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Kari D. Millet

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Senior Thesis
by Kari d. Millet
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Thrice hath the lone owl hooted,
And thrice the panther cried,
And swifter through the darkness
The Pale Brigade shall ride.
No trumpet sounds its coming,
And no drumbeat stirs the air,
But noiseless in their vengeance,
They wreak it everywhere. [1]

The most common image of the Ku Klux Klan is that of an out-of-date, secret organization of robed white southern men on horseback who burn crosses and attack the homes of blacks in midnight raids. While this view of the Klan is appropriate for certain aspects of the organization at times, it does little to explain who the klansmen are and how their organization has survived for over one hundred years. In reality, the traits of both the klansmen and the Klan have changed dramatically over time.

The history of the Ku Klux Klan is one with varying degrees of strength, activity and visibility. The only factor that has remained constant for the Klan throughout its history is that it is an organization centered on hatred. As a hate movement the Klan has adapted and evolved in order to establish a place for itself in American society, whether accepted or not. The position of the Klan in American history can be seen in four peaks of the organization's

activity, namely in the 1870's, the 1920's, the 1960's and the 1980's. In each of these four time periods the Klan was highly visible, and had a very large following.

The vast increases in Klan activity and membership during the 1870's, the 1920's, the 1960's and the 1980's were caused by a combination of social, economic and political forces. When white Americans saw social tensions added to economic hardships and political unrest, they often looked to the Klan as the instrument for protecting their rights. Whether real or imagined, the danger of these social, economic and political forces caused many whites to rally to the Klan.

The Ku Klux Klan in the 1870's, which began as a club for Confederate veterans, quickly became a secret organization intent upon restricting freedmen and battling northern Republican's plans for reconstructing the post-Civil War South. Called the Reconstruction Klan, the organization appealed to southern whites who were distraught with their defeat in the Civil War, and who were competing with newly-freed blacks for wages and northern politicians for control of the South. Although not entirely based in fact, rumors circulating about a northern Republican and southern black conspiracy convinced many whites of the need for Klan action. Revered as the savior of the South, the Ku Klux Klan saw its

first peak of membership, activity and visibility.

In the 1920's white Americans faced an entirely different set of perils. The post-World War I years saw an increase in the concept of "100% American". White Protestants in the United States urged each other to uphold Christian values, practice prohibition and unite under the true spirit of Americanism. Racial tensions, instigated by blacks who had served alongside whites in the first World War and expected equal treatment when they returned home, resulted in race riots in several big cities, including Chicago and New York. The Bolshevik Revolution, which overthrew the Russian monarchy and established communism in that country, sparked "the Red Scare" in America, making many whites leery of foreigners and non-Protestants. The Ku Klux Klan, romanticized by the 1915 release of the movie **The Birth of a Nation**, emerged as the defender of Americanism. Many white Protestant Americans joined the organization feeling that the champion of the South was the only hope for America.

The Ku Klux Klan of the 1960's, commonly referred to as the Anti-Civil Rights Klan, began its resurgence after the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court to desegregate public schools. The political nature of the Civil Rights movement, which was fully supported by both President John Kennedy and President Lyndon Johnson, created a stir with white

Americans. Feeling that the federal government was again conspiring with blacks, many whites looked at the Civil Rights movement as a second Reconstruction. Like the Reconstruction Klan, the Anti-Civil Rights Klan aimed at restricting blacks and battling the politicians that sympathized with the black cause. As the Civil Rights movement spread, and became more successful, more and more white Americans looked to the Klan to act as the protector of their rights, resulting in the third peak of Klan activity.

The revival of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1980's was initiated by a number of issues. Racial tensions, sparked by busing and affirmative action, added to social tensions felt because of the loss in Vietnam. The energy crisis and the rising state of inflation made many Americans uncomfortable economically. The Klan at this time was intertwining itself with other factions of the hate movement, namely neo-nazis. The Klan-Nazi coalition saw the federal government as a threat to America, because of a supposed Jewish conspiracy. Playing on anti-semitism and emphasizing racial, social and economic pressures, the Ku Klux Klan entered its fourth peak of membership and visibility.

In all four instances of increased Klan activity, the Klan itself played a large part in its demise. Inevitably, Reconstruction, the Red Scare, the Civil Rights movement and

the post-Vietnam anxieties died down. The end of social, economic and political strains decreased the need for the Klan, but the loss of public support ultimately resulted in the downfall of each Klan peak. The violent nature of the Klan allowed few white Americans to remain loyal to the organization, especially after their perceived threats had subsided.

Chapter 1

Klan Origins and Activities During Reconstruction

The Ku Klux Klan is an organization that began small but spread rapidly. Created by six young Confederate veterans, the original Klan was a social club intent upon bringing amusement to a small area of the war-torn South. Disheartened by defeat in the Civil War, southerners faced the economic and political hardships of reconstruction, as well as the social tensions created by emancipation. In the midst of this post-war turmoil arose an organization that anxious southern whites could use in their attempts to regain control of the South.

Late in 1865 six young Confederate veterans returned to their homes in Pulaski, Tennessee only to learn that hard times had hit in the aftermath of the Civil War. Pulaski, located in Giles County near the Alabama border, was home to the crossroads of two highways which led from Nashville to Birmingham and Chattanooga to Memphis. The area had a population that was almost half black. [2] In Pulaski, as in most southern towns, racial tension was only one of the problems at the end of 1865, however. Confederate soldiers returned to find their hometowns much changed. Many homes and businesses had been burned by the Union armies. Fields, once filled with cotton and crops, were barren and bare.

Emancipated blacks, often just as desperate as the veterans, were in a position to compete with the whites for jobs. Economic hardships were only worsened by political attempts to rebuild the war-torn South. Finding themselves in the middle of this post-war hell, James Crowe, Richard Reed, Calvin Jones, John Lester, Frank McCord and John Kennedy decided that their hometown of Pulaski needed some light-hearted amusement. [3]

The six men organized a club with the intent of playing pranks on their neighbors. They named their club the Ku Klux Klan. The term "Ku Klux" was taken from the Greek word "kuklos" which means circle. [4] The word "Klan" was added to show pride in their Scottish ancestry, and to add to the alliteration. [5] The men patterned the club's rituals after that of the college fraternity Kuklos Adelphean, or the "Old Kappa Alpha," which had disappeared by the end of the Civil War, but with which most educated Southerners in 1865 were familiar. [6] The costuming of the club was considered by the founders to be amusing; long, loose-fitting, white robes with occult symbols and tall, white headpieces shaped like dunce hats. [7] The men dressed themselves, donned their horses in white sheets and rode to neighbors' homes to play late-night pranks. These pranks often included the freeing

of livestock and the chasing of chickens.

As news of the late-night visits spread the club gained popularity. Deciding to increase membership, the founding members established an oath of secrecy for new inductees. The mysticism of the disguised riders and their secret oaths made the club even more popular. Soon young men from neighboring counties, both in Tennessee and Alabama, asked for permission to organize clubs of their own. These new clubs usually differed from the original in details of organization and ritual, but generally shared the same basic character. The Pulaski club exercised nominal leadership, as the founders of the organization, but it had no real control over others that were established in nearby areas. [8] The non-violent nature of the organization required no such control at first, but gradual changes occurred that the founding members had not anticipated. The playing of practical jokes on neighbors spread to include outsiders, the most obvious of which were the newly emancipated blacks in the area. By the end of 1866 visits by the Klan to blacks were shifting from simple pranks to more oppressive forms of attacks, including the confiscation of firearms, the breaking up of social and religious gatherings and even the beating of blacks who were dragged from their beds at night. [9] The shift from amusement to violence was a direct result of the

economic, social and political pressures felt by Southerners at the time.

By 1866 Southerners knew that Reconstruction would not be as lenient as they had expected. A Republican-controlled Congress passed the Civil Rights Acts in April of 1866, which guaranteed various legal rights to former slaves. [10] In June of 1866 Congress proposed the 14th Amendment which would grant citizenship to blacks. [11] Since none of the seceded states had yet been readmitted to the Union, Congress added the stipulation that each Southern state had to ratify the 14th Amendment before it would be considered for readmittance. The only state to do so at the time was Tennessee. [12] The stubbornness of the Southern states resulted in the passing of the Reconstruction Acts early in 1867. [13] These acts abolished the state governments and organized the whole of the South into five military districts, each commanded by a Federal General of the Civil War. The acts also outlined the process by which each state could be readmitted to the Union, requiring that each state register as voters all adult black males and adopt new state constitutions which guaranteed black male suffrage. Politically, Reconstruction was an outrage to white Southerners. The aims of Reconstruction represented the death of the antebellum South; the South for which the

Confederates sacrificed their lives and that which they were now trying to restore.

Southern whites had a hard time accepting blacks as anything other than inferiors, and were insulted to think that blacks would be privileged with equal rights. As Radical Republicans introduced the South to Reconstruction, a deep fear for the future gripped the area. Once servants and fieldhands, blacks were now competing with the whites for jobs. To many southern whites it seemed that the black population was better represented by the government than the white. This was perhaps an imagined fear, but Congressional legislation, like the Civil Rights Acts and the 14th Amendment, seemed to support that assumption. Early in 1865 Congress established the Freedmen's Bureau to assist the former slaves in adapting to their free status. [14] Agents of the Freedmen's Bureau were almost always white Republican officials, as were many other local authorities, and agencies of the Bureau were established in both urban and rural areas throughout the South.

