come to the land of Columbus in search of daily bread. We go to the polls and we vote for those men of Christ who preached for brotherhood and against hatred and slavery. To all, for God, we respond to the abuses of power not with violence but by crushing it with the vote.⁴⁰

³⁷ “La Risposta,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 9 August 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

³⁸ “La Risposta,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 9 August 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

³⁹ “La Risposta,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 9 August 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

⁴⁰ “La Risposta,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 9 August 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

Motivating all Italian-Americans to vote displayed the respect and faith Italian-Americans held toward America's democratic system. In the Old World such voting opportunities never existed for Italians, who were barred from any type of representation in the Italian government. Italian-Americans in the Mahoning Valley took advantage of the ability to influence the election of a particular candidate. If any Italian-Americans doubted their ability to influence American politics, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* reminded them otherwise.

Your vote this year has huge importance and will be of great weight in the administrative annals of this great republic. Our vote today will be able to change many things in the future, which will bring about greater respect for our noble race. Five thousand two hundred votes are sufficient to tip the scales more to one side than the other. Here is our response!⁴¹

In order to further educate and motivate Italian-Americans to participate in the democratic political process, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* announced the intentions of some Italian-Americans to initiate an Italian-American political club to combat the masked enemy. Italians hoped the club would help those who intended to vote in November to participate in the election in a disciplined and organized manner.⁴² According to an article from *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* dated October 11, 1924, Italians made the Italian-American Political Association of Mahoning County a reality.

By October 1924, the Italian-American Political Association of Mahoning County already existed for a few months and included more than one thousand members with many others on the brink of joining which would increase the number of Italian-Americans in line for the voting booth. The association was very organized with regular

⁴¹ "La Risposta," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 9 August 1924, p. 1.

⁴² "La Risposta," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 9 August 1924, p. 1.

meeting sessions scheduled for the administration and assembly. During a usual management session held October 3, the administration decided to have a session for the assembly every third Sunday of the month. Members of the administration and assembly encouraged all members and sympathizers to the association to attend the usual sessions held in the Duca of Abruzzi room.⁴³

The tactics utilized by *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* and the Knights of the Flaming Circle were opposite in almost every way. The tactics advocated by *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* to decrease Klan influence may have appeared less powerful than those promoted by the Knights of the Flaming Circle. The subversive methods used by the Knights of the Flaming Circle achieved direct results both positive and negative. On the contrary, the effects of the efforts on the part of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* to promote voting and encourage citizen participation were difficult to measure. However, for the Knights of the Flaming Circle and for Italian-Americans who advocated voting, the final goal to achieve was the same. A statement in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* summarized the sentiment Italian-Americans held toward the Ku Klux Klan in the Mahoning Valley. "To one hundred percent Americanism we proudly respond one hundred percent Italianism, and to the one amongst the crowd who seeks to betray our cause we will call him a bastard and accompany him to our curse and the curse of our distant homeland."⁴⁴

The Italian American population and the Klan each felt strongly about their beliefs regarding the other. Klansmen were determined that immigrants only contributed to working class ills while Italian-Americans firmly believed in the unconstitutional nature of the Klan. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* published an article of statements issued

⁴³ "Italian-American Citizen Political Association of Mahoning County," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 11 October 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

⁴⁴ "La Risposta," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 9 August 1924, p. 1.

by Supreme Court Judge Arthur S. Tompkins, showcasing the unconstitutional nature of the Klan. Judge Tompkins spoke at Fordham University in honor of the 148th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. During his speech he accused the Klan of being an anti-American organization that disguised its failure to obey laws by forcing anti-Klan individuals to abide to outrageous Klan laws. In his speech, Tompkins made this strong statement as recorded by *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*:

Any Klan or group of individuals that discriminates against all men, because of their religious or political beliefs, or because of the color of their skin, is especially anti-American and anti-Constitutional. There should not be a place in America for men who hide their face behind a mask claiming to regulate the private affairs of their fellow citizens.⁴⁵

Il Cittadino Italo-Americano valued the words by Judge Tompkins because of his Protestant affiliation and his membership in the Masonic lodge.⁴⁶ Furthermore, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* utilized his words as evidence that other individuals, particularly some Protestants, also defined the Klan as an enemy of liberty. Therefore, while the Klan repeatedly criticized ethnics for being uneducated, uncivilized, and immoral, the creators of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* understood the principles of the United States. Each group, both the Klan and Italian-Americans, believed that they represented hard working, loyal, and honest citizens. These beliefs were so strong that violent incidents continued to characterize the environment of Niles society through the summer of 1924.

On July 3, 1924, a bomb exploded during a reception given for the ex mayor of Youngstown, George Oles, at the ex-mayor's friend's house in Poland. The bombing

⁴⁵ "Il 'Klan' Denunciato Come Nemico della Liberta'," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 12 July 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

⁴⁶ "Il 'Klan' Denunciato Come Nemico della Liberta'," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 12 July 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

occurred at 10:30 in the evening and was the second time an incident such as this happened to Oles.⁴⁷ After several failed attempts to institute reform during his administration as a result of his lack of experience, Oles resigned from his administration prematurely. Oles's inability to allocate appropriate funding for projects and remove inept city officials also influenced his decision to quit as mayor of Youngstown. Citizens remembered him as being a government official who had the will to morally reform Youngstown but who did not have the correct experience.⁴⁸ Therefore, even after his own decision to remove himself from office, Oles faced violent opposition for being a political figure in favor of Klan-backed moral reform.

On July 19 Officer Charles A. Gilbert suffered an attack by three men who left with his badge and gun. According to the *Youngstown Citizen*, Officer Gilbert was one of the only officers to attempt to reestablish order during the riot in Niles on June 21, while other Niles officers "allowed the mob to do as it pleased."⁴⁹ The attack on Officer Gilbert occurred at two o'clock in the morning along Main Street in Niles. The *Youngstown Citizen* blamed the Knights of the Flaming Circle for the attack as repayment for the efforts of Officer Gilbert during the riot in June. After the attack, Officer Gilbert gave a description of the men who attacked him and was certain that all three were Americans. Chief Rounds expected to make an arrest quickly; however, no subsequent articles in the *Youngstown Citizen* listed any arrests made.⁵⁰

The assault of Officer Gilbert was one example of several actions along the lines of riots, attacks, and burnings initiated by the Knights of the Flaming Circle. The months

⁴⁷ "Una Bomba Esplode Presso la Casa del l'ex Sindaco Oles," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 12 July 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

⁴⁸ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 27-28.

⁴⁹ "Attempt to Kill Police Officer in Niles," *Youngstown Citizen*, 26 July 1924, p. 1.

