

Read the article and answer the questions that follow.

1

The United States has faced deep racial problems throughout its history. One of the most well-known racist groups in the nation has been the Ku Klux Klan, otherwise simply known as the KKK. The KKK believes white people are superior to other races, and that they should be in a dominant position in society. These types of ideas have existed throughout our history, but the KKK has gone through three waves of popularity since the 1800s.

The First KKK: 1860s

The Ku Klux Klan first sprang up in Pulaski, Tennessee sometime near the beginning of 1866. The Civil War had just ended, and six soldiers from the Confederacy (1) formed the group in reaction to the end of slavery and beginnings of Reconstruction. (2) It was designed to be a brotherhood of white men who shared racist ideologies. (3) For instance, they did not believe Black people should be allowed to participate in society. The KKK was not the only white supremacist group that appeared during Reconstruction, but it was one of the most influential and long-lasting.

Members of the Klan wore masks and robes; the costumes served to scare their victims and to protect their identities. They acted as a terrorist group, killing freed slaves and any Republican leaders who were trying to create laws to protect African Americans.

One of their biggest goals was to keep African Americans and Republicans from voting, because they wanted to maintain white Democrat rule in the southern states. (4) To do this, they violently intimidated voters on their way to the polls during election seasons. For example, in Louisiana over 2,000 people were killed or injured in the few weeks before the 1868 presidential election.

5

Northern Republicans, as well as some southern Democrats, began to oppose the Klan and campaigned against their cruel treatment of African Americans. Soon Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1871, which specifically protected people against the KKK. The Klan mostly disappeared by the mid-1870s, although a few smaller white supremacist groups still committed violence against African Americans in the South.

The Second KKK: 1915-1920s

The second wave of the Ku Klux Klan started in 1915, in Atlanta, Georgia. That year, the film *The Birth of a Nation*, directed by D.W. Griffiths, was released. It glorified the actions and legacy of the original Klan from the 1860s, and it inspired William Joseph Simmons to start a new Klan movement on Stone Mountain in Georgia. It stayed local for a while, but by the early 1920s it spread across the Midwest and reached a membership of 1.5 million people. This phase of the Klan was much more organized and structured than the first.

The Second Klan kept the overall vision of white American supremacy, but it also added a religious angle. Two-thirds of Klan members were white Protestant ministers. They wanted to maintain Protestant Christian morals, so they were against behaviors like divorce and drunkenness. But they also hated the many Catholic and Jewish immigrants who were coming to America during this time. They saw themselves and white Protestants as morally superior; however, all mainstream Protestant groups condemned (5) their extreme views. In the South, the KKK still targeted Black people.

The Second Klan still wore gowns, this time white robes with masks and tall, cone-shaped hats — clothing inspired by the depiction of the Klan in Griffiths' film. Another idea that the Klan had taken from the film was the practice of cross burning. They burned large wooden crosses in public and private meetings to emphasize their supposed commitment to Protestant morality.

This time, although there was still some violence (especially in the South), the Klan focused more on political actions. They pushed for legal prohibition (6) of alcohol and opposed any non-Protestant immigration from foreign countries. Many Klan members were elected to local, state, and national political offices, where they enforced their white supremacist, nativist (7) viewpoints.

10

Very shortly after its peak, the Second Klan began to dissolve for several reasons. In-fighting (8) and the criminal behaviors of some Klan leaders also affected membership. Lists of Klan members in some communities were leaked, which led many other people to leave the group out of embarrassment and fear that their names would be smeared. (9) States also began to pass laws against wearing the signature costumes,

which also took away anonymity. Finally, when the Great Depression hit in the late 1920s, many members did not have the time or money to continue to participate.

The Third KKK: 1860s- Present

Although the formal structure of the Ku Klux Klan fell apart, small white supremacist groups started popping up again in the 1960s. They used the KKK name and wore the same white costumes. These groups became very violent in the South during the Civil Rights Movement.