The Union League, a Unionist wartime patriotic society that had been introduced into the South by Republicans following the war, provided a convenient scapegoat for both the real and imagined evils of the time. [15] The Union League, like the Klan, was a secret organization with closed

meetings and sacred oaths. The organization served as both a fraternal order and a branch of the Republican Party, fulfilling both a social and political function. Emphasizing patriotism and loyalty to the Union, the Union League heralded the Republican Party as the defender of Unionism and black rights. Membership into the Union League was open to blacks as well as southern Unionists, and the organization often hosted barbecues and parades for black members. The Union League urged blacks to assert their new legal rights, and was partially responsible for mobilizing the black vote. Some radical spokesmen of the society even called for the redistribution of "rebel lands" to blacks. [16] The existence of the Union League was provocative because it mobilized black support through a secret society whose actions were not fully known nor understood by outsiders. Rumors concerning the society circulated widely in the South, leading the Democratic Party to denounce it as "subversive and inflammatory". [17] Negro crime was attributed to the teaching and inspiration, if not the direct order, of the society. The very existence of the Union League contributed to the Klan's actions during Reconstruction. During the testimony of Klan leader John Gordon in 1871, he stated that he had joined "a secret organization that was formed for the purpose of protecting society against Negro depredation and

the supposed dangers of the Union League." [18] The Union League aroused so much hostility in the South that in 1868, after black voters had helped to place a Republican in the presidency, the Republicans ordered the organization disbanded.

Southerners correctly assumed that northern Republicans were grooming blacks to act as political puppets. This assumption led to the additional fear that northern Republicans and blacks were conspiring for control of southern state governments, which made many white Southerners more leery about the blacks in their communities. The Richmond Enquirer & Examiner considered "the progress of that secret negro conspiracy which has for its object the establishment of negro domination" a true danger to the South. [19] The fear of blacks beyond the political level, ignited local action in an attempt to limit the black population. Although it was no longer a legal institution, Southerners remembered the slave patrol which had been used in antebellum times to regulate the slave population. The slave patrol set a precedent for southern men who created vigilante bands for the purpose of maintaining order, or more specifically of controlling that which they feared. The Ku Klux Klan was a product of this precedent. [20] Southern men felt it was their duty to protect themselves and their

families. Even southern "women...were afraid to go to town by themselves for fear of being insulted or ravished by negroes. Instead they formed large companies for mutual protection. This fear...was what had brought the Klan into existence." [21] Members of the Klan acted as regulators to keep the blacks in order, and to "save the South from Africanization". [22]

The political birth of the Klan occurred in April 1867 at a reorganizational meeting in Nashville. [23] The former Confederate general George Gordon was named Grand Dragon, or head of the state, of the Tennessee Klan. [24] Gordon issued a set of rules, called the Prescript, to the Tennessee and Alabama groups that were present. The Prescript established the hierarchical organization of the Klan, created a code for public communication, designed the official flag and set up membership requirements. [25] The Klan was organized under a Grand Wizard (often called Imperial Wizard in later years) who appointed Grand Dragons to rule each state (or realm) in his stead. The first Grand Wizard of the Klan, although he never publicly admitted the fact, was Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest. [26] He probably did not become so until May 1867, having not been present at the April meeting in Nashville. [27] The visibility of the Klan increased following the Nashville meeting. Although the first mention

of the Klan in a newspaper had been on March 29, 1867 in the Pulaski Citizen. announcements of Klan meetings began to be common in the press after the April meeting. [28] A parade on June 5, 1867 in Pulaski celebrated the one year anniversary of the town's Klan. About 75 masked men parading through town on horses were witnessed by several hundred spectators. At this time few Klans existed outside of Tennessee and Alabama, but "the first four months of 1868 saw a phenomenal expansion of the Ku Klux Klan...to every Southern state between the Potomac and the Rio Grande. [29] It is widely believed that Forrest was directly involved in the spread of the organization. Evidence shows that he traveled through much of Alabama and Georgia until March 1868; Klan dens emerged shortly after in each place that he had visited. [30]

Democratic newspapers were another dominating factor in the spread of the Klan. Many Klan leaders were ex-Confederate officers who were associated with Democratic Party. The Democratic press reported appearances of the Klan and carried news items of Klan activity, treating the organization as a useful agency to combat "the evils of Radicalism [Republican government] and Negro ascendancy". [31] Democratic newspapers played an important role in mobilizing public support behind the Klan by

supplying information on Klan operations and informing people on how to join. Confederate Colonel William Saunders, head of the North Carolina Klan, was an associate editor of the Wilmington Journal, an outspoken Democratic newspaper that helped organize the Klan in that state in March 1868. [32] When Klan violence reached such proportions as to attract the attention of federal authorities, Democratic newspapers either denied that the outrages had ever occurred or simply stated that the Klan was a hoax invented by "overactive Republican imaginations". [33] In March 1868 the Columbus Sun in South Carolina reported that the Klan was a "wholly imaginative organization". [34] Other newspapers were much less subtle in mentioning the Klan, like the Nashville Gazette who in April 1868 reported that the organization was thriving in Alabama and warned that "niggers are disappearing...with a rapidity that gives color to the canibilistic [sic] threats of the Shrouded Brethren. Run, nigger, run, or the Kuklux will catch you. [35] Democratic newspapers were pivotal in bringing the message of Klan leaders to all areas of the South. Many organizations sprang up that had no affiliation with Forrest or the Pulaski Den, but resembled the Klan in many respects. Some of these organizations included the Knights of the White Camelia in Louisiana, the Knights of the Rising Sun in Texas and the

Young Men's Democratic Clubs of Florida. [36]

In order to gain membership into the Klan, as well as similar groups, a male, aged eighteen years or older, had to be recommended by a present member. Membership of the Klan was drawn from all ranks of society. Most members were Democrats, and many had been Confederate soldiers. Some were attracted to the Klan for political reasons, but most, especially the younger members, were drawn into membership by the mysticism of the organization. As the Attorney General of Mississippi said in 1871, "the Klan was an adventure, a way to escape the tedium of rural life. It was also a patriotic venture, which like military service in wartime, often had the esteem and support of public opinion. [37]

An interview with Grand Wizard Forrest by the Cincinnati Commercial on August 28, 1866 suggested that the Klan did indeed have overwhelming public support. Forrest claimed to have 40,000 Klansmen in Tennessee alone, and boasted a membership of 550,000 in the combined South. [38] Numbers like these show why the Klan was often referred to as the Invisible Empire, which "some persons believed...to be the true official name of the order, with 'Ku Klux Klan' adopted for public use only. [39]

Empire or not, the Klan was certainly popular throughout the South. In Nashville juvenile baseball teams were named

"Ku Klux" and "Pale Face", and local theater fans could attend the "Ku Klux Klan" burlesque. [40] Several southern companies attributed the name "Ku Klux Klan" to knives, paint, pills, smoking tobacco and even a circus act. [41] Some newspapers incorporated the name into their own, like the Ku Klux Kaleidoscope of Goldsboro, North Carolina; the Ultra Ku Klux of Jefferson, Texas and the Daily Ku Klux Vedette of Houston [42]. The three K's became a successful advertising gimmick. Saloons would offer Ku Klux Kocktails, and the Wickes' company suggested the use of their accident-proof kerosene "because Kommon Kerosene Kills". [43] The increase in Klan visibility aided in the increase of Klan membership. But, as organization grew so did the violence attributed to it.

Usually the emergence of the Klan was accompanied by novelty pranks directed towards the newly emancipated blacks in the area. Donned in white sheets and high headpieces that made them seem extremely tall, Klansmen would appear to be ghostly figures riding through the night. "The impression sought to be made upon 'the freedmen' was that these white-robed night prowlers were the ghosts of Confederate dead who had arisen from their graves in order to 'wreak vengeance on an undesirable class'". [44] A klansman would often extend a fake arm to a black man to shake, and then ride off seemingly

armless. Klansmen would perform the same prank with a fake skeletal head. At other times the klansman would hold an animal-skin bag under his sheet and appear to drink inhumanly amounts of water. These "harmless" pranks played on the supposed superstitions of freedman, represented the Klan's first phase of black control. [45] These pranks probably scared black children more than the adults, who often recognized the voices heard from beneath the sheets or the faces seen through the eyeholes of the masks. Fear in the black community probably rose from stories of the brutality performed by these masked riders in nearby towns.