⁵⁰ "Attempt to Kill Police Officer in Niles," *Youngstown Citizen*, 26 July 1924, p. 1.

of June and July were particularly eventful with three riots all instigated by members of the Knights of the Flaming Circle. In addition to the riots, a mob assaulted four individuals, two officers and two civilians. The mob beat one of these individuals into unconsciousness. The Knights of the Flaming Circle further displayed its presence in Niles by lighting fiery tires in front of Klan endorsed establishments. The members placed a burning circle in front of a Protestant church on August 8, 1924, just before attacking Steve Martin. As a result of the riots, attacks, and tire burnings, the *Youngstown Citizen* urged Mayor Kistler to remove Chief Rounds from his position on the grounds of incompetence. Kistler promised to remove Rounds after awaiting an investigation by the Governor if particular affirmations commenced. The affidavits transpired, but Rounds remained.⁵¹

Events in Niles calmed down in September 1924 with only a robbery incident marking tensions between the Klan and the Knights of the Flaming Circle. Thieves stole twenty five new guns from a sporting goods store which the public speculated the Klan stole. *The Citizen* vehemently denied stealing and storing the guns and ammunition.⁵² Unfortunately, tensions between the Klan and anti-Klan factions became more violent than simple robbery accusations during the month of October and the beginning of November.

The violent actions of the Knights of the Flaming Circle drew the attention of newspapers who reported the incidents for public knowledge. The publicity given to the Knights of the Flaming Circle exposed Niles citizens to one type of Italian-American response to the Ku Klux Klan. Therefore, many individuals defined Italian-Americans by

⁵¹ "More Blackguardism in Niles," *Youngstown Citizen*, 9 August 1924, p. 4.

⁵² "The Niles Robbery," *The Citizen*, 13 September 1924, p. 1.

what they read in the local newspapers, which only reported the violent and radical incidents perpetrated by the Knights of the Flaming Circle, such as placing nails on parade routes and destroying American flags. Few Niles citizens knew of the other, less public, response to the Klan by *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*. Since Il Cittadino Publishing Company printed the newspaper in Italian, it limited its audience to those who could read Italian. Other local newspapers in the Mahoning Valley did not report on Italian-American efforts to promote voting or literacy. Only those who used *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* as a primary means of obtaining information would attempt to combat the Klan by promoting political involvement and encouraging active citizenship.

The efforts of Italian-Americans to resist and attack Klan influence through political intervention did not see immediate results. The editors of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* realized that it would take time for the Italian voting population to increase to a level that could influence political elections. However, in the fall of 1924 many Italian and Irish Americans were no longer willing to wait for politics to trigger a reversal of Klan power. When Mayor Kistler granted the Klan permission to parade on November 1, 1924, the Knights of the Flaming Circle vowed to prevent such a parade from transpiring. After all, the Klan was an unconstitutional organization that threatened the liberties many Italians treasured as American citizens.

Chapter Four: Disorder in Niles

The tensions between Italian-Americans and Klansmen that intensified during the summer of 1924 in the Mahoning Valley culminated in the fall. The peak of resistance among Klan and anti-Klan factions occurred in Niles, as each group fought to defend their rights as American citizens. Passions never decreased despite the brief lull in hostilities between the Klan and the Knights of the Flaming Circle during the month of September. On November 1, 1924, Klansmen and members of the Knights of the Flaming Circle gathered in the early morning for a confrontation that would give Niles national publicity. Each group had already proved, through previous efforts and incidents in the summer of 1924, their unwavering loyalty to the United States, and each group viewed the other as a menace to society. When the Ohio National Guard finally restored order in Niles, Irish and Italian-Americans celebrated their success in halting the occurrence of the scheduled Klan parade. Unfortunately, this was at the cost of several wounded.

Tensions between Klansmen and anti-Klan factions reignited in late October when the Klan announced plans for a massive Halloween festival on October 31 in Youngstown. *The Citizen* reported that the Halloween festival was to be the largest celebration held in the Mahoning Valley. The committee in charge of the October 31 Halloween celebration carefully planned the event to ensure its success, and committee members encouraged merchants to take advantage of the huge festival as a way to promote Klan business. Other activities scheduled included airplane stunts over Market Street followed by a parade beginning at 8 o'clock in the evening in Youngstown. Concerned about law enforcement, *The Citizen* ensured that undercover men would intermingle in the crowd to regulate the festivities; however, the Klan did not anticipate

any trouble. In fact, *The Citizen* stated in regards to the expected enjoyment of the celebration, “When the bomb is fired as the signal for the big show to start, the old will become young: cares will be tossed aside and all Youngstown will become a big happy family.”¹

The fact that the Klan advertised its existence in the Mahoning Valley through extravagant parades, gatherings, and celebrations blatantly reminded anti-Klan factions of the presence of the Klan. Therefore, it was no surprise that many believed that in order to stop the Klan they had to prevent it from gathering. Klan celebrations not only provided Klansmen with the means to flaunt power, but they also helped the Klan advertise itself to potential members by displaying it as a family oriented and patriotic organization.

Plans for the Halloween celebration changed when Klansmen decided to reschedule the parade for Saturday, November 1. Mayor Kistler granted the Klan a permit to parade on the first of November in Niles despite the history of violent responses to Klan parades on behalf of anti-Klan groups. On October 28 Mayor Kistler and Sheriff John Thomas agreed to meet with a committee of fifteen citizens at City Hall to discuss potentially halting the Klan parade.² Niles citizens wanted to place a ban on the Klan parade for fear that it would only cause unnecessary violence. Citizens rightfully held such fears due to the history of tensions between Klan and anti-Klan factions in Niles.

An incident involving an attack on several men occurred merely three days before the scheduled committee meeting which provided a recent reminder of the precarious environment in Niles. On Friday, October 24, unknown individuals attacked several men. J. C. Montgomery, one of the men attacked, was not seriously injured but did suffer from

¹ “Stage is Set for Big Halloween Festival – Friday, October 31,” *The Citizen*, 23 October 1924, p. 1.

² “Mayor, Sheriff May Call off Niles Parade,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 28 October 1924, p. 1.

minor cuts and bruises. The other two men attacked, Ralph and Chester Wardeska, also did not suffer serious injury. The newspaper failed to include whether or not the individuals attacked were for or against the Klan. However, the attackers had struck one of these men in the back of the head with a brick which showcased the assailants' intention to cause serious injury.³ Incidents such as this attack provided substantiated evidence for withholding permission for the Klan to parade on Saturday.

Prior to the committee meeting Kistler stated that the parade would proceed without any interruption; however, Sheriff Thomas anticipated that the meeting would bring about a peaceful agreement between Klan and anti-Klan groups. Though Kistler claimed not to expect any trouble during the parade, he asked for assistance from police forces of neighboring cities to manage the traffic flow of Klansmen into Niles. The Klan expected the parade to be the largest ever in the state of Ohio. Kistler anticipated the arrival of thousands of vehicles in Niles and had the assurance that Warren and Youngstown would send policemen.⁴ In order to refrain from arousing concern, Kistler ensured citizens that the duty of the police was to make sure events ran smoothly.

Unknown to Kistler, Youngstown policemen had no jurisdiction in Trumbull County since their ability to wear revolvers or badges ceased upon leaving Mahoning County unless in pursuit of a criminal.⁵ Nonetheless, Kistler's request for assistance materialized. The additional troops were to reinforce the Niles police force which consisted of merely nine men. Kistler swore in these temporary troops as special officers and required that they wear their uniforms while patrolling the streets. Kistler intended

³ "Uniformed Men of Other Cities to be on Duty Saturday," *Niles Daily Times*, 27 October 1924, p. 1.

