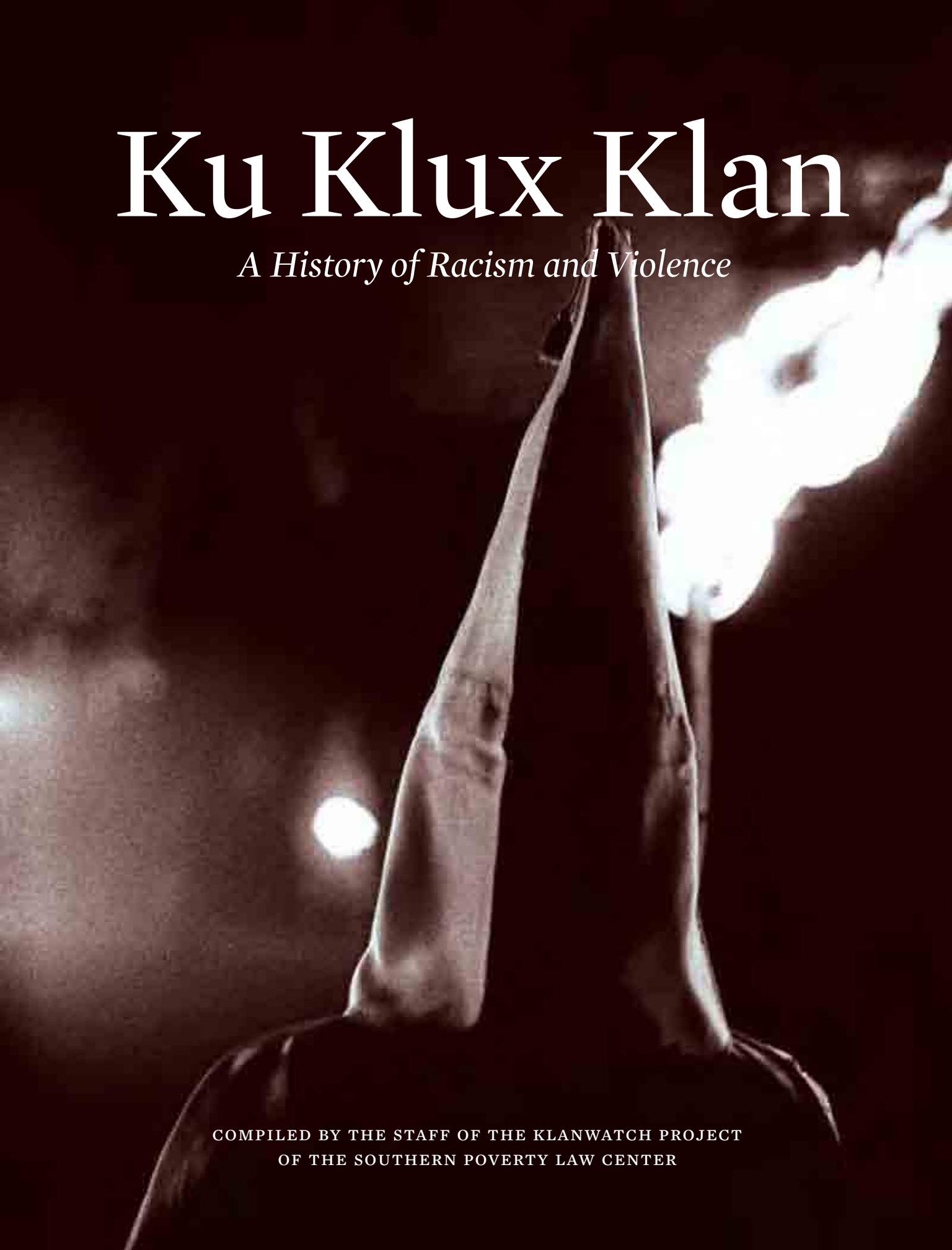
Ku Klux Klan

A History of Racism and Violence



COMPILED BY THE STAFF OF THE KLANWATCH PROJECT
OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

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SIXTH EDITION

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A History of Racism and Violence

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EDITED BY RICHARD BAUDOUIN
GRAPHIC DESIGN BY RUSSELL ESTES
COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY ED ECKSTEIN/CORBIS

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PREFACE

WHY STUDY THE KLAN?

BY JULIAN BOND

This is a history of hate in America — not the natural discord that characterizes a democracy, but the wild, irrational, killing hate that has led men and women throughout our history to extremes of violence against others simply because of their race, nationality, religion or lifestyle.

Since 1865, the Ku Klux Klan has provided a vehicle for this kind of hatred in America, and its members have been responsible for atrocities that are difficult for most people to even imagine. Today, while the traditional Klan has declined, there are many other groups which go by a variety of names and symbols and are at least as dangerous as the KKK.

Some of them are teenagers who shave their heads and wear swastika tattoos and call themselves Skinheads; some of them are young men who wear camouflage fatigues and practice guerrilla warfare tactics; some of them are conservatively dressed professionals who publish journals filled with their bizarre beliefs — ideas which range from denying that the Nazi Holocaust ever happened to the contention that the U.S. federal government is an illegal body and that all governing power should rest with county sheriffs.

Despite their peculiarities, they all share the deep-seated hatred and resentment that has given life to the Klan and terrorized minorities and Jews in this country for more than a century.

The Klan itself has had three periods of significant strength in American history — in the late 19th century, in the 1920s, and during the 1950s and early 1960s when the civil rights movement was at its height. The Klan had a resurgence again in the 1970s, but did not reach its past level of influence. Since then, the Klan has become just one element in a much broader spectrum of white supremacist activity.

It's important to understand, however, that violent prejudice is not limited to the Ku Klux Klan or any other white supremacist organization. Every year, murders, arsons, bombings and assaults are committed by people who have no ties to an organized group, but who share their extreme hatred.

I learned the importance of history at an early age — my father, the late Horace Mann Bond, taught at several black colleges and universities. He showed me that knowing the past is critical to making sense of the present. The historical essays in this magazine explain the roots of racism and prejudice which sustain the Ku Klux Klan.

PENNY WEAVER

As a founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Julian Bond was highly active during the Civil Rights Movement.

STEVE SCHAPIRO/CORBIS

As for current events, that was an even easier lesson for me because I grew up in the racially torn years of the 1950s. As a young civil rights activist working alongside John Lewis, Andrew Young, the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others, I saw the Ku Klux Klan as an all-too visible power in many of the places we went to organize voter registration and protest segregation.

We knew what the Klan was, and often we had a pretty good idea of who its members were. We also knew what Klansmen would do to us if they could get away with it.

For many years the KKK quite literally could get away with murder. The Ku Klux Klan was an instrument of fear, and black people, Jews and even white civil rights workers knew that the fear was intended to control us, to keep things as they had been in the South through slavery, and after that ended, through Jim Crow. This fear of the Klan was very real because, for a long time, the Klan had the power of Southern society on its side.

But in time that changed. It is a tribute to our laws that the Klan gradually was unmasked and its illegal activities checked.

Now, of course, I turn on my television set and see people in Klan robes or military uniforms again handing out hate literature on the town square. I read in my newspaper of crosses again burned in folks' yards, and it seems as if we are back in the Sixties.

Some say the Klan today should just be ignored. Frankly, I'd like to do that. I'm tired of wasting my time on the KKK. I have better things to do.

But history won't let me ignore current events. Those who would use violence to deny others their rights can't be ignored. The law must be exercised to stay strong. And even racists can learn to respect the law.

That's why this special report was prepared — to show the background of the KKK and its battle with the law, and to point out the current reasons why hate groups can't be ignored. This hate society was America's first terrorist organization. As we prepare for the 21st Century, we need to prepare for the continued presence of the Klan. Unfortunately, malice and bigotry aren't limited by dates on a calendar.