Klan dens seemed to follow a regular pattern. After making their presence known to the black community, the Klan would begin to behave more violently, especially when blacks refused to shrink in fear of the ghostly riders. The most common activity of the Klan was whipping. This punishment was usually directed against black men and older boys, and was generally accompanied by the accusation of some crime. [46] Klan violence was almost always done at night in bands of about twelve men. The klansmen had the advantage of darkness, disguise, superior numbers, better armament and, most importantly, the freedmen's fear of resisting a white man. Voting the Republican ticket, belonging to the Union League and teaching in a black school all constituted reason

for a night raid. The Klan often visited black Union veterans, agents of the Freedmen's Bureau and black office holders. Black criminals had to fear the possibility of a Klan lynching while in jail. From June to October 1867 "25 murders, 35 assaults with intent to kill, 83 assault and batteries, four rapes and four arsons" were attributed to the Klan. [47] In August 1867 agent A.H. Eastman mentioned disturbances to the Freedmen's Bureau for the first time, saying that the Ku Klux Klan appeared to be on "the war path". [48] Eastman's report was followed by one from agent William Green of Wilmington, Tennessee. Green's report states that Klan members "have committed so many gross outrages that it is impossible to enumerate them all. The villains seem determined to overawe the country and frighten colored people into implicit obedience to any demand they make." [49] Klan violence, which was targeting whites in the South as well as blacks, began to take on such a fervor that it seemed almost unstoppable.

The first reported Klan outrage outside of Tennessee occurred on March 30, 1868 in Columbus, Georgia. [50] The murder of the scalawag, or white southern Unionist, George Ashburn attracted the attention of General Meade, the military leader of Georgia at the time. Meade's attempt to try members of the Columbus Klan coincided with the

establishment of the new Georgia state government. With the military courts superseded, the trial was entrusted to the officials in Columbus, who subsequently dropped the case. [51] Federal troops sent to deal with the Alabama Klan in 1868 could not get the cooperation of the local law, and were forced to leave the area without putting a halt to Klan violence. [52] The impact of Klan violence did not escape the attention of political figures in the North. In a letter to David Boyd in January of 1867, William T. Sherman said,

if we are forced to keep paid soldiers all through the country to do the work of civil sheriffs, it is idle for any friend of the South to approach a popular assemblage North. Mr. Johnson...has thrown himself into the breach and if he had been sustained by the people at the South he could have made good his position, but these multiplied instances of violence...take from him all chance of explanation. I have been more embarrassed by well proven cases of murder with Grand Juries ignoring indictments and turning loose murders...than by any other cause. [53]

Because klansmen were often the sheriffs, judges and jurymen in all areas of the South, the federal government had little hope of trying or convicting those guilty of Klan offenses without becoming personally involved.

The presidential campaign of 1868 marked a climax of Klan activity in most areas. Between the April and November elections 1,081 people were killed, 135 were shot and 507 were otherwise outraged in Louisiana alone. [54] This degree

which dealt specifically with the Klan, enabling the President to use the military to put down the Klan's "civil disturbances" and allowing citizens who were deprived of their rights by the Klan to sue klansmen in federal court [71]. This law made it a federal offense to conspire or "go in disguise upon the public highway, or upon the premises of another" for the purpose of limiting equal rights. [72] Unfortunately this law only affected those incidents which occurred after its passing. All of the injustices enacted by the Klan prior to April 20, 1871 could not be tried under this law. The Secretary of War and the Attorney General sent agents of the secret service into the South to gather evidence to convict klansmen under the Section 6 of the Enforcement Act. This investigation of the Klan was "one of the largest investigations in Congressional history up to that time". [73] Congress also established a joint committee, officially known as the Joint Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, to head the investigation. The committee compiled twelve volumes of testimony concerning Klan actions, which they presented before Congress in a hearing that lasted from May to September 1871. The result of this hearing resulted in the arrests of many klansmen from all over the South. Unable to handle the great amount of prisoners, federal

courts prosecuted only the worse offenders. Of the 220 persons indicted from York County, South Carolina, only five were convicted. [74] In Tallahassee, Florida only one conviction was made out of fourteen cases concerning murders committed by klansmen. [75] This pattern was followed everywhere in the South. The amount of time and business that the trials entailed were tremendous, and often turned out to be more than the courts could handle. Many of the atrocities committed by the Klan were never rectified, but the effect of the trials had a serious impact on Klan membership which resulted in the decline of Klan activity during Reconstruction.

The fact that Klan violence erupted like never before during the 1868 elections implies that the Klan was motivated politically. While the Democrats and Klan leaders played an efficient role in gathering support for the Klan, and in using the organization to gain political ends, politics cannot be said to be the only instigator of the Klan. Many Klan members joined the organization because of the fear of a black conspiracy, usually believed to be influenced by the Union League. And, Klan activity continued after the political instigators distanced themselves from the organization. The increased membership and activity of the Klan during Reconstruction was the result of a precedent

established in the Old South when the threat of slave revolt occupied the minds of all Southerners. The thought of being governed by blacks, of losing jobs to inferiors, of seeing interracial relationships, of mixing the blood of the two races was more than most southern men would accept. For this reason they became involved with a group that seemed to be the only obstacle to the black ascendancy that they feared.

Chapter 2

The Klan in the Twenties

In the years following Reconstruction the Ku Klux Klan lapsed into a period of inactivity. Legislative actions taken against the Klan in the 1870's had resulted not only in the reduction of membership, but also in a sharp decline of popularity. The Klan was portrayed as a lawless organization that had ravaged the South during Reconstruction. For revival the Klan would need an improved image, as well as a new plan of heroics. The Klan's improved image came with the publication of Thomas Dixon's novel The Clansmen. The new plan of action called for the Ku Klux Klan to be the defender of "Americanism"; the ideas and beliefs upon which democracy and the American spirit were based. Public opinion concerning foreigners and non-Protestants fueled the rebirth of the Klan during the 1920's, resulting in the second peak of the Klan.

Although seemingly a dead organization, the Ku Klux Klan received much attention at the turn of the century. In 1905 Thomas Dixon's The Clansmen romanticized the Klan as a noble order that had helped to save the South from the clutches of Radical Republicanism and black savagery. [76] The effects of the book were minimal until 1914 when Dixon sold the

screen rights to filmmaker David Wark Griffith. The following year Griffith released the movie The Birth of a Nation, which helped to further romanticize and rationalize the actions of the Reconstruction Klan. [77] In comparison to newspapers, the movie was far more powerful in embedding a lasting image of the Klan in the American imagination. Many people walked away from the movie believing that the righteous Klan had been brutally and unnecessarily attacked by the press.

The release of The Birth of a Nation coincided with efforts to reorganize the Klan in Atlanta, Georgia. William Joseph Simmons, a fraternal organizer by trade, wanted to use the appeal of the Reconstruction Klan and the attraction of mystery and secrecy to revive the Klan in Atlanta. This, however, would not be necessary. The brutal murder of a fourteen year girl in Georgia provided the spark that would ignite the rebirth of the Klan in that state.

On April 27, 1915 the ravished body of Mary Phagan was found in the basement of the building in which she worked. [78] Her Jewish employer, Leo M. Frank was accused of the rape and murder. The news of the murder and arrest resulted in an anti-semitic frenzy throughout Georgia. Frank was abducted from a Georgian jail, and later hanged, by twenty-five men who called themselves the Knights of Mary

Phagan. [79] Following the lynching, the Knights of Mary Phagan held a cross burning on Stone Mountain, the first cross burning to be associated with the KKK. [80]

On December 4, 1915 the state of Georgia issued a charter for the organization of a "patriotic, military, benevolent, ritualistic, social and fraternal order" which was to be officially known as "The Invisible Empire, The Ku Klux Klan, Inc.". [81] At this time the organization was little more than a social order for its members and a money making scheme for Simmons. Besides paying a ten dollar klostoken (membership fee) and buying an official uniform (a cheap white sheet,) members were urged by Simmons to sign up for \$53,000 worth of Klan life insurance. [82] By the end of World War I the Georgia Klan had a scattered membership of about 5,000. [83] Wanting to expand even more Simmons turned to the publicity company of Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler. Clarke and Tyler's company The Southern Publicity Association became the "Propagation Department" of the Georgia Klan. Contracted to receive eight of every ten dollar klostoken, Clarke and Tyler hired 1,100 solicitors, called kleagles, to sell the Klan to America. [84] The kleagles were given instructions to play on whatever prejudices were found in an area. This plan of action was quite successful. From June to October 1921 the kleagles

signed over 100,000 new members and more than \$1,500,000 in fees were taken. [85] By the end of 1921 the Ku Klux Klan had spread throughout the North, and had even reached the Pacific Coast.

The Klan became popular because of the program it was selling. In an era when dress lengths were getting shorter, music and dance was becoming more open and sensual, and Freudian gospel urged inhibition, Klan leaders urged members to uphold Christian values. The Ku Klux Klan stressed the need for premarital chastity, marital fidelity, respect for parental authority, obedience of prohibition laws and disenfranchisement from corrupt politicians. Many white Americans saw the KKK as an organization that was trying to revive the true essence of their country. In fact, the Klan was often referred to as a "mainly anti-bootlegging and anti-home breaking organization". [86] In the Klan's own words,

there should be a revival of the true American spirit that made our country great and it is the aim and ambition of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan to play a leading part in the building up of this spirit. [87]

Because the message of the Klan was so popular, violent actions were often simply overlooked. When klansmen brutally beat an adulterous Texas woman, tarred and feathered a Louisiana man who had beaten his wife or tarred and feathered a Beaumont doctor who had performed two abortions, many

people expressed the belief that they had gotten what they deserved. These violent actions were proof to many white Americans that the KKK was serious about restoring morals to American society.