⁴ "Mayor, Sheriff May Call off Niles Parade," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 28 October 1924, p. 8.

⁵ "Mayor, Sheriff May Call off Niles Parade," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 28 October 1924, p. 8.

for these men alone to have control of Niles on Saturday.⁶ Some neighboring cities, such as Girard, could not send reinforcements to assist Niles due to the need for the police to maintain order in the city they served.⁷ Kistler, though never admitting it in public, must have suspected the possibility for disorder during the parade otherwise he would never have appealed to neighboring cities for assistance.

The Knights of the Flaming Circle, under the leadership of James and Joseph Jennings, responded to Kistler's permission to allow 25,000 masked Klansmen to gather in Niles for a parade and a subsequent fireworks show by scheduling a state conference of its own to be held the same day as the Klan parade. Members of the Flaming Circle also insisted on organizing their own parade to occur simultaneously with the Klan parade. The organization distributed posters advertising a meeting scheduled for 2:30 Saturday afternoon in Niles, the same time the Klan parade was to commence. The posters only served to reaffirm the possibility for aggression.⁸ Though Kistler granted the Klan permission to parade, he declined the Knights of the Flaming Circle a similar permit. In subsequent reports, Mayor Kistler denied that the Knights of the Flaming Circle brought any formal request to him to parade.⁹ Kistler's actions in refusing to provide a parade permit to the Knights of the Flaming Circle exhibited his connection and favoritism to the Klan, an association known by most Niles' citizens.

The committee meeting on October 28 did not result in a termination of the scheduled Klan parade. Officials present at the October 28 committee meeting included Niles Police Chief J. L. Rounds, Trumbull County sheriff John E. Thomas, county

⁶ "Uniformed Men of Other Cities to be on Duty Saturday," *Niles Daily Times*, 27 October 1924, p. 1.

⁷ "Girard Won't Help," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 28 October 1924, p. 12.

⁸ "Uniformed Men of Other Cities to be on Duty Saturday," *Niles Daily Times*, 27 October 1924, p. 1.

⁹ "Mayor, Sheriff May Call off Niles Parade," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 28 October 1924, p. 8.

prosecutor Harvey Burgess, and Mayor Kistler. Sheriff Thomas initiated the meeting by introducing P. J. Sheehan, supervisor of the Niles Brick Company. Sheehan represented the Manufacturer's Association of Niles and also served as the decided chairman of the committee. Sheehan's opening speech described his urgency that citizens attempt to reach an understanding in order to maintain the integrity of Niles. Unfortunately, the committee accomplished little. Mayor Kistler still refused to revoke the Klan's permit to parade. Since the parade remained scheduled, Chief Rounds promised his utmost effort in protecting the lives of Niles citizens should any riots occur.¹⁰

Upon orders from Clyde Osborn, Grand Dragon of the Ohio Klan, the Klansmen at the October 28 meeting agreed to march unmasked and solidified that agreement by signing a document which Kistler kept as evidence.¹¹ Other orders issued by Osborn included:

No Klansman shall appear in uniform in the streets of Niles excepting in the parade.
No Klansman shall wear any regalia excepting in the parade.
No Klansman shall direct traffic or discharge any police duties.
No Klansman shall bear sidearms.
No Klansman shall parade with arms folded.
Klansman shall parade with visors up.
No Klansman shall resent remarks from the side lines or take action against any demonstrations excepting in actual self-defense.¹²

Osborn also asserted he was unable to prevent the parade but promised to do anything necessary to avoid disorder. The Grand Dragon claimed that he lacked the ability to interfere and saw no reason to stop the parade. Osborn ordered Klansmen to refrain from demonstrations by recognizing the law and displaying respect for others. Osborn stated,

¹⁰ "Kistler Would," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 29 October 1924, p. 14.

¹¹ "Unmasked Klan Parade May be Held in Niles," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 28 October 1924, p. 1.

¹² "Osborn, Niles," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 29 October 1924, p. 14.

“We ask only for our rights as Americans.”¹³ As Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, it was not in the interests of Osborn to abandon an opportunity to advertise the presence of the Klan in the Mahoning Valley.

Representatives of the anti-Klan factions stated at the meeting that the Klan’s agreement to parade unmasked decreased the likelihood of trouble occurring on November 1. However, when Kistler asked leaders of Klan and anti-Klan forces to sign a truce, they refused. All hoped that the Klan’s promise to parade unmasked would avert disorder.¹⁴ However, individuals opposed to the Klan were less concerned about whether or not the Klan paraded unmasked. Parading unmasked did not alter the message that the Klan presented. The issue that anti-Klan groups had with the parade was that it advertised the principles for which the Klan stood.

Unfortunately, the orders promised by Osborn failed to bring an end to the conflict over the November 1 parade. In the early morning of October 29, after the committee meeting to discuss the parade, unknown individuals bombed Mayor Kistler’s home with dynamite. Headlines from newspapers throughout the Mahoning County reported the incident on the front page with bold statements such as: “Dynamite Hits Niles Mayor’s House.”¹⁵ The bombing followed threats to Mayor Kistler from anti-Klan factions who warned the mayor that they would bomb his house if he failed to cancel the Klan parade. The explosion damaged the front of Kistler’s home, shattering windows and damaging the front porch; however, the explosion caused no injuries to the mayor or his wife.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the incident represented the seriousness of the situation in Niles.

¹³ “Osborn, Niles,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 29 October 1924, p. 14.

¹⁴ “Unmasked Klan Parade May be Held in Niles,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 28 October 1924, p. 1.

¹⁵ “Dynamite Hits Niles Mayor’s House,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 29 October 1924, p. 1.

¹⁶ “Blast Follows Anti-Klan Threat,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 29 October 1924, noon edition, p. 1.

Investigations to discover the perpetrators ensued immediately. Kistler claimed he heard two vehicles leaving his neighborhood shortly before the explosion occurred. After careful inspection of the damage, police discovered fingerprints on the porch railing. Though no one knew exactly who the attackers were, Kistler and Rounds suspected the involvement of anti-Klan forces. After the incident reporters asked Kistler if he intended to put up a reward for the capture of those who caused damage to his home, but his only response was that if investigators established a reward, the city of Niles would have to pay it.¹⁷ Kistler did not have the money to put toward a reward fund, and since investigators could not collect enough evidence from the damaged section of Kistler's home to make an arrest, the only way to catch the perpetrators was by eye witness testimony.

The police did not take the threats issued by anti-Klan factions seriously despite prior scuffles between Klan and anti-Klan forces. Citizens expected violence to occur since the Knights of the Flaming Circle scheduled a conference the same time as the Klan gathering; however, the explosion was a surprise to Niles citizens who assumed responses to Kistler's refusal to revoke the parade permit would only occur the day of the parade. Posters distributed by the Knights of the Flaming Circle encouraged women and children to stay home the day of the parade, hinting at the likelihood of hostilities.¹⁸ The blast of the mayor's home combined with the issuance of posters from the Knights of the Flaming Circle solidified Niles citizens' concerns regarding the safety of the city.

