



They Called Themselves the K.K.K.: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group

By Susan Campbell Bartoletti

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Boys, let us get up a club. With those words, six restless young men raided the linens at a friend's mansion, pulled pillowcases over their heads, hopped on horses, and cavorted through the streets of Pulaski, Tennessee in 1866. The six friends named their club the Ku Klux Klan, and, all too quickly, their club grew into the self-proclaimed Invisible Empire with secret dens spread across the South. This is the story of how a secret terrorist group took root in America's democracy. Filled with chilling and vivid personal accounts unearthed from oral histories, congressional documents, and diaries, this account from Newbery Honor-winning author Susan Campbell Bartoletti is a book to read and remember. A YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults Finalist.

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They Called Themselves the K.K.K.: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group By Susan Campbell Bartoletti **Bibliography**

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 7-10—This richly documented, historically contextualized account traces the origin and evolution of the Ku Klux Klan from a small mischievous social club into a powerful, destructive organization. With compelling clarity, anecdotal detail, and insight, Bartoletti presents the complex era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877, that gave rise to the KKK. After the Civil War, the defeated South was a simmering cauldron of political, economic, and social instability. As the federal government struggled to provide law and order and to protect the rights of freed slaves, secret groups of Southern whites banded together to vent their anger over lost property, prosperity, and power. From six men in a law office in Pulaski, TN, KKK dens spread across the South targeting freed blacks and their supporters. Although the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 was meant to end violence, KKK activity persisted through the 20th century, diminishing in the last 30 years as civil rights became a reality for all Americans. Bartoletti includes excerpts from slave narratives, archival illustrations, and historical quotes to convey the human drama of KKK terrorism. An annotated bibliography and source notes illuminate the variety and significance of reference works. Additional secondary titles include Chester L. Quarles's scholarly *The Ku Klux Klan and Related American Racialist and Antisemitic Organizations* (McFarland, 2008). Bartoletti effectively targets teens with her engaging and informative account that presents a well-structured inside look at the KKK, societal forces that spawn hate/terrorist groups, and the research process. *Gerry Larson, Durham School of the Arts, NC*

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From Booklist

Starred Review Bartoletti follows multi-award-winning titles such as *Hitler Youth* (2005) with another standout contribution to youth history shelves. Here, she examines how the Ku Klux Klan formed and grew out of the ashes of the Civil War. Bartoletti, who taught eighth-graders for 18 years, writes in admirably clear, accessible language about one of the most complex periods in U.S. history, and she deftly places the powerfully unsettling events into cultural and political context without oversimplifying. It's the numerous first-person quotes, though, that give the book its beating heart, and her searing, expertly selected stories of people on all sides of the violent conflicts will give readers a larger understanding of the conditions that incubated the Klan's terrorism; how profoundly the freed people and their sympathizers suffered; and how the legacy of that fear, racism, and brutality runs through our own time. In an author's note, Bartoletti describes visiting a contemporary Klan rally as part of her research, and that bold, immersive approach to her subject is evident in every chapter of this thoroughly researched volume. Like the individual stories, the powerful archival images on every page will leave an indelible impression on young readers, who will want to move on to the extensive annotated resources. The adjacent Story behind the Story feature fills in more details about this lucid, important title, which should be required reading for young people as well as the adults in their lives. Grades 7-12. --Gillian Engberg

Review

* "Balancing the stories of the Klan and the former slaves' determination to remake their lives, Bartoletti makes extensive use of congressional testimony, interviews, journals, diaries and slave narratives to allow the players to speak in their own voices as much as possible...An exemplar of history writing and a must for libraries and classrooms."—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

* "Bartoletti follows multi-award-winning titles such as *Hitler Youth* (2005) with another standout contribution to youth history shelves...It's the numerous first-person quotes, though, that give the book its beating heart, and her searing, expertly selected stories of people on all sides of the violent conflicts will give readers a larger understanding of the conditions that incubated the Klan's terrorism; how profoundly the freed people and their sympathizers suffered; and how the legacy of that fear, racism, and brutality runs through our own time."—*Booklist*, starred review

* "Copious photos, engravings, and illustrations provide a hard-hitting graphic component to this illuminating book. And while Bartoletti notes that contemporary 'hate groups wield none of the power or prestige that the Ku Klux Klan held in earlier years,' her account of attending a Klan meeting while researching the book is chilling to the core." —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

* "As in *Hitler Youth*, Bartoletti tackles a tough, grim subject with firmness and sensitivity...Period illustrations throughout make seeing believing, and the appended civil rights timeline, bibliography, and source notes are an education in themselves. Exemplary in scholarship, interpretation, and presentation."—*The Horn Book*, starred review

* "Bartoletti effectively targets teens with her engaging and informative account that presents a well-structured inside look at the KKK, societal forces that spawn hate/terrorist groups, and the research process."—*School Library Journal*, starred review

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