When the Civil Rights Movement swept across the nation in the 1950s and 1960s, white members of the Klan opposed the expansion of rights for African Americans. Like the first KKK, they used violence to intimidate and oppress African Americans. Bombings, especially of Black churches and activists' homes, were extremely common. They also tried to make deals with southern lawmakers to keep Civil Rights laws from being passed. Fortunately, their efforts were not successful, and the U.S. has passed many laws to protect civil rights for minorities.

There are still some independent Ku Klux Klan groups scattered around the country today, mostly in the South and the Midwest. Their membership continues to decline, but membership in hate groups in general continues to increase in the United States. Some believe that the KKK is less popular because they do not effectively use the internet to recruit new members. Today the KKK also fights against immigration and same-sex marriage.

"America's Most Infamous Hate Group: The KKK" by Jessica McBirney. Copyright © 2017 by CommonLit, Inc

- (1) the group of southern states that attempted to exit the United States to form their own nation*
- (2) "Reconstruction" was the period after the Civil War ended, when the federal government required southern states to end slavery, rewrite their state constitutions, and provide support for freed slaves.*
- (3) Ideology (noun): the set of ideas and beliefs of a group or political party*
- (4) While the names for the United States' two-party system have remained the same, the views associated with the Democratic and Republican parties have changed over time. During this time, most newly freed Black Americans identified with the Republican party because Abraham Lincoln was a Republican.*
- (5) Condemn (verb): to express complete disapproval of, typically in public*
- (6) the action of forbidding something, especially by law*
- (7) a policy of favoring native inhabitants as opposed to immigrants*
- (8) hidden conflict or competitiveness within an organization*
- (9) Smear (verb): to damage the reputation of someone*

1. PART A: Which of the following identifies the main idea of the text?

- A. The KKK was an influential political organization in the past, but no longer exists due to a lack of public support.
- B. While it is believed that the KKK has experienced a recent increase in membership, it is impossible to know due to the secrecy surrounding the group.
- C. The beliefs held by the KKK have become less offensive over time and no longer resemble the group's original racist ideologies.
- D. While its presence and power have varied overtime, the KKK has remained consistent in its promotion of exclusionary and prejudiced beliefs.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?

- A. "Soon Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1871, which specifically protected people against the KKK." (Paragraph 5)
- B. "This time, although there was still some violence (especially in the south), the Klan focused more on political actions. They pushed for legal prohibition of alcohol and opposed any non-Protestant immigration from foreign countries." (Paragraph 9)
- C. "Lists of Klan members in some communities were leaked, which led many other people to leave the group out of embarrassment and fear that their names would be smeared." (Paragraph 10)
- D. "Fortunately, their efforts were not successful, and the U.S. has passed many laws to protect civil rights for minorities." (Paragraph 12)

3. PART A: How does the author develop the idea that the KKK has been unsuccessful in its goals?
- A. The author shows how the KKK has not been popular in a wide variety of areas, which has limited its influence.
 - B. The author explains how the KKK has been opposed by both political parties since its initial establishment.
 - C. The author provides examples of laws that have been put in place by the government to protect minorities.
 - D. The author describes how the group was unable to agree on goals to promote and methods to pursue their goals.
4. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "Soon Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1871, which specifically protected people against the KKK." (Paragraph 5)
 - B. "They wanted to maintain Protestant Christian morals, so they were against behaviors like divorce and drunkenness." (Paragraph 7)
 - C. "States also began to pass laws against wearing the signature costumes, which also took away anonymity." (Paragraph 10)
 - D. "Bombings, especially of Black churches and activists' homes, were extremely common. They also tried to make deals with southern lawmakers to keep Civil Rights laws from being passed." (Paragraph 12)
5. Why do members of the KKK wear those silly costumes?
6. How did the first KKK hope to maintain white Democratic rule in the southern states?
7. What was the inspiration for the Second KKK?
8. How was the Second KKK different from the First KKK?
9. What inspired the start of the Third KKK?
10. What has happened to the membership of the KKK?