This report was produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center's Klanwatch Project. The SPLC is a private, nonprofit, public interest organization located in Montgomery, Alabama. It established Klanwatch in 1981 to monitor white supremacist activities throughout the United States. Together, SPLC attorneys and Klanwatch investigators have won a number of major legal battles against Klan members for crimes they committed.

This is not a pretty part of American history — some of the things you read here will make you angry or ashamed; some will turn your stomach. But it is important that we try to understand the villains as well as the heroes in our midst, if we are to continue building a nation where equality and democracy are preserved.

JULIAN BOND IS A HISTORY PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA AND A DISTINGUISHED ADJUNCT PROFESSOR AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY.

GETTY IMAGES

Two early members of the Ku Klux Klan are pictured in their disguises.

PART ONE

THE TERROR IS BORN

THE FOUNDING OF THE KU KLUX KLAN

The bare facts about the birth of the Ku Klux Klan and its revival half a century later are baffling to most people today. Little more than a year after it was founded, the secret society thundered across the war-torn South, sabotaging Reconstruction governments and imposing a reign of terror and violence

that lasted three or four years. And then as rapidly as it had spread, the Klan faded into the history books. After World War I, a new version of the Klan sputtered to life and within a few years brought many parts of the nation under its paralyzing grip of racism and blood shed. Then, having grown to be a major force for the second time, the Klan again receded into the background. This time it never quite disappeared, but it never again commanded such widespread support.

Today, it seems incredible that an organization so violent, so opposed to the American principles of justice and equality, could twice in the nation's history have held such power. How did the Ku Klux Klan — one of the nation's first terrorist groups — so instantly seize the South in the aftermath of the Civil War? Why did it so quickly vanish? How could it have risen so rapidly to power in the 1920s and then so rapidly have lost that power? And why is this ghost of the Civil War still haunting America today with hatred, violence and sometimes death for its enemies and its own members?

Frontier Justice

The answers do not lie on the surface of American history. They are deeper than the events of the turbulent 1960s, the parades and cross burnings and lynchings of the 1920s, beyond even the Reconstruction era and the Civil War. The story begins, really, on the frontier, where successive generations of Americans learned hard lessons about survival. Those lessons produced some of the qualities of life for which the nation is most admired — fierce individualism, enterprising inventiveness, and the freedom to be whatever a person wants and to go wherever a new road leads.

But the frontier spirit included other traits as well, and one was a stubborn insistence on the prerogative of "frontier justice" — an instant, private, very personal and often violent method of settling differences without involving lawyers or courts. As the frontier was tamed and churches, schools and courthouses replaced log trading posts, settlers substituted law and order for the older brand of private justice. But there were always those who did not accept the change. The quest for personal justice or revenge became a key motivation for many who later rode with the Ku Klux Klan, especially among those who were poor and uneducated.

Night Patrols

A more obvious explanation of the South's widespread acceptance of the Klan is found in the

institution of slavery. Freedom for slaves represented for many white Southerners a bitter defeat — a defeat not only of their armies in the field but of their economic and social way of life. It was an age-old nightmare come true, for early in Southern life whites in general and plantation owners in particular had begun to view the large number of slaves living among them as a potential threat to their property and their lives.

A series of bloody slave revolts in Virginia and other parts of the South resulted in the widespread practice of authorized night patrols composed of white men specially deputized for that purpose. White Southerners looked upon these night patrols as a civic duty, something akin to serving on a jury or in the militia. The mounted patrols, or regulators, as they were called, prowled Southern roads, enforcing the curfew for slaves, looking for runaways, and guarding rural areas against the threat of black uprisings. They were authorized by law to give a specific number of lashes to any violators they caught. The memory of these legal night riders and their whips was still fresh in the minds of both defeated Southerners and liberated blacks when the first Klansmen took to those same roads in 1866.

Aftermath of War

An even more immediate impetus for the Ku Klux Klan was the Civil War itself and the Reconstruction that followed. When robed Klansmen were at their peak of power, alarmed Northerners justifiably saw in the Klan an attempt of unrepentant Confederates to win through terrorism what they had been unable to win on the battlefield. Such a simple view did not totally explain the Klan's sway over the South, but there is little doubt that many a Confederate veteran exchanged his rebel gray for the hoods and sheets of the Invisible Empire.

Finally, and most importantly, there were the conditions Southerners were faced with immediately after the war. Their cities, plantations and farms were ruined; they were impoverished and often hungry; there was an occupation army in their midst; and Reconstruction governments threatened to usurp the traditional white ruling authority. In the first few months after the fighting

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Lynchings were a common form of vigilante justice during the 19th century.

The Unusual Origins of the Klan

The origin of the Ku Klux Klan was a carefully guarded secret for years, although there were many theories to explain its beginnings. One popular notion held that the Ku Klux Klan was originally a secret order of Chinese opium smugglers. Another claimed it was begun by Confederate prisoners during the war. The most ridiculous theory attributed the name to some ancient Jewish document referring to the Hebrews enslaved by the Egyptian Pharaohs.

A Klansman's costume from the late 19th century

In fact, the beginning of the Klan involved nothing so sinister, subversive or ancient as the theories supposed. It was the boredom of small-town life that led six young Confederate veterans to gather around a fireplace one December evening in 1865 and form a social club. The place was Pulaski, Tenn., near the Alabama border. When they reassembled a week later, the six young men were full of ideas for their new society. It would be secret, to heighten the amusement of the thing, and the titles for the various offices were to have names as preposterous-sounding as possible, partly for the fun of it and partly to avoid any military or political implications.

Thus the head of the group was called the Grand Cyclops. His assistant was the Grand Magi. There was to be a Grand Turk to greet all candidates for admission, a Grand Scribe to act as secretary, Night Hawks for messengers and a Lictor to be the guard. The members, when the six young men found some to join, would be called Ghouls. But what to name the society itself?

The founders were determined to come up with something unusual and mysterious. Being well-educated, they turned to the Greek language. After tossing around a number of ideas, Richard R. Reed suggested the word "kuklos," from which the English words "circle" and "cycle" are derived. Another member, Capt. John B. Kennedy, had an ear for alliteration and added the word ""clan." After tinkering with the sound for a while they settled on Ku Klux Klan. The selection of the name, chance though it was, had a great deal to do with the Klan's early success. Something about the sound aroused curiosity and gave the fledgling club an immediate air of mystery, as did the initials K.K.K., which were soon to take on such terrifying significance.

Soon after the founders named the Klan, they decided to do a bit of showing off, and so disguised themselves in sheets and galloped their horses through the quiet streets of tiny Pulaski. Their ride created such a stir that the men decided to adopt the sheets as the official regalia of the Ku Klux Klan, and they added to the effect by donning grotesque masks and tall pointed hats. They also performed elaborate initiation ceremonies for new members. Similar to the hazing popular in college fraternities, the ceremony consisted of blindfolding the candidate, subjecting him to a series of silly oaths and rough handling, and finally bringing him before a "royal altar" where he was to be invested with a "royal crown." The altar turned out to be a mirror and the crown two large donkey's ears. Ridiculous though it sounds today, that was the high point of the earliest activities of the Ku Klux Klan.

Had that been all there was to the Ku Klux Klan, it probably would have disappeared as quietly as it was born. But at some point in early 1866, the club added new members from nearby towns and began to have a chilling effect on local blacks. The intimidating night rides were soon the centerpiece of the hooded order: bands of white-sheeted ghouls paid late night visits to black homes, admonishing the terrified occupants to behave themselves and threatening more visits if they didn't. It didn't take long for the threats to be converted into violence against blacks who insisted on exercising their new rights and freedom. Before its six founders realized what had happened, the Ku Klux Klan had become something they may not have originally intended — something deadly serious.

BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

Klansmen were caught trying to lynch a carpetbagger in 1871.

GETTY IMAGES

ended, white Southerners had to contend with the losses of life, property and, in their eyes, honor. The time was ripe for the Ku Klux Klan to ride.

Mischief Turns Malicious

Robert E. Lee's surrender was not fully nine months past when six young ex-Confederates met in a law office in December 1865 to form a secret club that they called the Ku Klux Klan. From that beginning in the little town of Pulaski, Tennessee, their club began to grow. Historians disagree on the intention of the six founders, but it is known that word quickly spread about a new organization whose members met in secret and rode with their faces hidden, who practiced elaborate rituals and initiation ceremonies.

Much of the Klan's early reputation may have been based on almost frivolous mischief and tomfoolery. At first, a favorite Klan tactic had been for a white-sheeted Klansman wearing a ghoulish mask to ride up to a black family's home at night and demand water. When the well bucket was offered, the Klansman would gulp it down and demand more, having actually poured the water through a rubber tube that flowed into a leather bottle concealed beneath his robe. After draining several buckets, the rider would exclaim that he had not had a drink since he died on the battlefield at Shiloh. He then galloped into the night, leaving the impression that ghosts of Confederate dead were riding the countryside.

The presence of armed white men roving the countryside at night reminded many blacks of the pre-war slave patrols. The fact that Klansmen rode with their faces covered intensified blacks' suspicion and fear. In time, the mischief turned to violence. Whippings were used first, but within months there were bloody clashes between Klansmen and blacks, Northerners who had come South, or Southern unionists. From the start, however, there was also a sinister side to the Klan.

Black Codes

By the time the six Klan founders met in December 1865, the opening phase of Reconstruction was

The Terror of the Nightrider

The scholar Gladys-Marie Fry, who writes about slave patrols in her book, *Night Riders in Black Folk History* (University of Tennessee Press, 1977), believes it was no accident that the early Klansmen chose white sheets for their costumes. The following story was told to her by a black resident of Washington, D.C., who heard the story from his ex- slave ancestors:

The Klan's costumes were supernatural in appearance.

"Back in those days they had little log cabins built around in a circle, around for the slaves. And the log cabins, they dabbed between two logs, they dabbed it with some mortar. And of course when that fall out, you could look out and see. But every, most every night along about eight or nine o'clock, this overseer would get on his white horse and put a sheet over him, and put tin cans to a rope and drag it around. And they told all the slaves, 'Now if you poke your head out doors after a certain time, monster of a ghost will get you.' They peeped through and see that and never go out. They didn't have to have any guards."

Fry said such disguises meant to scare slaves were common and that the first Klansmen, knowing this, naturally chose similar uniforms, often embellishing them with fake horns and paint around the lips and eyes.

Relying heavily on the oral testimony of contemporary blacks whose parents or grandparents were slaves, Fry concludes that many slaves were superstitious, with real fears of ghosts, "haints," and the supernatural. But she said most slaves knew when white slave owners and patrollers were trying to fool them. One ex-slave told a Federal Writer's Project interviewer during the 1930s, "Ha! ha! dey jest talked 'bout ghosts till I could hardly sleep at night, but the biggest thing in ghosts is somebody 'guised up tryin' to skeer you. Ain't no sich thing as ghosts." Another former slave reported, "Dey ghost dere — we seed 'em. Dey's w'ite people wid a sheet on 'em to scare de slaves offen de plantation."

According to Fry's research, slaves may have been frightened by the slave patrols, but they were far from defenseless. A common trick of the patrollers was to dress in black except for white boots and a white hat, which did make a ghostly sight when a group of them were riding along on a dark night. On one such occasion, however, slaves stretched grapevines across the road at just the right height to strike a rider on horseback. The slave patrol came galloping along and hit the grapevines; three patrollers were killed and several others injured. There were no more mounted slave patrols for a long time afterwards in that county.

After the Civil War, when the Ku Klux Klan served the same purpose of controlling blacks as the slave patrols had, many whites (and later historians) mistook the surface behavior of blacks for their genuine feelings. For blacks, Fry says, "Appearing to believe what whites wanted them to believe was a part of wearing the mask and playing the game ... In another instance, on ex-slave who heard rumors of strange riders in his neighborhood went to his former master for information. The master told him, 'There are Ku Klux here; are you afraid they will get among you?' The black said, 'What sort of men are they?' The reply: 'They are men who rise from the dead.' According to the Congressional committee's report, this informant gave the matter considerable thought and rejected it. In his own words: 'I studied about it, but I did not believe it.' "

Fry continues, "It is significant that the early Klan made such great efforts to frighten and terrorize blacks through supernatural means. The whole rationale for psychological control based on a fear of the supernatural was that whites were sure that they knew black people. They were not only firmly convinced that black people were gullible and would literally believe anything, but they were equally sure that blacks were an extremely superstitious people who had a fantastic belief in the supernatural interwoven into their life, folklore, and religion.

"Such thinking had obvious flaws: the underestimation of black intelligence and the overvaluation of existing superstitious beliefs. Blacks were frightened, no doubt, but not of ghosts. They were terrified of living, well-armed men who were extremely capable of making black people ghosts before their time."

STEFANO BIANCHETTI/CORBIS

nearly complete. All 11 of the former rebel states had been rebuilt on astonishingly lenient terms which allowed many of the ex-Confederate leaders to return to positions of power. Southern state legislatures began enacting laws that made it clear that the aristocrats who ran them intended to yield none of their pre-war power and dominance over poor whites and especially over blacks. These laws became known as the Black Codes and in some cases amounted to a virtual re-enslavement of blacks.

In Louisiana, the Democratic convention resolved that "we hold this to be a Government of White People, made and to be perpetuated for the exclusive benefit of the White Race, and ... that the people of African descent cannot be considered as citizens of the United States." Mississippi and Florida, in particular, enacted vicious Black Codes, other Southern states (except North Carolina) passed somewhat less severe versions, and President Andrew Johnson did nothing to prevent them from being enforced.

These laws and the hostility and violence that erupted against blacks and Union supporters in the South outraged Northerners who just a few months before had celebrated victory, not only over the Confederacy but its system of slavery as well. In protest of the defiant Black Codes, Congress refused to seat the new Southern senators and representatives when it reconvened in December 1865 after a long recess. At the moment the fledgling Klan was born in Pulaski, the stage was set for a showdown between Northerners determined not to be cheated out of the fruits of their victory and die-hard Southerners who refused to give up their supremacy over blacks.

Ironically, the increasingly violent activities of the Klan throughout 1866 helped prove the argument of Radical Republicans in the North, who wanted harsher measures taken against Southern governments as part of their program to force equal treatment for blacks. Partly as a result of news reports of Klan violence in the South, the Radicals won overwhelming victories in the Congressional elections of 1866. In early 1867, they made a fresh start at Reconstruction. In March 1867, Congress overrode President Johnson's veto and passed the Reconstruction Acts, which abolished the ex-Confederate state governments and divided 10 of the 11 former rebel states into military districts. The military governors of these districts were charged with enrolling black voters and holding elections for new constitutional conventions in each of the 10 states, which led to the creation of the Radical Reconstruction Southern governments.

Despite the efforts made during Reconstruction, Southern whites re-imposed a racist regime almost immediately after the Civil War.

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Ghost Riders

In April 1867, a call went out for all known Ku Klux Klan chapters or dens to send representatives to Nashville, Tenn., for a meeting that would plan, among other things, the Klan response to the new federal Reconstruction policy.