Three events boosted the postwar surge of Klan membership. First, in the fall of 1920 arsons burned cotton gins and bales in many areas of the South. To discourage further attempts and to protect their property, southern farmers resumed the practice of night-riding. There was no Klan involvement in this renewal of night-riding, but the resurgence of the activity drew attention to the Klan. [88] Second, nearly a year later, the liberal newspaper the New York World began a public attack of the Klan. The rebirth of the Klan and its spread across the United States alarmed the writers for the World. They began printing articles about the history of the Klan, including testimony from the legislative investigation of the organization, in an attempt to turn public favor away from the Klan. Unfortunately for them, their plan backfired. The publicity attracted receptive Americans in areas that had not previously heard of the Klan. Instead of working against the Klan, the World's articles acted as free publicity for the organization, helping to spread the ideas of the KKK and increase its membership. [89] An interview in the American Journal of

Sociology quotes a 1920's klansmen as saying that "no other organization in the history of the country has received so much free advertising in so short a time." [90] This widespread publicity also gained the attention of the United States Congress, which began another inquiry into the activities of the Klan, marking the third event that boosted the Klan. Simmons and other Klan officials who were brought before a Congressional hearing testified to the non-violent, patriotic, moralistic nature of the order. Congress closed the hearings with no recommendation, seemingly giving the Klan its stamp of approval. [91] The Ku Klux Klan was again in the limelight.

With the Klan back in public sight the goal of Klan leaders would be to increase membership. The characteristics of American society in the years following the first World War gave them the fuel they needed to boost Klan membership to outrageous heights. The war had subjected the United States to its first systematic, nationwide propaganda campaign, which not only taught Americans to hate, but officially sanctioned hate. This hatred was turned against Germans especially, but also towards everything that did not fit the concept of "100% American." And, during the initial postwar years, much failed to fall into that 100 percent mark. The Ku Klux Klan picked up the concept of 100%

American, and made it part of Klan ideology. Klan pamphlets stated that

the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan stand for
"America First"- first in thought, first
in affection, and first in the Galaxy of
Nations. [92]

The Ku Klux Klan declared itself the defender of Americanism, and subsequently gained much public support. Several events in the postwar years aided the KKK in attracting even more white Americans to Klan membership.

The year 1919 saw a vast increase in the migration of blacks into the North, resulting in a series of race riots throughout the country. Having served in World War I, many blacks returned to the United States feeling more ambitious about their social status. Black veterans returned home expecting improved economic and social conditions. After all, they had sacrificed and fought for their country just like their white neighbors. Many blacks believed that leaving the South, a symbol of hundreds of years of oppression for their people, could only increase their chances for future equality. The initial postwar years saw an influx of southern blacks into the North, especially into the larger cities. With blacks moving above the Mason-Dixon line, northern whites no longer considered the black population to be a southern problem. Tensions between whites

and blacks resulted in race riots in many cities across the North, including Chicago and New York. Perhaps the most public of these riots occurred in Chicago during the summer of 1919. [93] A black teenage boy who drifted into the "white" area of Lake Michigan was stoned by whites from the beach, and drowned. The incident resulted in a week-long riot that saw 38 people killed, 537 injured and thousands more left homeless. [94] These tensions allowed the Ku Klux Klan, a predominantly southern institution up until that time, to spread throughout the North.

The Russian Bolshevik Revolution of 1919 sparked a phenomenon in the United States commonly referred to as "The Red Scare" [95]. Led by Lenin, the All-Russian Communist Bolshevik Party played a leading role in converting Russia to communism; the economic state that serves as the antithesis to capitalism. The effects of the Russian Revolution on the United States were profound. Moderate to extreme socialists and labor unionists in the U.S. were all branded radicals, and the country engaged in a nationwide hunt for communists. Distrust exploded in the workplace. Those people trying to unite workers into labor unions were automatically labeled communists, turning economic tensions into social anxieties. The instability created by the Red Scare cleared the way for the Klan to come to the rescue of

"Americanism"; the social institution, obviously, connected to the "supreme" economic state of capitalism.

The postwar period also saw what was perhaps the greatest outburst of anti-foreign sentiment in U.S. history. There was an increase in the drive to restrict foreign immigration, as immigrants were thought to bring poverty and radicalism with them to the United States. The Klan used growing tensions between Americans and foreign immigrants to secure its position as the defender of Americanism. Klan writings said that

America has become more and more a melting pot, and her native born in many sections are being pushed into the background by the flood of foreigners, most of which retain allegiance to a foreign flag...The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan do not feel that it was for the refuse populations of other lands that the Pilgrim Fathers worked and suffered...but we feel that they suffered...that we, her native born, might secure political independence, social security, happiness and the improvement and progress of our race. [96]

Americans believed that some whites were inferior to others. This notion, often referred to as WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) supremacy, considered Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian whites to be the superiors of the white race, which placed them significantly higher than Italians, Greeks, and Slavs. The concept of WASP finds its basis in a movement known as Anglo-Saxon Israelism, or British-Israelism, which traces the lineage of Anglo-Saxon whites to Abraham, making them

the true chosen people of God. British-Israelists say that God is making plans for the unification of the true Israel, and that the "the whole Celto-Saxon Race in the British Empire, the U.S.A. and the fragments elsewhere - the Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, Icelanders, Basques, Nestorians, etc. - together...will be united into one harmonious whole, constituting Abraham's 'great nation'. [97] Klan leaders agreed with the superiority of Anglo-Saxons, saying that

Anglo-Saxons established this nation, [the U.S.A.] wrote its code and sent their sons into the wilderness to gather fresh stars for the flag...The making of America is fundamentally an Anglo-Saxon achievement. [98]

The notion of Anglo-Saxon supremacy also ignited religious resentment, as Italian Roman Catholics and many Jewish were scattered throughout the Slavic countries, making neither truly American.

Anti-catholic and anti-semitic sentiment flourished in the 1920's. Five out of eight adult church members in the United States in 1920 were Protestant. [99] The most prevalent religion at that time, Protestantism was equated with Americanism. Many Protestants believed that Roman Catholics were tied to a foreign Pope. Anyone who followed him clearly could not be a true American. The Klan did not profess to being anti-Catholic, instead Klan leaders said that

the Klan is not anti-Catholic. It pities all

Catholics in their foreign papal enslavement and prays that they may be free of it. But above all, the Klan is pro-Protestant, the only form of Christianity which can be free and 100 percent American. [100]

For the Klan, the Jews, certainly wrong religiously to begin with, were subject to even more suspicion. Not only were Jews involved in the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, but it had been a Jew (Leo M. Frank) who had so savagely murdered a little girl named Mary in Georgia in 1915. A klansmen is quoted as saying that

a young girl is no longer safe on our country roads! They are picked up by men in automobiles. The Jews get them and sell them as white slaves. [101]

Together Catholics and Jews represented almost everything that threatened American society in the years following World War I. Many Americans believed that the "Catholics and Jews together were...a much greater danger to the world than the Germans had ever been." [102] Common distrust for foreigners, embodied by Catholics and Jews, gave the kleagles a solid program to sell. Except for areas like south Louisiana, where Catholics were a majority, and New York City, where the Jewish population was extremely high, the Klan spread like wildfire with its anti-Catholic and anti-semitic views.

The most peculiar aspect of the Klan in the 1920's was that it spread quickly across the country, especially in the

Mid-West and the Pacific coast area. By 1920 these areas had high concentrations of members which rivaled membership in the deep South. The Klan was able to spread rapidly in areas where little aggression existed between whites and blacks because its ideas were accepted by most whites as being the basic ideas of democracy. The Klan, with its attack on blacks, radicals, Catholics and Jews, seemed to uphold the beliefs of many white Americans. The Klan wanted to restore fundamental Christian and American values, and expel those groups that did not seem to display the same. The state in which the Klan had the most impact in the 1920's was Indiana.

The most famous Klan gathering of all times occurred on July 4, 1923 at Kokomo, Indiana. [103] At this meeting D.C. Stephenson was appointed Grand Dragon of Indiana, and Imperial Klaliff which made him second in line for command of the Klan under Grand Wizard Evans. Under Stephenson, also known as Steve or The Old Man, Indiana boasted more than 35,000 Klan members, and became the only state ever to have klaverns (local dens) chartered in each county. [104] Stephenson established a specific system to sell the Klan to the Hoosier state, thinking that the violent characteristics of the southern Klan would not be tolerated in the North. He wanted to portray the Klan as being respectable, and in order to improve the group's image ordered his Klansmem "to do a

good deed every week". [105] Stephenson worked along the new lines created by the Southern organization in order to present the Klan as a defender of democracy and American values.