Niles citizens blamed Colonel C. E. Gunder, kleagle of the Youngstown Klan, for instigating anti-Klan factions. A conflict occurred in early October involving the assault

¹⁷ "Niles Bombing," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 29 October 1924, p. 1, 14.

¹⁸ "Niles Bombing," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 29 October 1924, p. 14.

on a police lieutenant in Niles. Officers arrested several individuals from Klan and anti-Klan forces suspected of involvement in the attack. Both sides agreed to drop the charges against all individuals provided each side pledged not to parade or engage in any acts that could potentially induce hatred. Shortly after this agreement, the Klan held a celebration at Idora Park and Gunder was the main speaker. In his speech, Gunder accused the local Klan of compromising their scheduled program. According to the *Youngstown Vindicator* other blazing remarks made by Gunder also contributed to the fury of opposing factions, such as his desire to “head a parade” of the Klan in Niles. Many felt that had Gunder toned down his remarks, anti-Klan groups would not have gone through with the threat issued to Kistler.¹⁹ Gunder did not want Klansmen to back down to anti-Klan factions, yet his statements only aggravated the situation.

The decision of Mayor Kistler to call upon the Ohio National Guard for assistance on November 1 circulated first a rumor among local newspapers. Before long news writers found concrete information proving the rumor true. City and county officials planned a meeting for the afternoon on October 29 to determine whether or not to ask Governor Donahey to send troops. The officials present at the committee meeting also attended the meeting regarding the National Guard. Sheriff Thomas felt confident that his forces would be able to handle any trouble occurring Saturday without outside assistance. Nonetheless, those who attended the meeting decided to appeal to Governor Donahey for military aid on the chance that Niles police could not maintain order.²⁰ Following the decision, Kistler telegraphed Governor Donahey with the request to have one regiment of troops sent to Niles by eight o’clock in the morning on Saturday,

¹⁹ “More About Niles Bombing,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 29 October 1924, p. 1.

²⁰ “Kistler Would Ban Parade if Merchants Asked,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 29 October 1924, p. 1.

November 1. Donahey, after consulting with the Adjutant General Henderson, declined Kistler's request on the grounds that sending troops merely in expectation of local disaster lacked precedent in the state of Ohio. Donahey instead advised Kistler to have all city and county officials organized and prepared in order to prevent an emergency.²¹ However, after that statement Donahey issued this promise, "P. S. Should riots or outbreaks occur; I shall use every force at my command not only to quell the same but to maintain peace and order."²² Though Donahey could not send troops to Niles only in anticipation of disorder, Donahey assured Kistler that the National Guard would go to Niles at the first sign of trouble.

On October 30, Niles citizens launched one last effort to avoid violent conflict and cancel the Klan parade. City officials approved a large community meeting at the McKinley Memorial to take place in the afternoon despite efforts on the part of some citizens to prevent the meeting. The Directors of the Niles Chamber of Commerce rejected the appeals of these citizens to cancel the last minute meeting. Sheriff Thomas announced the planned meeting in the morning of October 30 and invited all citizens to attend no matter what their racial, political, or religious background. Citizens hoped the last minute meeting would create a plan for maintaining peace. One way citizens aspired to promote peace was by appealing to Protestant ministers and Catholic priests to cooperate in a plan for harmony. No one in Niles, including the ministers and priests themselves, had ever made an attempt to reconcile the differences between the two religious ideologies.²³ Though not in all instances, members of the Klan typically looked to Protestant ministers for leadership while members of the Knights of the Flaming Circle

²¹ "Ask Niles Mayor to Revoke Permit," *Youngstown Citizen*, 31 October 1924, p. 1.

²² "Ask Niles Mayor to Revoke Permit," *Youngstown Citizen*, 31 October 1924, p. 2.

²³ "Citizens to Try to Avert Rioting," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 30 October 1924, p. 1.

usually looked to Catholic priests for guidance. The religions that the organizations associated with became part of the conflict. Therefore, a truce among Protestant ministers and Catholic priests would ease tensions between Klan and anti-Klan factions.

The quickly improvised citizens' meeting was a response to another night of violent disturbances in Niles. Police arrested four men for an attack on M. P. Dallas. As a result of the attack, Dallas suffered head lacerations and needed emergency medical treatment. The brawl took place at "Dodger" Evans's store at five o'clock on October 29. The trouble began when individuals accused Dallas of communicating hidden information between Klan and anti-Klan forces and ended with the arrest of "Dodger" Evans, John Collins, Chris Eberhart, and ex-Lieutenant of Police, Joe Mears. The paper did not indicate whether the individuals involved were for or against the Klan. Police housed the men in jail the night of October 29 and scheduled a hearing for them with Mayor Kistler on October 30.²⁴ Incidents such as these exacerbated the concerns held by many Niles citizens regarding the parade.

The last minute meeting to appeal to Mayor Kistler for a cancellation of the Klan parade was a response to the tense atmosphere brewing in Niles. After the bombing of Mayor Kistler's home, Niles citizens felt certain that disaster on November 1 was inevitable. Groups of men stood on street corners and contemplated the possibilities and implications of open conflict in Niles. Police and government officials discouraged Niles citizens from traveling around the city at night. Citizens looked upon strangers to Niles with distrust, speculation, and fear. Business owners prepared for the day of the parade by boarding up the front of their buildings to protect the windows from shattering should

²⁴ "Citizens to Try to Avert Rioting," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 30 October 1924, p. 1.

warfare ensue on November 1. These actions indicated that few believed in the possibility for a cancellation of the parade. Yet, some remained hopeful that one final appeal to the mayor would resolve the conflict and spare the citizenry concern about their safety.²⁵

Nearly 500 citizens attended the mass meeting held at McKinley Memorial. President of the Chamber of Commerce, Fred Alexander, opened the meeting. Two committees each presented their resolutions to the situation in Niles. The first committee asked that Kistler revoke the Klan's permit to parade on Saturday. The other committee issued a resolution asking citizens to cooperate with Sheriff Thomas in order to maintain order during the Klan parade. Citizens at the meeting rejected the second resolution and accepted the decision to ask for a revocation of the Klan parade permit. Those who presented the winning resolution included ex-Senator John McDermott; general manager of the Niles Republic Iron & Steel Company, Samuel Brown; general foreman of the Niles Brick Company, Joseph Pallante; manager of the Mahoning Valley Steel Company, John Hosack; and John Sharkey from Empire Mill. Those at the mass meeting also nominated a committee of five to represent the citizens' decision to Mayor Kistler. This committee consisted of T. H. Hall, Edward Doran, D. S. Parry, John Casey, and Carmen DiChristopharo.²⁶ John McDermott read the final resolution:

Resolved: that it is the sense of the your committee that in view of the trouble recently had at a former Ku Klux Klan parade in Niles, and in view of the present alarming condition of the citizens of this city because of the great publicity already given this matter, and that after due consideration it is our honest opinion that no parade should take place in Niles on November 1. Be it further resolved that it is the further sense of your committee that Mayor H. C. Kistler be petitioned to revoke said permit.²⁷

²⁵ "Feeling High," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 29 October 1924, p. 14.