Throughout the summer and fall, the Klan had steadily become more violent. Thousands of the white citizens of west Tennessee, northern Alabama and part of Georgia and Mississippi had by this time joined the Klan. Many now viewed the escalating violence with growing alarm — not necessarily because they had sympathy for the victims, but because the night riding was getting out of their control. Anyone could put on a sheet and a mask and ride into the night to commit assault, robbery, rape, arson or murder. The Klan was increasingly used as a cover for common crime or for personal revenge.

The Klan's Version of History

Few eras of United States history are as entangled in myth and legend as the period of 1865 to 1877, known as the Reconstruction. For the modern Klansman, this period of history is vitally important, and the retelling of the events of those days is a basic element of Klan propaganda.

The Klan version of Reconstruction goes like this: In the dark days immediately after the Civil War, Southerners were just beginning to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives when an evil and profit-minded coalition of Northern Radical Republicans, carpetbaggers and Southern scalawags threw out legitimate Southern governments at bayonet point and began installing illiterate blacks in state offices. Worse, the conspirators aroused mobs of savage blacks to attack defenseless whites while the South was helpless to do anything about it. The Radicals pulling the strings behind the scenes stole Southern state governments blind and sent them deeply into debt. After a few years of this, the Ku Klux Klan arose, drove out the carpetbaggers and Radicals and restored white Southerners to their rightful place in their own land.

The Klan was romanticized as the South's savior.

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Like all legends and myths, this particular scenario starts out with a few grains of truth, but winds up being a romanticized story, a version of history that white Southerners in the late 1800s wanted very badly to believe was true.

No events of this period illustrate the inaccuracy of the legend better than the race riots which occurred in Memphis and New Orleans in the first half of 1866. In both cases, white city police attacked groups of blacks without provocation and killed scores of men, women and children with the help of armed white mobs behind them. These were the worst incidents of white organized violence against blacks in that year, but by no means the only ones.

The next phase of the story concerns the Reconstruction governments that were installed in 1867 after Congress abolished the renegade governments formed by the ex-Confederate states immediately after the war. Some of these newly formed governments were indeed corrupt and incompetent, as white supremacists maintain. But historians who have studied these governments have found that often the greatest beneficiaries of the corruption were aristocratic white Southerners.

One historian summed up the radical governments this way: "Granting all their mistakes, the radical governments were by far the most democratic the South had ever known. They were the only governments in Southern history to extend to Negroes complete civil and political equality, and to try to protect them in the enjoyment of the rights they were granted." And when these governments were replaced by all-white conservative governments, most of these rights were stripped away from blacks and in some cases from poor whites as well.

The restoration of white government in the South was called "redemption," and although there are many historical reasons for the change, it was a development for which the Klan claimed credit, thereby placing the secret society in what it viewed as a heroic role in Southern history .

The Nashville Klan convention was called to grapple with these problems by creating a chain of command and deciding just what sort of organization the Klan would be. The meeting gave birth to the official philosophy of white supremacy as the fundamental creed of the Ku Klux Klan. Throughout the summer of 1867 the Invisible Empire changed, shedding the antics that had brought laughter during its parades and other public appearances, and instead taking on the full nature of a secret and powerful force with a sinister purpose.

All the now-familiar tactics of the Klan date from this period — the threats delivered to blacks, radicals and other enemies warning them to leave town; the night raids on individuals they singled out for rougher treatment; and the mass demonstrations of masked and robed Klansmen designed to cast their long shadow of fear over a troubled community.

Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest

By early 1868, stories about Klan activities were appearing in newspapers nationwide, and Reconstruction governors realized they faced nothing less than an insurrection by a terrorist organization. Orders went out from state capitols and Union army headquarters during the early months of 1868 to suppress the Klan.

Invisible Government

But it was too late. From middle Tennessee, the Klan quickly was established in nearby counties and then in North and South Carolina. In some counties the Klan became the de facto law, an invisible government that state officials could not control.

When Tennessee Governor William G. Brownlow attempted to plant spies within the Klan, he found the organization knew as much about his efforts as he did. One Brownlow spy who tried to join the Klan was found strung up in a tree, his feet just barely touching the ground. Later another spy was stripped and mutilated, and a third was stuffed in a barrel in Nashville and rolled down a wharf and into the Cumberland River, where he drowned.

With the tacit sympathy and support of most white citizens often behind it, the Klan worked behind a veil that was impossible for Brownlow and other Reconstruction governors to pierce. But even though a large majority of white Southerners opposed the Radical state governments, not all of them approved of the hooded order's brand of vigilante justice. During its first year, the Klan's public marches and parades were sometimes hooted and jeered at by townspeople who looked upon them as a joke. Later, when the Klan began to use guns and whips to make its point, some white newspaper editors, ministers and other civic leaders spoke out against the violence.

But in the late 1860s, white Southern voices against the Klan were in the minority. One of the Klan's greatest strengths during this period was the large number of editors, ministers, former Confederate officers and political leaders who hid behind its sheets and guided its actions. Among them, none was more widely respected in the South than the Klan's reputed leader, General Nathan Bedford Forrest, a legendary Confederate cavalry officer who settled in Tennessee and apparently joined the Klan fairly soon after it began to make a name for itself. Forrest became the Klan's first imperial wizard, and in 1867 and 1868 there is little doubt that he was its chief missionary, traveling over the South, establishing new chapters and quietly advising its new members.

The ugly side of the Ku Klux Klan, the mutilations and floggings, lynchings and shootings, began to spread across the South in 1868, and any words of caution that may have been expressed at the Nashville meeting were submerged beneath a stream of bloody deeds.

The KKK's First Death

As the violence escalated, it turned to general lawlessness, and some Klan groups even began fighting each other. In Nashville, a gang of outlaws who adopted the Klan disguise came to be known as the Black Ku Klux Klan. For several months middle

BETTMANN/CORBIS

Tennessee was plagued by a guerrilla war between the real and bogus Klans.

The Klan was also coming under increased attack by Congress and the Reconstruction state governments. The leaders of the Klan thus realized that the order's end was at hand, at least as any sort of organized force to serve their interests. It is widely believed that Forrest ordered the Klan disbanded in January 1869, but the surviving document is rather ambiguous. (Some historians think Forrest's "order" was just a trick so he could deny responsibility or knowledge of Klan atrocities.)

Whatever the actual date, it is clear that as an organized, cohesive body across the South, the Ku Klux Klan had ceased to exist by the end of 1869.

That did not end the violence, however, and as atrocities became more widespread, Radical legislatures throughout the region began to pass very restrictive laws, impose martial law in some Klan-dominated counties, and actively hunt Klan leaders. In 1871, Congress held hearings on the Klan and passed a harsh anti-Klan law modeled after a North Carolina statute. Under the new federal law, Southerners lost their jurisdiction over the crimes of assault, robbery and murder, and the president was authorized to declare martial law and suspend the writ of habeas corpus. Nightriding and the wearing of masks were expressly prohibited. Hundreds of Klansmen were arrested, but few actually went to prison.

The laws probably dampened the enthusiasm for the Ku Klux Klan, but they can hardly be credited with destroying the hooded order. By the mid 1870s, white Southerners didn't need the Klan as much as before because they had by that time retaken control of most Southern state governments. Klan terror had proven very effective at keeping black voters away from the polls. Some black officeholders were hanged and many more were brutally beaten. White Southern Democrats won elections easily and then passed laws taking away the rights blacks had won during Reconstruction.

The result was an official system of segregation which was the law of the land for more than 80 years. This system was called "separate but equal," which was half true — everything was separate, but nothing was equal.

Born Again

During the last half of the 19th century, memories of the Ku Klux Klan's brief grip on the South faded, and its bloody deeds were forgotten by many whites who were once in sympathy with its cause. On the national scene, two events served to set the stage for the Ku Klux Klan to be reborn early in the 20th century.