The five techniques used by Stephenson to establish the Klan in Indiana are a perfect example of how the kleagles played on the prejudices and activities of an area in order to increase Klan membership. Stephenson appealed to those things which most Americans held sacred. The first technique was an appeal to clergy. [106] He made all ministers honorary members of the KKK, giving rewards to those who preached pro-Klan sermons and personal compensation to those who took klavern offices. He also required all new initiates to become active members of a congregation. Stephenson's second technique was a appeal to the Hoosier tendency to join clubs. By 1920 Indiana was the state with the largest number of fraternal organizations. [107] Stephenson had kleagles infiltrate these organizations to recruit new Klansmen. The third technique was an appeal to the Hoosier love of all day outings. [108] The Klan financed outdoor bashes throughout the state to lecture on Klan doctrine and sign new members. The fourth technique was an appeal for law and order. Stephenson supported the revival of the Horsethief Detective Association (HDA), an organization created late in the

nineteenth century by an Indiana statute which allowed the governor to call for volunteers to patrol horse thieving. [109] Stephenson urged the revival of the HDA, offering to overlap it with the Klan and to subsidize the venture with Klan money, to enforce prohibition in Indiana. All detectives were made honorary members of the Klan, and Stephenson waived the ten dollar klostoken for them. The detectives gave reports at weekly Klan meetings, where Klansmen were encouraged to report unlawful acts of drinking. Between June 1922 and October 1923 over 3,000 prohibition cases were prosecuted in Indiana with the help of the Klan. [110] Stephenson's fifth technique proved to be his best tactic for selling the Klan to the Hoosiers. He created the Queen of the Golden Mask, the first women's sect of the Ku Klux Klan. [111] Although women had been involved in Klan activities since its origins, in the 1920's they were given an official role in the Klan. As the providers of morals, values and spiritual foundations, women were considered a vital addition to the Klan. In fact more women led their husbands and families to the Klan in Indiana than any other factor. [112] An official from Grand Wizard Evans' Imperial Headquarters is quoted as saying that "women are proving the best supporters of the organization, and many Klansmen credit their wives with having suggested their

joining". [113] With this strong appeal to the Indiana population, Stephenson created the most powerful Klan state ever.

The Indiana Klan became more than just a public order. Klansmen were found in almost every police force, national guard battalion and local government in Indiana. In 1924 both U.S. Senators and the governor of Indiana were elected with Klan support, and Klansmen were elected to local positions across the state. [114] Klansmen and their families boycotted many businesses, colleges and newspapers that professed to be anti-Klan. The Indiana Klan had become so powerful that Grand Wizard Evans began to feel threatened by the man that had made it so. Fearing that Stephenson's popularity would interfere with his reelection, Evans tried to appoint a new Grand Dragon for Indiana to get Stephenson out of public view. Evans' plan collapsed on May 13, 1924 when the Hoosier Klan split from the Invisible Empire, becoming its own organization under the new Grand Wizard Stephenson. [115] Seen as the defender of Christian principles and a fighter for moral law and order, Stephenson was the most visible klansmen in America. He was expected to win the 1926 Senate race by a landslide, and he was becoming the Indiana hopeful for the Republican presidential candidacy in 1928.

Like all Klan organizations, that professed to be the defenders of law and morals while practicing rampant violence, the Indiana Klan was built upon Stephenson's hypocrisy. Seen as the champion of Christian principles in the public eye, D.C. Stephenson was a heavy drinker and a gambler in his private life. He had a personal army of armed bodyguards and service men who carried out his orders. A man who was used to getting his way, Stephenson thought that nothing could destroy him or the very profitable empire he had created in Indiana. He soon proved himself wrong. At Governor Ed Jackson's inaugural banquet Stephenson met twenty-eight year old Madge Oberholtzer, and the two soon began dating. The evening of March 15, 1925 Madge met Stephenson at his house, but did not return home. [116] A few days later she was brought to her parents' home by one of Stephenson's men who said that she had been involved in an automobile accident. In actuality she had been taken by gunpoint to a train bound for Chicago, having refused to elope with Stephenson. On the train she was brutally raped and beaten by Stephenson. In her own words, "he chewed me all over my body, bit my neck and face, chewed my tongue, chewed my breasts until they bled, my back, my legs, my ankles and mutilated me all over my body". [117] In an attempt to escape Stephenson by being brought to a hospital,

Madge took a handful of mercuric chloride tablets. Refused medical treatment for two days, she was returned to her parents in critical condition. Dying from severe blood poisoning, she gave her sworn testimony to a swarm of witnesses on March 28. On April 8 her kidneys failed, and on April 14, 1925 Madge Oberholtzer died. [118] D.C.

Stephenson, the man who thought nothing could touch him, was convicted of second degree murder, and sentenced to life imprisonment. The man who had established a Klan empire in Indiana destroyed it in one fatal swoop. The Indiana Klan, as well as Klan organizations across the country, could not survive the tarnish inflicted upon them by their most visible member. With the downfall of Stephenson, the seemingly most pious klansman to date, the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920's came to a grinding halt.

The second peak of Klan activity is characterized by its rapid spread throughout the United States. This growth was encouraged by social, political and economic events that permeated the country after the first World War. Seemingly the defender of Americanism, the Ku Klux Klan offered a release for frustrated white Protestant Americans. The Klan preached a return to the morals and values upon which America was founded. The popularity of the organization in the 1920's led not only to rampant increases in membership, but

also to Klan involvement in politics. Politics made the KKK even more publicized, especially when the most visible klansmen became a presidential hopeful. Although the second Klan gained a more significant standing than that of the Reconstruction Klan, common practices ultimately resulted in the same fate for the organization. While preaching order, klansmen and Klan leaders practiced unimaginable acts of violence and terror. When this hidden side of the Klan came to light, the organization showed itself to be both hypocritical and lawless. White Protestant Americans had yearned for a champion, but the Ku Klux Klan had proven to be much lower than their expectations. The second peak of the Ku Klux Klan occurred because the organization had reached such proportions across the United States that its faults were made all the more public.

Chapter 3

The Klan and the Civil Rights Movement

Despite the tumultuous decline of the Klan in the 1920's, the organization's political and economic successes continued to attract ambitious white supremacists long after Stephenson's demise. Desiring the power and money that had once rested in the hands of Klan leaders, several attempts were made to revive the Ku Klux Klan in the following years. Most of these ventures failed, however. The reason for these failures may be the lack of sufficient cause. While the 1930's were certainly a time of economic stress, the social and political tensions, also necessary for a Klan revival, were not as prevalent as they had been in the 1920's, nor as they would be in the 1960's. With the Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954, which called for the desegregation of public schools, the Ku Klux Klan again had a basis for resurgence. Trying to erase the lines of distinction between whites and blacks would indeed stir up social, economic and political unrest; all of which are necessary for a Klan revival. This third peak of activity "was destined to be a new array of wizards and dragons and a new set of klan organizations" [119].

Following the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka case in 1954, the Civil Rights movement began to move in full

force. In 1957 Congress passed the first federal civil rights law since Reconstruction. This Civil Rights Act established a commission to investigate instances of restricted civil rights, and created the Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice to enforce federal civil rights regulations. With the United States federal government obviously on their side, civil rights activists began marches and campaigns across the South. Civil Rights leaders, like Martin Luther King, Jr., were commonly seen on television and heard on the radio. White Americans, especially in the South, could not escape the reality that blacks were demanding equality, and were sometimes willing to use force to acquire it. In the turmoil surrounding the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, several white supremacists appealed to the white population to unite in protest. Feeling threatened by the advances of civil right activists, many whites signed on with the Klan.

The Klan of the 1960's was characterized by two distinct traits. First, it was indeed a new "set" of "organizations". Following a precedent established by Stephenson, klan units in the 1960's often split into separate factions under new leaders. William Hendrix of Florida's Southern Knights of the Ku Klux Klan described the Klan of the late 1950's as

being

a conglomeration of different organizations breaking up, going together, and not getting along. [120]

While all klansmen seemed to agree upon which issues to exploit, namely the new legislative movements towards civil rights, few klan units could agree upon a common course of action in dealing with these issues. Quarrelling leaders tended to leave an organization with loyal followers and establish their own klan units elsewhere. Second, the Anti-Civil Rights Klan was basically a southern-based organization. Although the Klan existed in other areas of the country, it had its main following in the Deep South where the Civil Rights movement was often considered a second Reconstruction.

After the release of the movie The Birth of a Nation in 1915 the Reconstruction Klan was looked upon as "the epitome of heroism, the savior of white supremacy and southern womanhood during a period when both were in danger at the hands of...unruly Negroes". [121] Southern klansmen felt the need to uphold this image of their organization, and hoped to again be the "savior" of the South. Fearing that the "judicial edicts and legislative enactments promoting constitutional rights," would promote another Reconstruction-like era in the South, klansmen agreed upon a

more militant course of action in dealing with the Civil Rights movement. [122] The only way to deal with the Civil Rights movement, according to Calvin Craig, a member of the United Klans of America (most commonly referred to as UKA), was "to go back to the old-time religion, and to the old-time Klan religion". [123] This meant attacking blacks and the whites who sympathized with them, and making the Klan of the 1960's "most akin to their activist brethren of the post-Civil War period". [124]

The constant rifts in klan units resulted in a wide variety of organizations during the brief history of the third peak of Klan activity. The first Klan organization to receive a state charter was the U.S. Klans, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc. of Georgia in 1955. [125] First organized under Eldon Edward, the U.S. Klans split many times before its downfall in 1963. In 1956 the Alabama segments of the U.S. Klans withdrew to form the Gulf Ku Klux Klan and the Ku Klux Klan of the Confederacy. Both of these organizations suffered the same fate as the U.S. Klans, dividing into several smaller factions in later years. In 1957 the U.S. Klans expelled two Tennessee members, Jack and Harry Brown, who in turn established their own Dixie Klans, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Another expelled member, Robert Shelton, created his own Alabama Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in 1960.