²⁶ "Ask Niles Mayor to Revoke Permit," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 31 October 1924, p. 1.

²⁷ "More About Niles Trouble," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 31 October 1924, p. 16.

Some attendees of the mass meeting spoke on behalf of the situation that they felt was serious and dangerous. John McDermott recalled previous instances in Niles and Warren where officials had to postpone Klan parades due to the rejection they triggered from citizens. McDermott also stated that the request to revoke the permit was not too much to ask from the mayor since it was his duty to correct his mistakes and protect the city. Addressing the statements made previously by Osborn that Klansmen would parade unmasked and unarmed, McDermott responded that such a statement served as a warning that Klansmen would be armed and masked. Other citizens appealed to Niles merchants to request Kistler's cancellation of the parade. This notion materialized from a previous assertion from Kistler that he would repeal the Klan's parade permit if asked to do so by Niles businessmen. Before the meeting adjourned, McDermott made one final statement warning citizens not to consider the mass meeting a victory until Kistler made his final decision. Despite McDermott's warning most at the meeting believed Kistler would rescind the permit.²⁸ That belief stemmed from the confidence citizens had in Kistler's ability to respond to the demands of those he served as mayor of Niles. However, Kistler did not respond to the petitions of the Niles citizens opposed to the parade; instead he catered to the requests of the Klan.

Instantly after the meeting adjourned, Kistler left for Warren to deliberate with Sheriff Thomas, County Prosecutor Harvey Burgess, and B. A. Hart, head of the Trumbull County Klan. Kistler issued this statement to the *Youngstown Vindicator* and citizens of Niles in the evening of October 31:

Up to present time I do not feel that any condition has arisen that should cause me to revoke the permit granted for a parade between

²⁸ "Ask Niles Mayor to Revoke Permit," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 31 October 1924, p. 2.

the hours of 2 and 4 p. m. Saturday, November 1. If the citizenship of this and surrounding communalities will be cool headed and tolerate no unpleasantness need arise. We are all Americans, whether of the Klan, the Flaming Circle or of that great group of our citizenship that holds allegiance to neither. Let us be law abiding, broad minded and willing to extend constitutional rights and prerogatives to every group of state, race, color, or creed.²⁹

The efforts of Niles citizens to stop the parade by threat of force, such as those offered by the Knights of the Flaming Circle, and by more peaceful means, such as appealing to Mayor Kistler, fueled harsh responses from Klansmen. Anxieties were high on both sides of the conflict. Once again *The Citizen* illogically viewed the situation in Niles as part of the Pope's grand scheme to gain a place of power in the United States.

According to *The Citizen*:

The cause of all trouble emanates from Rome – Rome does not want the Klan to march and her alien scum, whom we have allowed to find a home in our midst, is to do her dirty work, providing they can get away with it. Therefore, the rif-raff of Niles have made up their minds that they will stop the Ku Klux Klan from staging their parade...³⁰

Ironically, Klansmen claimed their right to peacefully assemble as American citizens and expected police to enforce the laws that protected the aforementioned right. The Klan asserted its dislike for trouble but refused to allow the anti-Klan factions to determine the fate of the Klan parade. At issue were two questions: one involving the meaning of American citizenship and the other involving the principles that defined the United States. Klansman argued that citizenship required more than native birth or naturalization. True American citizenship entailed honoring American history, participating in American government, and recognizing the Protestant basis of the

²⁹ "Kistler Declines to Forbid Parade," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 31 October 1924, p. 1.

³⁰ "Shall Rome Dictate?" *The Citizen*, 30 October 1924, p. 1.

nation.³¹ Klansmen consistently questioned immigrants' loyalty without recognizing the devotion many foreigners had for the United States. Foreigners viewed the United States as a country that accepted various ethnicities and religions and saw the Klan's anti-immigrant policies as unconstitutional. Such treasured beliefs resulted in fervent defense. Therefore, the possibility for conflict was not unlikely.

Kistler's decision not to cancel the parade motivated Sheriff Thomas to ask Governor Donahey once again for troop assistance. Thomas felt as though the situation in Niles was expanding out of the bounds of his control. Donahey once again refused to send troops merely in anticipation of disorder. On the contrary, Donahey reprimanded Thomas and Kistler, saying that both individuals had the ability and the necessary time to prepare for a possible emergency situation. According to Donahey, Thomas in particular was able, as Sheriff, to organize any number of men and police necessary to ensure order.³² Donahey held Kistler and Thomas accountable should mayhem characterize Niles during the Klan parade.

By October 31, Sheriff Thomas organized a unit of 200 deputies under his command to maintain peace during the Klan gathering. Thomas provided instructions and arms to his deputized force of specialized and regular officers. Thomas requested that the deputies gather at the courthouse in Warren at nine o'clock in the morning and be ready to leave directly for downtown Niles. Upon arrival in Niles, Thomas planned to have deputies stationed at every street intersection in Niles and other locations where previous incidents of disorder occurred and would likely occur again. Thomas requested that all deputies report to him at regular intervals throughout the day. Though Thomas appealed

³¹ "The Klan of Tomorrow," *The Citizen*, 16 October 1924, p. 5.

³² "More About Niles Trouble," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 31 October 1924, p. 16.

to Donahey for military assistance, he did not suspect the arrival of trouble during daylight hours and instead anticipated warfare between opposing factions to begin when the sun set, the evening of November 1.³³ As a result, many, including Sheriff Thomas, did not anticipate the upcoming events.

Disorder in Niles began in the evening hours, but not the night after the parade on November 1. Warfare between anti-Klan and Klan forces originated after Kistler's final decision regarding the parade and the sunset on October 31. Frank E. McDermott participated in attacks on Klansmen on the night before the November 1 riot. McDermott came from an Irish family, and his father, ex-senator John McDermott, was instrumental during meetings to resolve the conflict peacefully in Niles. Frank McDermott's job placed him in Erie the day before the riot; however, when he heard about the Klan parade, he hurried home to Niles. McDermott, along with a dozen others, suspected Klansmen of transporting ammunition to Rummell's Pool Room in order to stock up on weapons for the Klan parade. The group with McDermott discovered a car in front of Rummell's Pool Room, and McDermott ran up to the parked car. At that point, he leaped onto the running board while his companions fired shots at the vehicle. McDermott released the running board and rolled down a hill after being shot twice by Rex Dunn, one of the men suspected of collecting ammunition for the Klan.³⁴ Niles police arrested Rex and Willard Dunn for shooting McDermott Friday night. Both spent one night in the

³³ "Shoot to Kill, Order Given Citizen Guards," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 31 October 1924, p. 1.