The first was massive immigration, bringing some 23 million people from Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Russia and a great cry of opposition from some Americans. The American Protective Association, organized in 1887, reflected the attitude of many Americans who believed that the nation was being swamped by alien people. This organization, a secret, oath-bound group, was especially strong in the Middle West, where the reborn Ku Klux Klan would later draw much of its strength.

The other major event which prepared the ground for the Klan's return was World War I, which had a wrenching, unsettling effect on the nation. On the European battlefields, white Americans again were exposed to unrestrained bloodshed while blacks served in the uniform of their country and saw open up before them a new world. Back at home, Americans learned suspicion, hatred and distrust of anything alien, a sentiment which led to the rejection of President Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations.

In the South, yet another series of events occurred which helped breathe life into the Klan several decades later. In the 1890s, an agrarian Populist movement tried to build a coalition of blacks and poor whites against the mill owners, large landholders and conservative elite of the Old South. The aristocracy responded with the old cry of white supremacy and the manipulation of black votes. As a result, the Populists were substantially turned back in every Deep South state except Georgia and North Carolina. A feeling spread across the South, shared by both the aristocracy and many poor whites, that blacks had to be frozen out of society.

The 1890s marked the beginning of efforts in the Deep South to deny political, social and economic power to blacks. Most segregation and disenfranchisement laws date from that period. It was also the beginning of a series of lynchings of blacks by white mobs. The combination of legalized racism and the constant threat of violence eventually led to a major black migration to Northern cities.

BETTMANN/CORBIS

William J. Simmons poses in his imperial wizard robe and mask.

PART TWO

THE INVISIBLE EMPIRE

KLAN POWER AT ITS PEAK

William J. Simmons, a Spanish war veteran-turned preacher-turned salesman, was a compulsive joiner who held memberships in a dozen different societies and two churches. But he had always dreamed of starting his own fraternal group, and in the fall of 1915 he put his plans into action.

On Thanksgiving eve, Simmons herded 15 fellow fraternalists onto a hired bus and drove them from Atlanta to nearby Stone Mountain. There, before a cross of pine boards, Simmons lit a match, and the Ku Klux Klan of the 20th century was born.

Although Simmons adopted the titles and regalia of the original version, his new creation at its outset had little similarity to the Reconstruction Klan. It was, in fact, little different from any of the dozens of other benevolent societies then popular in America. There is little doubt that Simmons' ultimate purpose in forming the group was to make money. But growth at first was slow, even after America entered World War I in 1917 and the Klan had a real "purpose" — that of defending the country from aliens, idlers and union leaders.

Then, in 1920 Simmons met Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler, two publicists who had formed a business in Atlanta. In June 1920, with the Klan's membership at only a few thousand, Simmons signed a contract with Clarke and Mrs. Tyler giving them 80 percent of the profits from the dues of the new members Simmons so eagerly sought. The new promoters used an aggressive new sales pitch — the Klan would be rabidly pro-American, which to them meant rabidly anti-black, anti-Jewish, and most importantly, anti-Catholic.

Simmons graphically illustrated the new approach when he was introduced to an audience of Georgia Klansmen and drew a Colt automatic pistol, a revolver and a cartridge belt from his coat and arranged them on the table before him. Plunging a Bowie knife into the table beside the guns, he issued an invitation: "Now let the Niggers, Catholics, Jews and all others who disdain my imperial wizardry, come out!"

Exploiting Fears

The message was clear — the new Klan was serious. That meant expanding its list of enemies to include Asians, immigrants, bootleggers, dope, graft, night clubs and road houses, violation of the Sabbath, sex, pre- and extra-marital escapades and scandalous behavior. The Klan, with its new mission of social vigilance, soon had organizers scouring the nation, probing for the fears of the communities they hit and then exploiting them to the hilt.

And the tactic was immediately a raging success. By the late summer of 1921, nearly 100,000 had enrolled in the Invisible Empire, and at $10 a head (tax-free since the Klan was a "benevolent" society), the profits were impressive.

While Simmons made speeches and tinkered with ritual, Clarke busied himself with expanding the treasury, launching Klan publishing and manufacturing firms and investing in real estate. The future looked very good.

But during that summer the Klan leaders in Atlanta ran into their first trouble — controlling their far-flung empire. While Klan officials talked of fraternal ideals in Atlanta, their members across the nation began to take seriously the fiery rhetoric the recruiters were using to drum up new initiation fees. Violence first flared in a rampage of whippings, tar-and-feathers raids and the use of acid to brand the letters "KKK" on the foreheads of blacks, Jews and others they considered anti-American. Ministers, sheriffs, policemen, mayors and judges either ignored the violence or secretly participated. Few Klansmen were arrested, much less convicted.

The Klan Exposed

In September 1921 the New York *World* began a series of articles on the Klan, backed up by the revelations of an ex-recruiter. Another newspaper reported some of the internal gossip and financial manipulations within the Atlanta headquarters. And even more embarrassing was a story in the *World* that Clarke and Mrs. Tyler had been arrested, not quite fully clothed, in a police raid on a bawdy house in 1919.

The article badly tarnished the Klan's moralistic image and precipitated a serious rift within the ranks. The *World* exposés also brought demands for countermeasures, and Congress responded in October 1921 with hearings into the Klan's activities. Although the Congressional inquiry so upset Clarke that he considered resigning, the actual hearings did little damage to the Klan. Simmons explained away the secrecy of the Klan as just part of the fraternal aspect of the organization. He disavowed any link between his Klan and the nightriders of Reconstruction days, and he denied — just as Forrest had done 50 years earlier — any knowledge of or responsibility for the violence. The committee adjourned without action, and the Klan benefited from all the publicity.

It almost seemed as if people in the rural areas of the country were determined to support

BETTMANN/CORBIS

The Klan was accepted as part of American life in the early 1920s.

When The Klan Ruled Oregon

Groups like the Klan can move into a community overnight. It isn't always the number of Klansmen involved that causes the most trouble, but the tactics they use and the response they meet. History warns against taking the Klan lightly, as demonstrated by events in Oregon in the 1920s.

Oregon in the spring of 1921 was as unlikely a potential Ku Klux Klan stronghold as any state in the nation. It was peaceful and quiet, its fine school system had virtually banished illiteracy, and no one was making fiery speeches about race (97 percent of the people were white) or immigrants (87 percent were native born).

Incredibly, within a year of the arrival of a single Klan salesman, Oregon was so firmly in the grasp of the hooded nightriders that the governor admitted they controlled the state. Just as amazing, by 1925 the people of Oregon had thrown off the Klan's shackles of hate and fear and the hooded order faded.

The Oregon chapter began when the Klan salesman, Luther Powell, arrived from California looking for new recruits. He sized up the state of affairs in Oregon and decided he would make the lax enforcement of prohibition his first issue. Anti-Catholicism would later prove more productive, but for Powell's first organizational meeting the Prohibition issue was good for 100 new Klansmen, including lots of policemen. Then his new Klan lynched a black who had been convicted of bootlegging.

Next, Klansmen ordered a salesman and a black man they disliked to leave the state. Crosses were burned on the hillsides around several towns, and an "escaped nun" was brought into the area to tell made-up horrors about the Catholic clergy. This was followed by the distribution of hate pamphlets in some churches to whip up the fears and suspicions of the people.

With this pattern established, the Klan began to spread. Its tactics included boycotts, recall campaigns against unfriendly officeholders, infiltration and takeover of churches, and division of every community it touched into two bitterly antagonistic camps. Politicians, ministers, newspaper editors and other civic leaders throughout the state said and did nothing. Within a year, Oregon's governor, Ben Olcott, told fellow governors at a meeting: "We woke up one morning and found the Klan had gained political control of our state. Practically not a word had been raised against them."