After Edward's death the battle for a successor resulted in yet another split of the U.S. Klans. Robert Davidson left with Calvin Craig to organize the United Klans of America, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc. (UKA) early in 1961. In July 1961 Shelton, Davidson and Craig met in Indiana Springs, Georgia to unite the Alabama Knights with UKA. The Imperial Wizard of the U.S. Klans at this time was Reverend E. George. After an attempt by a single klavern to elect a new Imperial Wizard in 1963, Reverend George left the organization to create his own Improved Order of the U.S. Klans, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc. The U.S. Klans was reduced to that one klavern of about fifty members in College Park, Georgia with their new Imperial Wizard H.J. Jones. The story of the rise and fall of the U.S. Klans is typical of the divisions and mergers that occurred in almost all klan units during the 1960's. [126]

The largest obstacle to klan harmony in the 1950's and 1960's seems to have been the degree of militancy used by each individual organization. The use of violence tended to vary among geographic regions, as did the secrecy of the organizations. The "most sinister and dangerous aspects of Klan secrecy... [was] the formation of small hard-core groups within the klan organization whose members and activities... [were] unknown to the general membership". [127] These

"supersecret action groups" resembled big-city gangsters. [128] They were often called in from the outside to deal with especially dangerous trouble-makers (usually Civil Rights activists, both black and white, who were causing the largest stir.) Local klansmen would be sure to make public appearances around town on the nights that the "action groups" came to take care of their business, which usually involved the "disappearance" of said trouble-makers. The local Klan units would not only disclaim responsibility, but they would also accuse the Federal government or Civil Rights activists of committing the crimes themselves in order to make the Klan look bad. The use of these action groups, and the use of violence in general, caused great tensions between Klan organizations. By 1965 there were only four main Klan units in the country - the Improved Order of the U.S. Klans, the Association of South Carolina Klans, the Dixie Knights and the UKA. But by 1967 that number had increased to fifteen. [129] Like many Klan leaders, Robert Shelton and Calvin Craig, two of the creators of UKA, took completely different stands on the militancy issue.

Robert Shelton, who at thirty-one was the youngest man to be elected Imperial Grand Wizard, decided to support a non-violent campaign much like that of Stephenson in the 1920's. [130] Shelton, depicting the Klan as respectable and

non-violent, established klan units in nineteen states, including Indiana and Wisconsin. He is quoted as saying,

we want the kind of people in the Klan like businessmen who build - not the kind of people who by their own inner emotions destroy what they are trying to build. [131]

Shelton's goal was to portray the Civil Rights movement as being communist. He hoped to defeat the Civil Rights movement by accusing Civil Rights leaders of being "Communist-inspired, Communist-organized, and Communist-funded". [132] Shelton's Klan pledged support to the Constitution "as written by our forefathers," and refused to accept changes made by a Federal government that was a "captive of communists". [133] Shelton also tried to downplay anti-Catholic and anti-semitic sentiment in an attempt to secure more support for the Klan. This non-violent, anti-communist ploy was a success in the northern and mid-western states, where klan realms remained small and relatively ineffective. It proved unsuccessful in the Deep South, however, where the bulk of membership and activity endured. Craig, an advocate of violence and a return to the activism of the Reconstruction Klan, took a much different stand than that of Shelton. Grand Dragon of the state of Georgia, Craig had a much more militant group to control.

Activism and militarism characterized the Klan of the

Deep South during the third peak of Klan activity. The new destructive tactic of the Ku Klux Klan was bombing. Along with courses of instruction for the use of firearms, Klan groups offered schooling on the methods of manufacturing and detonating explosives. Craig's UKA units sponsored training workshops, led by former Navy frogmen, to teach members about making and using bombs. The use of explosives may have began as early as 1951 when a Negro housing project was bombed in Florida, and the NAACP leader Harry Moore and his wife were killed. [134] Although the culprits were never identified, the explosion is generally considered to be the work of klansmen. As Civil Rights demonstrations spread throughout the South, klan membership and violence increased. After the desegregation of city buses in Montgomery, Alabama in 1956, klansmen bombed four Negro churches and the homes of three of the Negro bus boycott leaders. [135] The 1958 attempt to dynamite a Negro school near Charlotte, North Carolina resulted in the imprisonment of the Imperial Wizard of the Christian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. [136] The use of explosives was another factor that led to increased friction between Klan organizations. In 1959 the dynamiting of a North Carolina home was attributed to the Chessman, a splinter group from the less violent U.S. Klans. [137] The bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Church in 1963 by

UKA klansmen resulted in the deaths of four young black girls. [138] From April to October 1964 there were more than twenty-five bombings in McComb, Mississippi, all of which are attributed to klansmen. [139] On January 24, 1965 St. Peter's A.M.E. Church in New Bern, North Carolina was bombed during a NAACP meeting. [140] Using explosives became a common practice for the Klan, which seemed to be uncontrollable in its attempt to "maintain the segregation of the races". [141]

Like the Klan of the Reconstruction era, the 1960's Klan quickly attracted the attention of the federal government. When Alabama klansmen attacked two buses of "freedom riders", a group of mixed race Northerners who decided to challenge the segregation of the interstate bus system in 1961, the Kennedy administration donated a new bus to the group. When the Klan attempted the same in Montgomery, President Kennedy sent 500 federal agents to the South to investigate the Klan's assaults and to aid the "freedom riders" in reaching their next destinations. [142] He then asked the Interstate Commerce Commission to order the desegregation of all facilities and terminals used in interstate bus travel. His request was promptly granted. When the black James Meredith was accepted to the University of Mississippi at Oxford in 1962 the Klan planned violent opposition. President Kennedy

sent 3,000 troops and National Guardsmen to escort Meredith onto campus. [143] Four days after the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, President Lyndon Johnson urged the passage of the Civil Rights Bill as a memorial to JFK. To the dismay of klansmen, the Civil Rights Bill was passed into law in 1964. It called for restaurants, hotels and other businesses to serve all people "regardless of race, color, religion or national origin" and required equal opportunity in the workplace. [144] Other Civil Rights laws increased protection for the black vote, by outlawing poll taxes and literacy tests, and prohibited racial discrimination in the sale or rental of housing. The position of the federal government in regards to the Civil Rights movement made even the least violent of the klansmen rage at the injustice done to the white race. The beliefs that the Civil Rights movement was a second Reconstruction and that the federal government was run by communists were more vehemently supported by klansmen.

As more Civil Rights activists pressed their way into the South, the Ku Klux Klan became even more hostile towards the movement. The increases in klan atrocities attracted the attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation under J. Edgar Hoover, which became just as involved in investigating Klan affairs as the administrations of Kennedy

and Johnson. In 1963 Civil Rights leaders created the Council of Federated Organizations (more commonly called COFO) to infiltrate Mississippi in order to battle segregation in that state. [145] When COFO planned a public move into Mississippi for the summer of 1964, the Klan fought back. Sam Holloway Bowers, the Imperial Wizard of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi (an offshoot of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Louisiana,) called the COFO's visit a "nigger-communist invasion". [146] Bowers thought of his White Knights as "a lonely band of patriots who formed the last line of defense against a communist conspiracy". [147] At a June 7, 1964 meeting in the abandoned Boykin Methodist Church, Bowers laid out an intricate plan to deal with the coming of COFO, which included the creation of a "supersecret action group." He issued an executive order stating that

the military and political situation as regards
the enemy has now reached the crisis stage...
the events which will occur in Mississippi this
summer may well determine the fate of Christian
civilization for centuries to come. [148]

Shortly thereafter three COFO workers disappeared from Philadelphia, Mississippi after interviewing several people who had witnessed the burning of a Negro church. Hoover sent 153 FBI investigators to Mississippi to solve the case after the men's car was found burned and stashed in the Bogue

Chitto Swamp. President Johnson sent Hoover an additional 100 Navy patrol men to help in the search for the COFO workers. Six weeks later the bodies of Mickey Schwerner, Anthony Goodman and James Chaney were found buried under a dam that had recently been built south of the town of Philadelphia. [149] As a result of the COFO murders the FBI established an office in Jackson, Mississippi that was concerned solely with studying the Klan in Mississippi, which by this time consisted of the White Knights and Americans for the Preservation of the White Race (the non-violent faction of the Mississippi Klan.)

With all of the violence aimed at blacks and white sympathizers in the South, it was the death of a northern woman that ultimately led to the decline of the Klan in the 1960's. Viola Liuzzo was a white woman from Detroit who traveled with members of the NAACP to Selma, Alabama to participate in a march for black voters rights. After the march on March 25, 1965 Viola, who was driving the black nineteen year old Leroy Moton to the airport, was shot twice in the head by a klansmen in a passing car. [150] The case was solved within 24 hours of the murder by an undercover FBI agent named Rowe, who was one of the four klansmen in the car. [151]

Rowe had been a member of a Klan since 1957, when he had joined at the request of the FBI for the purpose of furnishing that agency with knowledge of klan activities. [152]

As the country demanded retribution for Viola Liuzzo's murder, President Johnson made a public stand against the Klan. He authorized a complete investigation of all Klan activity by both the FBI and the House on Un-American Activities Committee (also known as HUAC). [153] As a result of the investigation the Klan lost much support in all areas of the country. By 1970 an estimated 76% of the American population strongly disapproved of the organization, and considered the Klan to be worse than the Viet Cong [154].