³⁴ Frank E. McDermott, interview by Stephen Papalas, 8 December 1982, interview 217, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Archives and Special Collections, Maag Library, Youngstown, Oh., 4-8.

Trumbull County jail. After a hearing in the justice court, police released them on \$1,000 bond.³⁵ The skirmish on the eve before the riot foreshadowed the larger battle to come.

Members of the Knights of the Flaming Circle met at eight o'clock in the morning on November 1 to mobilize forces and establish stations at all entrance points of the city. They anticipated the arrival of nearly 5,000 members from areas such as Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Steubenville before noon. The organization planned to stop the parade by prohibiting Klansmen entrance into Niles by using any means necessary. Members of the Knights of the Flaming Circle forced Klansmen from their vehicles, searched them, removed any weapons, and forced them out of the city. The organization used violence against the Klansmen only when necessary -- if Klansmen were not willing to exit Niles.³⁶ By noon the Knights of the Flaming Circle established a vantage point at the intersection of Federal and Main Streets with weapons adorning the hands and shoulders of all those present.³⁷ Though armed with weapons, the Knights of the Flaming Circle did not want to resort to the use of violence. However, the organization became aggressive if it meant preventing Klansmen from entering Niles. The ultimate goal was to prevent the parade without bloodshed.

The Klan set up its own vantage point roughly one mile from the location of the Knights of the Flaming Circle on Niles-Warren Road. Klansmen armed themselves and hung white ribbons with the emblem of Klan duties around their necks. Besides carrying weapons and attacking anti-Klan factions when necessary, Klansmen distributed pamphlets calling native born Americans to "refuse to submit to the dictation of foreigners" throughout the downtown area until Chief Rounds requested an end to that

³⁵ "Four Wounded Men Taken to Warren," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 1 November 1924, p. 3.

³⁶ "Donahey Orders Regiment Out," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 1 November 1924, p. 8.

³⁷ "Reporter in Midst of Fray, Tells of Three Fusillades," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 1 November 1924, p. 4.

activity.³⁸ Stopping the distribution of Klan pamphlets was the only action Rounds took towards stopping the warring factions. At 1:15 in the afternoon, after several instances of shootings and violent assaults that left many wounded in various areas of the city, Sheriff Thomas stood at the intersection of Federal and Main Streets requesting both sides recognize a twenty minute truce. Both sides refused to observe the truce and one anti-Klan leader responded, “We are standing on our rights as American citizens to defend ourselves against a mob of armed yeggs imported here at the instance of the Ku Klux Klan to shoot down our residents. They shall not pass here.”³⁹ Klan and anti-Klan factions refused to observe a truce because doing so meant surrendering values and morals.

Arthur J. Lynch, writer for the *Cleveland Press*, described his experience as W. H. Kline escorted him through the Klan grounds where roughly three hundred Klansmen, some dressed in Klan regalia and some not, gathered. He watched as a uniformed Klansmen on horse rode back and forth through the crowd of Klansmen and issued duties to all present. The *Cleveland Press* correspondent described other sights at Klan headquarters.

A huge four-sided table is in the center of the field. Lunches are being served here by the Klan women. Several tents are used as dressing rooms for the Klansmen. The anti-Klan faction posted guards at all railroad and interurban stations and all those on board identified as Klansmen were dragged off and beaten. Others stopped every auto coming into town.⁴⁰

Shortly after the rejection of the truce, Governor Donahey sent one unit of the Ohio National Guard to Niles after receiving official information regarding the injury of

³⁸ “Donahey Orders Regiment Out,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 1 November 1924, p. 8.

³⁹ “Four Wounded Men Taken to Warren,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 1 November 1924, p. 3.

⁴⁰ “Donahey Refuses to Send State Troops to Niles,” *The Cleveland Press*, 1 November 1924, p. 2.

nearly twelve men. Before the arrival of the National Guard, anti-Klan factions gathered at the intersection of Main and Federal Street, the main highways leading to the Klan field, and prevented any vehicles from getting through. The Knights of the Flaming Circle cheered the coming of the National Guard because the efforts to prevent the parade from occurring were a success. Anti-Klan factions prevented the transportation of Klansmen to the Klan field until the arrival of military troops.⁴¹ Had the National Guard not arrived, the struggle between the Klan and the Knights of the Flaming Circle would not have ended, signifying the determination of both sides to fight for their American rights.

Prior to the National Guard's arrival in Niles, several Niles citizens, from anti-Klan and Klan forces, were injured during street fights. The *Youngstown Telegram* published a list of those injured during the Niles riot which included twelve individuals. Of the twelve injured nine received wounds as a result of gunfire. The other three victims' wounds were the result of beatings and stabbings. Casualties ranged from critical wounds to simple cuts and bruises. One woman in particular, Mrs. Ellen Scriven, did not participate in the riot but received her wound from a stray bullet while in her home. Furthermore, five of those injured were not Niles citizens.⁴² The fact that more than one fourth of those injured claimed residence outside of Niles illustrated the breadth of participation in the riot. Though the riot occurred in Niles, both sides invited individuals from surrounding areas. Therefore, the Niles riot affected people not only from Niles but also individuals from other areas in the Midwest and Northeast.

⁴¹ "Four Wounded Men Taken to Warren," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 1 November 1924, p. 3.

⁴² "Complete List of Injured in Niles Trouble," *The Youngstown Telegram*, 3 November 1924, p. 3.

During the evening of November 1, Sheriff Thomas conducted a tour of Niles to ensure that rioting had ceased. By that time the city was quiet; nearly all businesses and banks closed for the night. Klansmen and members of the Knights of the Flaming Circle from other cities rapidly exited Niles and warned others not to enter the city. Mayor Kistler's whereabouts remained unknown since Friday night after the mass citizens meeting, and his office was empty all day on Saturday. City administrators had no indication of the location of the mayor.⁴³ Kistler's failure to revoke the Klan parade had severe consequences. His absence during the riot strained his relationship with the Klan and portrayed him as a weak leader. He failed to act out his duty as mayor.

Niles police arrested approximately fifty individuals, mostly Klan police, before the establishment of martial law. Once the state militia gained control of the warring factions in Niles, officers arrested nearly forty more armed Klan policemen in full regalia and detained Klan policemen at headquarters. Niles police did not issue charges against all Klan police; however, several remained detained and charged with carrying concealed weapons. Police released Klansmen from headquarters after the state militia established order in Niles. Niles police sent the Klan policemen's weapons to Jacob Kinkler, a Klan Cyclops, while Chief Rounds stored hundreds of confiscated pistols, ammunition belts, and shotguns in his office.⁴⁴ Removing weapons from the hands of riot participants was a quick and simple way to restore order. Niles police likely did not want to press harsh charges in the hopes that Niles citizens learned their lesson from the day's events. Anti-Klan factions took every peaceful action possible to avoid confrontation prior to the

⁴³ "Reporter in Midst of Fray, Tells of Three Fusillades," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 2 November 1924, p. 4.