And in fact, a later study showed that at least as far as the press was concerned, Gov. Olcott was almost literally correct — hardly a word was raised against the spread of Klan intimidation. Despite what was happening all around them, Oregon's newspapers remained silent on the subject of the Ku Klux Klan, even to the extent of not printing news of national Klan events then making headlines across the country. Citizens of Oregon who relied on their newspapers to tell them what was happening in their communities would never have known the Klan seized control.

Thus, few people realized how few citizens actually belonged to the Klan in Oregon. When the governor admitted the Klan takeover, the hooded order had only about 14,000 members — about two percent of the state's population. The next year, the Klan's high-water mark was reached — 25,000 members.

The Klan's grand dragon in Oregon during its period of ascendancy was a railroad worker named Fred Gifford. He took over after the national organization's representatives in the state squabbled over initiation fees. He sought to dominate the entire state, helped in part by the utility companies, to which he was strongly tied.

The Ku Klux Klan's reign in Oregon turned out to be very short, however. Hungry for more power, Gifford began to make enemies within his own organization and throughout the state. A newspaper in Salem finally began printing hostile stories, exposing Klan activities and corrupt practices. Other papers followed suit and a number of ministers began attacking the Klan from their pulpits. By 1926, Gifford's power had so waned that in an effort to help a candidate for office, he publicly supported the man's opponent.

The rapid rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon illustrates what can happen to a community when its citizens pretend not to see or hear the hatred around them. There were many reasons for the rapid Klan triumph, but the silence of the state's leaders as the shadow spread over them was certainly a major factor. And the Klan's fall, although it too had many causes, was largely the product of the courage of the state's governor, its clergy, its newspapers and civic leaders who finally spoke out against the Klansmen.

Blacks were regularly lynched by white mobs.

whatever the big newspapers and Congress condemned. Following more articles in the World in October (these concentrating on the violent nature of the Klan), membership in the Invisible Empire exploded. "It wasn't until the newspapers began to attack the Klan that it really grew," Simmons recalled later. "Certain newspapers also aided us by inducing Congress to investigate us. The result was that Congress gave us the best advertising we ever got. Congress made us."

Power Struggle

With the Klan's new strength came prolonged internal bickering. In the fall of 1922, with Texas dentist Hiram Wesley Evans leading the way, six conspirators made plans to dethrone Simmons. Evans became imperial wizard, and in 1923 the conspirators saw a chance to grab permanent control of the Klan's property, worth millions by this time. When Clarke was indicted on a two-year-old morals charge, Evans was able to cancel the promoter's lucrative contract with the Klan and thus seize control of the money-making dues apparatus. Mrs. Tyler had already resigned to get married, so that left only Simmons, who became furious when he realized he had been out-maneuvered by Evans and his faction.

A full-scale war was fought between the Evans and Simmons factions with lawsuits and countersuits, warrants and injunctions, all gleefully reported in newspapers across the country. The fight spilled over into chapters in Texas and Pennsylvania and resulted in the shooting of Simmons' lawyer by Evans' chief publicity man. The power struggle ended in February 1924, when Simmons agreed to a cash settlement.

The Klan continued to grow during this period of internal strife, but its weaknesses were laid open for America to see. The Klan promoted itself as an organization dedicated to defending the morals of the nation, but there had been too many charges of immorality against its leaders. Its supposed nonprofit status was badly undermined by the wrangling over finances, and most of its vaunted secrecy was exposed in the reams of court documents churned out by the feuding.

More Violence

And its violence was clearly revealed. Under Evans, the Klan launched a campaign of terrorism in the early and mid-1920S, and many communities found themselves firmly in the grasp of the organization. Lynchings, shootings and whippings were the methods employed by the Klan. Blacks, Jews, Catholics, Mexicans and various immigrants were usually the victims.

But not infrequently, the Klan's targets were whites, Protestants and females who were considered "immoral" or "traitors" to their race or gender. In Alabama, for example, a divorcee with two children was flogged for the "crime" of remarrying and then given a jar of Vaseline for her wounds. In Georgia, a woman was given 60 lashes for a vague charge of "immorality and failure to go to church"; when her 15-year-old son ran to her rescue, he received the same treatment. In both cases, ministers led the Klansmen responsible for the violence.

But such instances were not confined to the South. In Oklahoma, Klansmen applied the lash to girls caught riding in automobiles with young men, and very early in the Klan revival, women were flogged and even tortured in the San Joaquin Valley of California.

In a period when many women were fighting for the vote, for a place in the job market and for personal and cultural freedom, the Klan claimed

GAMMA-KEYSTONE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Box Office Propaganda

Sooner or later just about every Klansman worthy of his robe sees the silent film classic *Birth of a Nation*, which is usually accompanied by a stirring narrative of the two hour and 45 minute saga. For those who believe in the legend of the Ku Klux Klan as the savior of the South during Reconstruction, the movie has always been one of the most powerful pieces of propaganda in the Klan's arsenal.

Released in 1915, *Birth of a Nation* was a cinematic masterpiece that set new standards for the fledgling film industry. The story it tells fits perfectly into the version of history the Klan preaches. The movie, based on a novel by North Carolina minister Thomas Dixon Jr., was the brainchild of a talented young director, D.W. Griffith. In an era of short, slapstick nickelodeon comedies, Griffith wanted to film a masterpiece that would tell the grand story of events leading up to the Civil War, the great conflict itself, and finally the tragedy and suffering of Reconstruction, complete with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan.

In making his epic, Griffith blended the almost magical appeal of the pre-war South, the heroics of the great Civil War battles and all the stereotypes and myths of Reconstruction with a skill that made the picture a sensation. The plot is a cotton-candy love story between a Southern colonel and the prison nurse who tended to him. The cast includes an evil Northern congressman, who wanted the South to be punished for the war; a brutish carpetbagger; loyal black family servants; a sex-crazed black rapist, and loutish, power-mad black Reconstruction legislators and soldiers.

The suspense builds until finally the demure sister of Ben Cameron, the Southern colonel, leaps to her death to avoid being raped by a lecherous black. With this outrage, the Ku Klux Klan enters the picture, riding the South Carolina Piedmont to rid the land of the scourge that had descended upon it. To audiences accustomed to nothing more than one-reel comedies and melodramas, the panoramic epic was a blockbuster.

The son of an ex-Confederate officer, Griffith viewed his material as nothing less than history on the screen, but the first showings of the movie provoked a storm of indignant protest in Northern cities. Thomas Dixon, the novel's author, effectively smoothed the way for widespread acceptance of the picture by cleverly arranging for a screening for his old classmate, President Woodrow Wilson, and the Cabinet and their families. Wilson emerged from the showing very moved by the film and called it "like writing history with lightning ... my only regret is that it is all so terribly true."

The movie went on to gross $18 million before it was retired to art theaters and film clubs. So powerful was the impact of the movie in 1915 that it is often credited with setting the stage for the Klan revival that same year. In fact, the man who actually created the 20th century Klan, William J. Simmons, was acutely aware of the promotional value of the film, and he used the publicity surrounding it to win recruits to his organization. Modern Klan leaders still use the movie as a recruiting gimmick and provide their own narration to the silent film.

Although the film is still regarded by critics as an early masterpiece for its direction and inventive uses of the camera, *Birth of a Nation* is so blatantly racist that it is rarely shown in public theaters today. Protest demonstrations frequently disrupt scheduled screenings. Now, only the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacists still claim any historical authenticity for the movie.

The Klan's use of the film is a good indication of how out-of-touch white supremacists are with the predominant American attitudes on race. The racial hatred exhibited in the movie, once acceptable, is now abhorrent to all but the Klan and the most extreme bigots.