The Ku Klux Klan of the 1950's and 1960's never came close to reaching the domination that the 1920's Klan had achieved, because it never built a highly profitable and politically influential standing. The Anti-Civil Rights Klan did surpass the second peak in terms of violence, however. The estimated 20,000 - 40,000 members of the 1960's Klan obtained the greatest record of violence aimed against civil rights in American history. [155] The Klan failed in its attempt to maintain segregation, partially because of the rampant use of violence, but also because of the internal strife that hindered the organization from strengthening in unity. The third peak of Klan activity introduced a new aspect of the hate movement, namely paramilitarism. After the 1960's, white supremacist organizations would be characterized more by military training and the use of

explosives than by lynchings and whippings. These organizations also would be more prone to gather and act on their own, without the consolidation of an intricate hierarchy. Aryan and neo-nazi groups, which are designated by their militancy, white supremacy doctrine and disassociation, can trace their starts back to the Klan of the 1960's.

Chapter 4

The Klan of the Eighties (and Beyond)

The years following the 1960's saw a rise in the number of individual groups in the hate movement. Instead of being characterized by rifts and splits, like the Anti-Civil Rights Klan, these new organizations tended to overlap in both membership and issues. The Ku Klux Klan was joined by a new array of groups, often referred to as neo-nazis or far-right extremists, who also preached white supremacy doctrine. The association of the Klan with these nazi-right groups came under review after a mob of klansmen and neo-nazi "storm troopers" killed five members of the Communist Workers Party at a 1975 "Death to the Klan" march in Greensboro, North Carolina. [156] After the Greensboro incident a slight distinction existed between some Klan sections in the Deep South and the rest of the Klan. Klansmen in the Deep South tended to stick with issues of color, much like the Klans of Reconstruction and the 1960's. Although Klan membership in the South did increase during the 1980's, the majority of Klan-related activity occurred outside of the Deep South. This fact contradicts the assertion that "only the American South provides fertile soil for the Klan seed". [157] After the peak of activity in 1981 and 1982, the division between the Klans of the Deep South and the Klans affiliated with

far-right extremist groups becomes more obvious.

The Klan resurgence during the middle of the 1970's, which peaked in the early 1980's, was sparked by racial issues, like busing and affirmative action. The 1974 ruling of Judge W. Arthur Garrity to implement busing was attacked by urban whites across the country. [158] The largest of these demonstrations occurred in Boston. [159] The white urban neighborhoods in the Boston area protested the integration plan with school boycotts, street demonstrations and highly publicized speeches and articles. Many white Americans, like the Bostonians, feared that without segregation in the schools nothing would exist to maintain the division of the races.

The racial tensions of the time added to the social and economic pressures being felt by all Americans. The United States had just lost a very costly and unpopular war in Vietnam. Not only had it been the country's first military defeat, but it was also the first time that the press was able to follow the fighting so closely. The humiliation, of both the country and its politicians, resulted in a grave dislike for the war, which in turn resulted in the dishonorable treatment of the war's veterans. Everyone, on both sides of the argument, blamed the government and demanded honesty in United States politics.

Social pressures concerning Vietnam were only enhanced by the energy crisis and a rising state of inflation. Beginning in 1973, Arabian countries decreased the amounts of oil shipped to the West while at the same time gradually increasing oil prices. The United States government kept oil prices artificially low as long as possible, but by the winter of 1974 could no longer do so. Fuel prices elevated, resulting in an energy scarcity which in turn fed inflation and unemployment in energy-related fields. All of this occurred at the same time that the federal government was trying to remove the last barriers that separated the races; segregation in the schools and the workplace.

An important aspect of the modern Klan is the use of publicity to favor the organization. A special edition of the magazine Southern Exposure in the summer of 1980, which was devoted in its entirety to discussing the new Klan movement, is quoted as saying that

there is nothing new about the economic frustrations, racial tension and crude anti-Semitism that contributes to the growth of the Klan, nor is there anything new about the message of the Klan in the 1980's: racial hatred. What is new and frightening is that this message is being delivered by Klan leaders who are becoming expert at generating publicity and manipulating the media. [160]

These new Klan leaders were often charismatic, influential

speakers who knew how to charm an audience and stun the press. The most public of these leaders was, and perhaps still is, David Duke of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Duke was described as being a "new image behind the old hood". [161] He was a polished media personality who preached a doctrine of "white rights." He was not

the archetypal Redneck that the mass media portrayed as a Klansmen. He wore a three-piece suit, was college educated, and an articulate proponent of his views. Duke learned how to use the media to promote his Klan...Most talk show hosts were completely unable and unprepared to successfully counter Duke's smooth presentation of neo-nazism. [162]

The Klan of the 1980's was indeed taking on a new side. Klansmen could infiltrate the home of receptive white Americans by appearing on national television or by sending pamphlets through the mail. Wilkinson's Invisible Empire made the evening news in July 1980 by publicly announcing their endorsement of Ronald Reagan for the presidency, saying that the Republican platform read as if it "were written by a Klansmen". [163] The tension that this endorsement created in the presidential race kept the Klan in the spotlight for two months. Jimmy Carter, who was president at the time and campaigning for re-election, said in September 1980 that he admired Reagan for "rejecting the Klan endorsement". [164] Although the Ku Klux Klan of the 1980's was not a strong

political influence, it did establish itself as a public movement. The manipulation of mass media was a new tool that allowed the Klan greater access to both members and the American public at large.

Having gained admittance to the lives of thousands of Americans, the organizations focused on specific groups who seemed most open to Klan ideas. The first of these groups was the family. Klan leaders sponsored affiliated units for women and children, and urged men to join with their families. Wilkinson and Duke even went so far as to sponsor programs for Klan children, such as the Klan Youth Corps and Klan Youth summer camps. [165] The second group targeted by the Klan was young men. "Current Klan and Nazi organization drives concentrate[d] in high schools and the armed forces," where young white men were considered more vulnerable and more perceptive to neo-nazi ideas. [166] Membership drives in these two groups proved to be quite successful. From its first attempts at resurgence in 1975 the Klan grew from approximately 6,500 members to between 9,700 - 11,500 at its peak in 1981. [167] The klansman also had a new counterpart, called the Klan-sympathizer. A Klan-sympathizer was not an official member of the Klan, but contributed money or bought publications in order to show support for Klan ideas. "Most authorities consider a ratio of ten sympathizers for every

Klan member a close approximation". [168] The Ku Klux Klan had found the perfect niche to exploit, and did so quite thoroughly in the 1980's.

The history of the Klan in the 1980's, which often overlaps that of far-right groups, is both short and seemingly perpetual. From 1979 to the end of 1985 at least fifty people were killed because of right-wing extremism in America, including eight neo-nazi activists. This string of violence can be attributed to both the Klan and its neo-nazi counterparts. The Klan at this time was split into three national organizations: the United Klans of America under Robert Shelton based in Tuscaloosa, Alabama; the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan under Bill Wilkinson in Shelton, Connecticut; and the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan under David Duke in Metairie, Louisiana. [169] The dominant far-right (or nazi-right) organizations were the Aryan Nations in northern Idaho under Richard Girnt Butler; the Posse Comitatus established by Gordon Kahl in North Dakota; the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord (CSA) coordinated by Jim Ellison at a compound along the Missouri-Arkansas border; The Order (also known as the Klan-Nazi Underground or the Silent Brotherhood) organized by Robert Mathews as an underground terrorist group in Idaho; the National Alliance of Dr. William Pierce created for much the

same reason; and an offshoot of The Order called Bruder Schweigen (or The Silent Brotherhood Strike Force II). [170] Many of the names associated with one of the above organizations are also commonly heard in reference to others. The leadership of many of these groups has changed hands several times since the beginning of the 1980's. Although the fourth peak of Klan activity lasted roughly six years, the organizations involved in the peak have acquired a seemingly perpetual nature because many of them have survived a severe decrease in membership. Some are struggling with few members or have gone underground, others await the release of their leaders from prison, but almost all remain active.

Influenced by the nazi-right, the Ku Klux Klan tended to turn away from the forms of individual violence that were used by Klans before the 1980's. Instead of lynchings, night-rides and house-bombings, some of the main activities of the 1980's Klan became conspiracy against and opposition to the government. Common practices included refusing to pay taxes, running guns, laundering money and conspiring to overthrow federal governments (both inside and outside of the United States.) Many Klan and neo-nazi organizations based their rights to do these things on the principle of Christian Patriotism and the religion of the Identity Movement.