⁴⁴ "Reporter in Midst of Fray, Tells of Three Fusillades," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 2 November 1924, p. 4.

parade. As a result, many anti-Klan individuals blamed Kistler's refusal to revoke the Klan's parade permit for causing the uprising.

Trials for those involved in the riot occurred in February, March, and April of 1925. Rioting, assault, and concealing weapons composed the list of charges for most of the men on both sides of the conflict. There were three main trials, all of which ended with a guilty verdict. Many of the men plea bargained for reduced charges with success. The Klan police, whose weapons adorned Chief Round's office, pled not guilty and received customary fines. Of all the people charged in the trial only a few received penalties that involved more than paying fines. The exceptions were Rex Dunn and Dude Murphy who spent time in the Canfield workhouse.⁴⁵

Il Cittadino Italo-Americano reported the Niles riot without taking the side of the Knights of the Flaming Circle. The news writers impartially described the events leading up to and during the riot, only providing the same facts present in other local newspapers. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* did not congratulate the Knights of the Flaming Circle for preventing the occurrence of the parade.⁴⁶ That *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* opted not to include celebratory comments for the anti-Klan faction exhibited the distinction between the two groups seeking to defend their American rights. The Italian-Americans who chose to use political means to defeat the Klan likely did not advocate the actions of the Knights of the Flaming Circle on the day of the riot. Italian-Americans involved in American politics wanted to prove their worthiness as American citizens and a physical reaction to the Klan, such as that by the Knights of the Flaming Circle, only exacerbated the negative attitudes Klansmen held toward the immigrant community.

⁴⁵ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 146-150.

⁴⁶ "I Disordini di Niles, O.," *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 1 November 1924, p. 1. Translated by Ashley Zampogna.

Unlike *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, *The Citizen* reported the Niles incident with significant bias. After the riot, Klansmen alleged that they were victims in the incident. A statement by Grand Dragon Clyde Osborne displayed his disbelief that blood was shed in order to prevent Klansmen from rightfully assembling. Osborne expressed further distress that the actions of the Knights of the Flaming Circle overshadowed the attempts of the local police to gain control. Instead of identifying the reasons behind the Knights of the Flaming Circle's intense reaction to the parade, Klansmen continued to accuse the anti-Klan faction of advocating sovietism and anarchy. The Klan viewed the Knights of the Flaming Circle as a mob that professed anarchism and sought to ruin the Republic.⁴⁷ Therefore, the incident in Niles temporarily reinforced the image of Southern and Eastern European immigrants as savages in spite of the civilized attempts to prevent the parade before it occurred. Klansmen were blind to the efforts of Niles immigrants, particularly Italian-Americans, to become active participants in American society and did not understand how the Klan restricted immigrants' capabilities to adapt.

The Citizen reported on the "deplorable condition of Niles" and reinforced the image of the foreign immigrant as revolutionary, violent, un-American, and brutal, through an image that graced the front page of paper. The article also stated concerns about the state of Niles by questioning the loyalty of local newspapers and law enforcement. The Klan believed that the Catholic Church financed the *Youngstown Telegram* and the *Youngstown Vindicator* for neither paper outwardly criticized the

⁴⁷ "Clyde Osborne Hits Circlers," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 2 November 1924, p. 1.

Knights of the Flaming Circle.⁴⁸ Although *The Citizen* placed emphasis on the role of religion, the editors blamed the disorder in Niles on anti-American elements.

It is not the intention of *The Citizen* to cause trouble. We believe in peace. We believe every person has a right to his or her own beliefs, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Jew, but when such dastardly un-American exhibits of devilry take place as did at Niles Saturday, we believe that the Protestants who were not there and who have not been informed, should know the facts.⁴⁹

The Citizen believed that the Knights of the Flaming Circle deserved blame because, according to the Klan, the Flaming Circle was an anti-American association. Klansmen never realized that members of the Flaming Circle fought for rights they believed they held as American citizens.



“Deplorable Condition of Niles,” *The Citizen*, 6 November 1924, p. 1.

Italian-Americans in Niles considered themselves part of United States and made that attitude present through their actions. Through *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, many Italian immigrants learned the basis of democracy and the importance of achieving naturalization in order to vote. These Italians held faith in the ability for individuals to

⁴⁸ “Deplorable Condition of Niles,” *The Citizen*, 6 November 1924, p. 1.

⁴⁹ “KKK Editorial,” *The Citizen*, 6 November 1924, p. 4.

influence government, possibly more faith than many native-born Americans. Some Italian laborers studied English after work, and *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* reminded Italians of the limitations illiteracy presented. Yet, despite these actions, the Klan continued to portray Italians as uneducated, illiterate pagan worshippers, without recognizing the deliberate efforts on the part of many Italians to become active Niles citizens. As a result of the Klan's anti-immigrant principles, the Knights of the Flaming Circle made a decision to use any force necessary to prevent the Klan from achieving control in Niles.

Conclusion

The riot drew in nationwide attention and several Niles citizens credited the Knights of the Flaming Circle for halting the Klan. Joseph Jennings Jr., whose father was a main participant in the riot on the side of the Knights of the Flaming Circle, delivered this statement during an oral interview that summed up the feelings of many Italian and Irish immigrants after the November 1 riot:

There were people that came from all over the country that wanted to see Niles, Ohio, which they later called Niles, America. That was one of the big highlights for the people in the area of Niles, stopping the Ku Klux Klan from coming into our area. It was the east end where most of the Italian people lived that stopped the Ku Klux Klan.¹

Mayor Kistler's decision to grant the Klan permission to parade on November 1, 1924 was the breaking point for Italian and Irish-Americans. Never before in Niles had Italian and Irish immigrants forgotten their differences and worked together toward one goal. Ordinarily, differences in Roman Catholic worship and battles for employment between Irish and Italian immigrants spurred conflict among the two ethnic groups. These conflicts existed in Niles not only between Irish and Italians but among every ethnic community. Each ethnic group had their own neighborhood composed only of individuals of the same ethnicity. According to Criscione, individuals had to fight their way through the neighborhoods. For example, Criscione, an Italian-American, had to wrestle his way through the German and Irish neighborhoods nearly every day.² The

¹ Joseph Jennings Jr., interview by Stephen Papalas, 20 August 1982, interview 308, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Archives and Special Collections, Maag Library, Youngstown, Oh., 3-4.

² Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, 8 May 1984, interview 311, transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Archives and Special Collections, Maag Library, Youngstown, Oh., 2-3.

division of ethnic groups was strong despite the fact that all groups faced similar difficulties in the United States.

By combining their strength, Irish and Italian immigrants in the East End organized enough force to physically prevent the Klan from obtaining control of Niles. Thus, the presence of the Klan ironically served as a unifying factor for Italian and Irish-Americans who both believed that the Klan damaged American society by establishing divisions between foreign and native-born. *The Citizen* issued insults directed at “immigrants,” not specifically Italians, Irish, Russians, or Greeks. Furthermore, the 1920s Klan’s emphasis on anti-immigration, law enforcement, and Protestantism directly influenced southern and eastern Europeans. Therefore, by generalizing ethnic groups under a common definition, the Klan provided a basis for ethnic unification.