GETTY IMAGES

to stand for "pure womanhood" and frequently attacked women who sought independence.

Political Gains

During the period of its most uncontrolled violence, the Klan also experienced unprecedented political gains. In 1922, Texas sent Klansman Earl Mayfield to the U.S. Senate, and Klan campaigns helped defeat two Jewish congressmen who had headed the Klan inquiry. Klan efforts were credited with helping to elect governors in 12 states in the early 1920s.

With two million members, new recruits joining the secret rolls daily, a host of friendly politicians throughout the land and his internal enemies subdued for the moment, Evans wanted to influence the presidential election of 1924. He even shifted his national headquarters from Atlanta to Washington. The Klan had a foothold in both parties since Deep South members tended to be Democrats while Klansmen in the North and West were often Republicans. But of the three major Presidential candidates, two were outspoken enemies of the Ku Klux Klan. And when the Democratic convention opened in New York, many Democrats were demanding the party adopt a platform plank condemning the Ku Klux Klan. The resulting fight tore the convention apart. After days of bitter wrangling over the issue, the platform plank denouncing the Klan lost by a single vote.

Although politicians became increasingly uncomfortable with Klan allies as a result of the turmoil, the success of the Klan candidates across the nation in 1924 buoyed Evans' spirits. His notoriety peaked with a parade of 40,000 Klansmen down Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue to the Washington Monument in August 1925. Evans boasted of having helped reelect Coolidge, of having secured passage of strict anti-immigration laws and of having checked the ambitions of Catholics and others intent on "perverting" the nation. The Klan was riding high.

Losing Ground

But the decline of the Ku Klux Klan was already well underway. By 1926, when Evans tried to repeat the parade in Washington, only half as many marchers arrived, and they were sobered by the news of political defeats in areas that a year before had been considered safe Klan strongholds.

Increasingly the Klan suffered counter attacks by the clergy, the press and a growing number of politicians. Then, in 1927, a group of rebellious Klansmen in Pennsylvania broke away from the Invisible Empire, and Evans promptly filed a $1OO,OOO damage suit against them, confident that he could make an example of the rebels. To his surprise, the Pennsylvania Klansmen fought back in the courts, and the resulting string of witnesses told of Klan horrors, terrorism and violence, named members and spilled secrets. Newspapers carried accounts of testimony ranging from the kidnapping of a small girl from her grandparents in Pittsburgh to a Colorado Klansman who was beaten when he tried to quit. One particularly horrible story described how a man in Terrell, Texas, had been soaked in oil and burned to death before several hundred Klansmen. The enraged judge threw Evans' case out of court.

The next year the Democrats nominated Al Smith — a New York Catholic and longtime Klan foe — for president against the Republicans' Herbert Hoover. The Ku Klux Klan had a perfect issue which Evans hoped to use to whip up the faithful. But his Invisible Empire had melted from three million in 1925 to no more than several hundred thousand, and the Klan was no factor in Hoover's election. Americans had clearly tired of the divisive effect of the masks, robes and burning crosses. What was left of the Klan's clout disappeared as its old friends in office, smelling the new political winds, deserted the organization in droves.

During the 1930s, the nation struggled through the Great Depression, and the Klan continued to shrink. It became primarily a fraternal society, its leaders urging its members to stay out of trouble and the national headquarters hoarding its meager funds. After Franklin D. Roosevelt took office, the Klan began to charge that he was bringing too many Catholics and Jews into the government. Later they added the charge that the New Deal was tinged with communism. The red menace was used more and more by Evans and other Klansmen as the rallying cry, and communists eventually replaced Catholics as one of the Klan's foremost enemies.

Only in Florida was the Klan still a factor in the 1930s. With a membership of about 30,000, the Klan was active in Jacksonville, Miami, and the citrus belt from Orlando to Tampa. In the orange groves of central Florida, Klansmen still operated in the

Women's auxiliaries of the Ku Klux Klan formed their own marching corps and joined in mass Klan demonstrations.

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old nightriding style, intimidating blacks who tried to vote, "punishing" marital infidelity and clashing with union organizers. Florida responded with laws to unmask the nightriders, and a crusading journalist named Stetson Kennedy infiltrated and then exposed the Klan, rousing the anger of ministers, editors, politicians and plain citizens.

New Leadership

Evans was replaced in 1939 by James A. Colescott of Indiana. He led the Klan in the Carolinas, where unions were trying to organize textile workers, and in Georgia, where nightriders flogged some 50 people during a two-year period. An outcry from the citizens of Georgia and South Carolina brought arrests and convictions, and the Klan was forced to retreat.

In the North the Klan suffered another reversal when some local Klan chapters began to develop ties with American Nazis, a move Southern Klansmen opposed but were basically powerless to stop. The end came in 1944 when the Internal Revenue Service filed a lien against the Ku Klux Klan for back taxes of more than $685,000 on profits earned during the 1920s. "We had to sell our assets and hand over the proceeds to the government and go out of business," Colescott recalled when it was over. "Maybe the government can make something out of the Klan — I never could."

Powerful social forces were at work in the United States following World War II. A new wave of immigrants, particularly Jewish refugees, arrived from war-torn Europe. A generation of young black soldiers returned home after having been a part of a great army fighting for world freedom. In the South, particularly, labor unions began extensive campaigns to organize poorly paid workers. The migration from the farms to the cities continued, with a resulting shakeup in old political alliances.

Bigots began to howl more loudly than in years, and a new Klan leader began to beat the drums of anti-black, anti-union, anti-Jew, anti-Catholic and anti-Communist hatred. This man was Samuel Green, an Atlanta doctor. Green managed to reorganize the Klan in California, Kentucky, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Florida and Alabama. But both federal and state bureaus of investigation prosecuted Klan lawlessness, and Green found that his hooded order was surrounded by enemies. The press throughout the South had become increasingly hostile, ministers were more and more inclined to attack the Klan, and state and local governments passed laws against cross burnings and masks.

By the time of Green's death in August 1949, the Klan was fractured internally by disputes and hounded by investigations from all sides in response to a wave of Klan violence in the South. Many Klansmen went to jail for floggings or other criminal acts. By the early 1950s, the Invisible Empire was at its lowest level since its rebirth on Stone Mountain in 1915 .

BETTMANN/CORBIS

The bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in 1963 was one of the Klan's most horrific attacks of the era.

PART THREE

FEAR AND VIOLENCE

THE KLAN DEFENDS SEGREGATION

The study of the ebb and flow of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States reveals a pattern: the Klan is strong when its leaders are able to capitalize on social tensions and the fears of white people; as its popularity escalates and its fanaticism leads to violence, there is greater scrutiny by law enforcement, the press

and government; the Klan loses whatever public acceptance it had; and disputes within the ranks finally destroy its effectiveness as a terrorist organization.

The Civil Rights Era Klan conforms to the pattern. When the Supreme Court threw out the "separate but equal" creed and ordered school integration in 1954, many whites throughout the South were determined to oppose the law and maintain segregation. Like the Southern opposition to Reconstruction government, the tensions and fears that arose after the Supreme Court decision provided the groundwork for a Klan resurgence.

In 1953, automobile plant worker Eldon Edwards formed the U.S. Klans, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, in Atlanta, but he attracted few members until the Supreme Court decision the following year. By September 1956, Edwards was host to one of the largest Klan rallies in years, drawing 3,000 members to Stone Mountain, the site of the rebirth of the Klan in 1915. By 1958, Edwards' group had an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 members.

The U.S. Klans wasn't the only Klan organization trying to gain a stronghold in the South; a number of rival factions made a name for themselves through gruesome acts of violence. A U.S. Klans splinter group in Alabama was responsible for the 1957 assault on Edward "Judge" Aaron, a black handyman from Birmingham. Members abducted him, castrated him and poured hot turpentine into his wounds.