In following Christian Patriotism, klansmen and neo-nazis believe that law and morality are defined in the "organic Constitution" (the original Articles of the Constitution and the original Bill of Rights) and the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible.) Christian Patriots (klansmen and neo-nazis) felt no obligation to any legal statute that contradicted these sources of law and morality, and they will use any means necessary to uphold God's will as stated in these sources. Therefore, activities of Christian Patriots reflected those common to revolt. Christian patriots felt that they were indeed involved in a revolution, which was aimed against a foe they label as "ZOG", or the Zionist Occupation Government. ZOG was believed to be "an international Jewish conspiracy" that was in control of the American government, as well as most governments around the world. [171] Many klansmen and neo-nazis, who honestly accept the existence of ZOG, find their actions to be in accordance with the teachings of Christian Patriotism.

The religious foundations for klansmen and neo-nazi actions can be found in the theological approach of the Identity Movement. The Identity Movement can be linked to the British-Israelism movement that dates to the nineteenth century. British-Israelism taught that due to a series of

migrations the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel became Northern Europeans. Thus, the "'ten lost tribes of Israel,' far from having vanished, were the progenitors of British peoples".

[172] Following this reasoning, British-Israelist writers implied that Anglo-Saxons, not the Jews, are the true chosen people of God. Accepting this vision as being true, the Identity Movement in America "offers theological rationalization for racial and religious bigotry". [173] They consider Anglo-Saxons to be the only race that can trace their ancestry back to Adam. The Identity Movement teaches that

the creation of the Jews is directly linked to the Sin in the Garden. Original Sin consisted in the copulation of Eve with Satan, from which came Cain, the ancestor of the Jews...All other races had separate, earlier origins and cannot trace their lineages to Adam. Blacks...were part of Lucifer's rebellion against God, serving as troops transported to earth 'from other planets in the Milky Way.' These inferior races had lived on earth for millions of years before 'Aryans' were first planted by God in the Garden of Eden. [174]

Because of their obvious belief in their superiority to other races, followers of the Identity Movement view the traditional battle of Armageddon as being a "confrontation between Jews, non-whites and the 'Adamic race' of Aryans". [175] The significance of the Identity Movement is in the theological basis that it gives for the white supremacy

theories of klansmen and neo-nazis.

Klansmen and neo-nazis that followed Christian Patriotism and the Identity Movement in the 1980's tended to be more militant than other such organizations. In fact, these organizations were often characterized by paramilitarism. The Texas group of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (originally under David Duke) was headed by Louis Beam, who had also instituted a paramilitary unit known as the Texas Emergency Reserves which was described as having "the greatest potential for violence of any [such group] in the country". [176] Beam worked closely with Bob Miles, of both the Michigan Klan and the Aryan Nations, and Robert Mathews, of the Aryan Nations and the CSA, in establishing an armed underground united Klan-Nazi group, which is sometimes referred to as The Order, the Klan-Nazi Underground or The Silent Brotherhood. Beam created a point system by which important targets of the military underground could be rated. "The most points go for hitting people of influence, rather than the indiscriminate terror against Black people that is common to other Klan groups. [177] Along with Richard Butler of the Aryan Nations, Beam and Miles managed to isolate their underground group from mainstream America. They established a twenty acre compound in Idaho for the use of The Order. Their compound was much like the ninety acre compound on the

Missouri-Arkansas border that belonged to the CSA. Such compounds were created specifically for military training, with the assumption that "normal economic functions should be carried out as much as possible within self-sufficient economies of Klansmen and other neo-nazis". [178] These Klan groups attempted to seize power through the use of violence. The doctrines of Christian Patriotism and the Identity Movement made them believe that they could.

The violent actions of Klan groups in the 1980's ultimately resulted in the decline of the fourth resurgence of Klan activity. The most militant, such as The Order and the CSA, were the organizations that suffered the hardest fall. The Order established a counterfeiting operation in order to fund paramilitary training, the stockpiling of weapons and the expenses involved in other criminal activities. In April 1984 members of The Order robbed an armored car in Seattle, and in July 1984 robbed a Brinks armored truck in California (netting approximately \$4 million which was supposedly handed out in part to other Klan-Nazi groups.) [179] On June 18, 1984 The Order was involved in the murder of Jewish radio personality Alan Berg. [180] The murder of a Missouri state trooper and the bombing of a Jewish synagogue in Idaho are also attributed to The Order. The organization was involved in a "seditious conspiracy between July, 1983 and March 1985 to overthrow the

U.S. government." [181] Most members of The Order are still serving rather lengthy prison sentences. The CSA has its own list of criminal activities, which includes the firebombing of an Indiana synagogue, the arson of a Michigan church, the attempted bombing of a natural gas pipeline in Missouri, conspiracy to kill Judge H. Franklin Waters and FBI agent Jack Knox, and possession of an arsenal deadly weapons and a 30-gallon drum of cyanide. [182] Several CSA members, including the former leader Jim Ellison and former spokesman Kerry Noble, are currently incarcerated as well. The case may be made that "it was the very weakness of the hate groups that led some of their most extreme adherents, out of desperation and impatience, to resort to the gun and the bomb. [183] By relying upon violence to acquire the power which they sought, many units of the hate movement brought about their own demise during the 1980's.

Other Klan groups suffered a similar fate because they were forced to take responsibility for the actions of their members. The most significant case is that of the UKA and to the 1981 murder of the black teenager Michael Donald in Mobile, Alabama. In 1987 the UKA was ordered to pay \$7 million in retribution for Donald's murder, which was carried out by several UKA members. The suit, filed by the boy's family, argued that under "the theory of agency...the

group had liability for the action of its members in much the same way a company has responsibility for the action of its employees. [184] The lawsuit crippled the UKA, but was much more stinging to Klan and neo-nazi organizations on the whole, because it established a precedent whereby an organization can in fact be held responsible for racist violence committed by individual members.

The Klan of the 1980's suffered a decline in membership and activity because of a factor common to the three prior Klan resurgences, namely its own violent actions. The Klan-Nazi pattern of lawlessness again led to a government crackdown, because of "their capacity and willingness to commit murder and mayhem". [185] By 1987 eighteen states had enacted legislation providing for criminal penalties "for those convicted of weapons training to promote civil disorder". [186] Thirty-one states enacted stricter laws for dealing with religious and racial vandalism. [187] In September 1986 the Defense Department issued a command to field officers on U.S. military bases calling for a halt of all activities sponsored by racist groups, "including fund-raising, public demonstrations, recruiting and training members". [188] By the end of 1984 Klan membership was down to about 6,500, and that number steadily dropped to about 5,000 by 1987. [189]

The fourth revival of the Ku Klux Klan, characterized by Klan-Nazi overlap, was a resurgence of many small racist organizations. Driven by the white supremacy doctrine of Christian Patriotism and the Identity Movement, these organizations tended to rely upon group violence in attempts to rectify what they perceived to be the greatest threats to the white race, namely racial and religious movements. As is common to the history of the Klan, the use of violence resulted in increased surveillance of Klan activity by the U.S. government. Government pressures and indictments ultimately led to disengagement of many of the organizations. But, even today, many members await the release of their leaders from jail. The decline of the 1980's Klan may not be the last that is seen of the Klan.

An important aspect of the decline of the 1980's Klan is the loss of public support. Once incorporated into neo-nazi organizations, klan units became isolated from mainstream America. The only Klan groups that remained popular with the common white population were those organizations in the Deep South. Klan groups in the South, while certainly violent, were not as extremist in nature as those Klan units associated with neo-nazis. The radical and blatantly violent extremist groups made the American public view all Klan organizations as extremist freaks. As usual, without

public backing the Klan could not survive. The Klan of the 1980's came to a grinding halt, much like the highly visible Klans that had risen and fallen before it.

Conclusion

Although commonly considered a southern organization, and often standardized as such, the Ku Klux Klan has proven to be both an activist and reactivist group that frequently crosses the boundaries of conventional stereotypes. The seemingly innocent club of six Civil War veterans, with its secrecy and mysticism, gave many white Americans, from very different time periods, an outlet for their frustrations. These pressures, sparked from social, economic and political spheres, were oftentimes more than the white American population could handle. As a result of these influences, white Americans often targeted ethnic and religious groups as the instigators of trouble. For many klansman, blacks, Jews, Catholics and foreigners unwillingly acted as the scapegoat for the problems in American society.

The Ku Klux Klan grew and adapted to fit both the time periods and the forces with which it was faced. Unfortunately, in each era, the Klan reacted to these perceived threats with increased violence. Klan terror shifted from the individual forms of whipping and lynching in the 1870's and 1920's, to the more impersonal forms of bombing and arson in the 1960's and 1980's. The taking of

human life has been a defining characteristic of the Klan since the origins of Klan violence in the Reconstruction era. This characteristic of the Klan is the one that has ultimately resulted in each decline of the organization's activity and visibility.

As the protector of white rights and the defender of the white American spirit, the Klan always attracted high numbers of receptive white Americans. The multitude of Klan violence often did not sit well with the majority of these people, however. The Klan's use of blatant violence resulted in official investigation, humiliating press and the incarceration of many highly visible Klan leaders. As social, economic and political tensions subsided, the white American population's need for a champion also dwindled. Without this need, and with the unsettling reports of Klan atrocities, whites turned away from the Klan in vast numbers. The violent nature of the Ku Klux Klan ultimately decreased the membership, slackened the activity and deteriorated the visibility of the organization.

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