Klan membership increased in Niles and other cities in the United States as a result of its appeal to native-born Americans as a fraternal, moral, and patriotic organization. Klan parades and afternoon picnics lured potential members to join the organization. As a result, membership grew rapidly between 1921 and 1924 intensifying the conflicts between Klansmen, Catholics, Jews, and immigrants. Tactics utilized by the Klan to exert power over these groups included political involvement, cross burnings, law enforcement, and verbal criticisms. Thus, the Klan became a target to combat for immigrants. The development of the Knights of the Flaming Circle displayed the amalgamation of Irish and Italians. These two ethnic groups joined for one purpose: to push the Klan out of the Mahoning Valley.

The Knights of the Flaming Circle gained public interest after its foundation in 1923 due to the attention grabbing tactics they employed. Local newspapers frequently

published information regarding the organization's latest activities. However, the public knew little to nothing about the efforts of a portion of the Italian-American community to utilize less public methods to combat the Klan. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* educated Italians on the American political system and encouraged them to participate in Niles society as active American citizens. Since the newspaper catered to the Italian-American community, the writers composed the articles in the Italian language, thus restricting the population able to read the paper.

The editors of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* recognized the Klan's ability to use the local political system to their advantage. Some Italian-Americans viewed the success of the Klan in politics and believed they could combat the organization by utilizing similar methods. Thus articles on literacy, voting, and political candidates were meant to mold Italian immigrants into American citizens. The Italian-American contributors to *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* even established the Italian American Political Association of Mahoning County in 1924, which organized Italian voters. Though *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* included numerous articles on American politics prior to the rise of the Klan, these editorials increased in frequency and passion as the Klan gained power in the Mahoning Valley. Thus, it is possible that the presence of the Klan accelerated the adaptation process for some Italian immigrants. These immigrants wanted to display their American citizenship to prove to Klansmen their worthiness to society.

United States census data exhibited remarkably high rates of home ownership for Italian immigrants in Niles when compared to home ownership rates for Italian immigrants in New York City. Census statistics regarding English speaking ability, naturalization, and literacy among Italian-Americans in Niles were equal to or lower than

similar statistics for Italian immigrants in Ohio and the United States. However, lower percentages in English speaking ability, naturalization, and literacy did not alter the fact that Italian immigrants were still active participants in Niles society. For example, in some places of employment, such as the Niles Fire Brick Company, the Italian laborers came from the same region in Italy. Therefore, there was a significant portion of the work force that communicated in Italian. Foremen knew how to speak English and needed that skill to speak to company owners whereas unskilled labor did not require English speaking ability. Some Italian laborers in Niles recognized the advantage of learning English and spent time after work learning English independently. Italians were also gradually learning about the American political process through *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*. Prior to the realization of the advantages voting presented, Italian immigrants had little motivation to achieve naturalization. However, the Italian American Political Association of Mahoning County provided Italian immigrants with the incentive to apply for naturalization papers.

Failure to apply for naturalization papers did not equate with a lack of patriotism for the United States. Italian-Americans belonging to Italian societies retained Italian values and celebrated the Italian village or region of their origin. In addition, members of Italian societies held celebrations in honor of the Italian nation. However, these societies also displayed American patriotism by presenting American flags alongside the banner of the Italian society during flag dedication ceremonies. Most important, some Italian-Americans, such as Ciro Saulino, a resident of Youngstown, spoke to others in Italian about appreciating American privileges and abiding the law. Instances such as this also indicate why the percentage for English speaking ability for Italians in Niles was lower

than the similar percentage for Italians in Ohio. There were several Italian-Americans in Youngstown and Niles that spoke to crowds of Italian immigrants in Italian.

Soon Italians realized that simply proving their American loyalty while participating in Niles society and politics were solutions without immediate results. The Italian American Political Association of Mahoning County motivated more Italians to vote, but the Klan continued to gain strength in the Mahoning Valley through the summer and into the fall of 1924. Furthermore, the Klan's negative criticisms of immigrants, Catholics, and Jews seemed to intensify during that time with frequent references in *The Citizen* calling these individuals anti-American ruffians, and outlaws. A conflict in identity occurred between Italian-Americans and Klansmen. While Klansmen identified immigrants as un-American and disloyal to the United States, as a result of focusing on the East Side Italians who engaged in gambling and bootlegging, many Italians considered themselves American citizens and treasured the opportunities America presented in terms of land ownership, employment, political activity, and education. Thus, the battle on November 1 was not a symbol of Italian tendencies for anarchy or sovietism but rather a final defense of American values.

Although *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* did not advocate the riot, it also did not condemn it. The newspaper contributors' opinions of the Knights of the Flaming Circle's physical defense against the Klan were covert. One could speculate that some of the Italian-Americans who made every peaceful and legal effort to prevent the Klan from parading finally broke down and joined in the physical fight. If this was the case for some Italian-Americans, it does not alter what they fought against the Klan for. Italians came to the United States for the freedom to work and live, even those who worked and lived

illegally. Many arrived before the re-emergence of the Klan in the United States and recognized the Klan as an organization that did not celebrate life and liberty for all.

Previous studies on the 1920s Klan discussed the ideology and tactics of the organization. However, limited information existed on the response of immigrants, Catholics, and Jews to the presence of the Klan. This study sought to analyze the response of Italian-Americans to the existence of the Klan from the perspective of the Italian-Americans themselves. Concurrent with Italian immigrant studies by Thomas Kessner, who discovered that Italians consciously altered their behavior to fit into American society, this study also determined that many Italians in Niles made deliberate efforts to become American citizens. However, in the case of Niles, the existence of the Klan made Italian-American efforts for American citizenship more urgent.

After the Niles riot tensions increased between Mayor Kistler and the Klan. The organization that once endorsed the Niles mayor no longer wanted his support. In the summer of 1925, Kistler refused the Klan a permit to parade in Niles on July 3 as a result of what happened during the riot on November 1. In defense of his decision to refuse the parade permit Kistler stated, "I do not believe that this parade will be in the interest of peace and harmony of our community, but that the tranquility of our citizenship will be much disturbed, bitter rancor, jealousies, religious prejudices and intolerance will be aroused."³

Italian-Americans in the Mahoning Valley continued their quest for political involvement and eventually witnessed the election of Carmen DiChristofaro, the first Italian and Catholic mayor of Niles. Now Niles boasts a strong Italian-American

³ "Two Mayors Place Bans on Parades of Ku Klux Klan," *Youngstown Vindicator*, 16 June 1925.

community that remembers the events of November 1, 1924. Many Italian-Americans are proud that the Knights of the Flaming Circle physically stopped the Klan from parading that day. Despite the tensions that characterized Niles during the existence of the Ku Klux Klan, Italian-Americans who lived through the experience look back on that time with pride. The Niles Italians of the 1920s were pleased with their success, both at achieving a place in American society and at preventing a harmful organization from restricting their rights as American citizens.

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