Edwards died in 1960, and the U.S. Klans organization fell into disarray. The next year, Robert M. Shelton, an Alabama salesman, formed the United Klans of America. Shelton achieved national notoriety when his Klansmen viciously beat black and white freedom riders in Birmingham, Montgomery and Anniston and joined in violent confrontations on university campuses in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi. By 1964 Shelton had a loosely organized Klan empire throughout the South.

By 1965, total Klan membership had reached an estimated 35,000 to 50,000.

Klan Killings

The South in the early 1960s was the site of daily tensions between those who favored integration and those who opposed it, and the tensions sometimes led to bloodshed. Civil rights marchers were attacked in Birmingham by police with dogs and fire hoses. Freedom riders — blacks and whites who rode buses throughout the South to protest

racial inequities — were mobbed by Klansmen in planned attacks. Civil rights leaders had their homes burned and their churches bombed.

Klan members were involved in much of the racial violence that spread throughout the South, and the fanatic Klan rhetoric inspired non-Klan members to participate in the campaign of terror. No Klan group was more ruthless than the secretive White Knights of Mississippi. The White Knights had only 6,000 or 7,000 members at its peak, but still earned the reputation as the most bloodthirsty faction of the Klan since Reconstruction. The White Knights committed many crimes during the 1960s, but the most shocking were the murders of one black and two white civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi, on June 21, 1964.

There were other senseless Klan killings during the 1960s. Among the victims were: Lt. Col. Lemuel Penn, a black educator who was shot as he was returning to his home in Washington after summer military duty at Ft. Benning, Georgia; Rev. James Reeb, who was beaten during voting rights protests in Selma, Alabama; and Viola Liuzzo, a civil rights worker who was shot in 1965 while driving between Montgomery and Selma.

African Americans faced color barriers throughout the South.

Bombings

Klansmen discovered dynamite as a weapon of terror and destruction. The use of bombs by Klansmen dated back to January 1956, when the home of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Montgomery was blasted.

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Despite threats and violence from the Klan, black people continued to demonstrate for equality.

Between that incident and June 1, 1963, some 138 bombings were reported, and the Klan was believed responsible for many of them.

One bombing stands out in the history of the Klan and its fanatical fight against integration in the South. On Sept. 15, 1963, a dynamite bomb ripped apart the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, killing four young black girls. Of all the crimes committed by all the desperate men under the sway of the Klan's twisted preaching, the Birmingham church bombing remains in a category by itself.

All told, the Klan's campaign of terror against the Civil Rights Movement resulted in almost 70 bombings in Georgia and Alabama, the arson of 30 black churches in Mississippi, and 10 racial killings in Alabama alone.

Violence Stirs Opposition

Klansmen were often operating in an atmosphere of official disapproval but unofficial acceptance of their tactics. While Southern law enforcement authorities made perfunctory efforts to arrest and prosecute the bombers, politicians pledged resistance to integration, and communities responded by closing ranks against blacks.

The acts of violence finally began to arouse public indignation in the South and across the nation. In 1964, a silent counterattack was begun by the FBI, which made a major effort to infiltrate the Klan. By September 1965, the FBI had informants at the top level of seven of the 14 different Klans then in existence. Of the estimated 10,000 active Klan members, some 2,000 were relaying information to the government. Although the FBI arrested Klansmen and prevented some violence because of this information, critics accuse the Bureau of improperly controlling some informers who may have been involved in illegal acts themselves.

In 1965, Klan violence prompted President Lyndon Johnson and Georgia Congressman Charles L. Weltner to call for a Congressional probe of the Ku Klux Klan. The resulting investigation produced a parade of tight-lipped Klansmen, evasive answers and tales of violence as had similar probes in 1871 and 1821.

This time, however, the House of Representatives voted to cite seven Klan leaders, including Shelton, for contempt of Congress for refusing to turn over Klan records. The seven Klansmen were indicted by a federal grand jury and found guilty in a Washington trial. Shelton and two other Klan leaders spent a year in prison.

Klan Power Weakened

FBI pressure, the Congressional probe and Southerners' weariness of violence took its toll on the Klan. Shelton and other Klan leaders still raged at blacks, Jews and other imagined enemies of the nation, but increasingly their public activities were confined to rallies and speeches while they privately tried to hold together their fractured empires. Some of their members drifted away, some were convicted like Shelton and sent to prison, some remained active but seemed less eager for clashing with authorities.

The stalwarts of the Klan kept hammering away at the old themes of hatred. Though calls for violence were now muted, their fanaticism was undimmed. Instinctively, they seemed to know their fight would carry on into the 1970s and beyond, fueled by the vulnerability of some Americans to the cry of racial prejudice that brought the Klan to life three times in the century following the Civil War.

BETTMANN/CORBIS

A white mob led by Klansmen burned a Freedom Riders bus in Anniston, Alabama.

MURDERED BY THE KLAN

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MEMORIAL HONORS THE FALLEN HEROES OF THE STRUGGLE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

The Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, was built by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a perpetual reminder of the sacrifices that were made to end racial segregation in the South. The names of 40 individuals, killed because they stood up for human rights, are inscribed in the circular black granite table that serves as the centerpiece of the Memorial. These are the true heroes of the Civil Rights Movement — their martyrdom made freedom possible for millions in the South.

For every story of courage that is represented on the Memorial, there is a parallel one of evil and violence. For every person killed, there was a killer — in most cases more than one. Some acted out of impulsive rage. Others used their legal authority to enforce the rules of a dying social order. In many cases, the killer was never apprehended, the crime concealed by a code of silence.

At the forefront of the racial terrorism of the 1950s and 1960s was the Ku Klux Klan. Klansmen have been identified as the killers of 14 of the individuals honored on the Memorial. Their stories are told below. But that number is surely an incomplete accounting. Many killings attributed to unknown night riders were likely the work of the Klan.

The deaths remembered on the Civil Rights Memorial offer undisputed testimony to the Klan's willingness to use murder as a tool to enforce its belief in white supremacy. The heroic spirit of those who gave up their lives in the cause of racial freedom should not be forgotten. Nor should the crimes of those who forced them to make that sacrifice.

Each year thousands of people visit the Civil Rights Memorial. The memorial honors 40 people who died during the Civil Rights Movement.

(TOP) MICHELLE LELAND; (BOTTOM) DAVE MARTIN

23 • JANUARY • 1957

WILLIE EDWARDS JR.

KILLED BY KLAN
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

The racial climate in Montgomery, Alabama, was palpably ugly in early 1957. A grass-roots movement of black citizens — led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. — had recently forced the integration of the city transit system. The Ku Klux Klan reacted violently. Members of the Klan marched through Montgomery in an effort to terrorize black bus riders and bombed the homes and businesses of boycott supporters.

Several members of a local Ku Klux Klan group decided that only the murder of a black would express their outrage. Willie Edwards Jr., a quiet man who had kept his distance from the bus boycott, became the unfortunate victim of their deadly resolve.

On Jan. 23, Edwards was substituting for the driver of a supermarket delivery truck when the Klansmen pulled him over on a rural stretch of road outside Montgomery. Their intent was to harass the regular driver of the truck, whom they suspected of dating a white woman. Not knowing what he looked like, they mistakenly assumed that Edwards, the fill-in, was their target.

The Klansmen forced Edwards into their vehicle and drove through rural Montgomery County. Though Edwards denied making advances to white women, his kidnappers tortured him repeatedly. Finally, they ordered him at gunpoint to jump off a bridge over the Alabama River. Seeing his only hope of escape, he leaped into the water below. His decomposed body was found three months later.

The investigation turned up no suspects and was quickly closed. Some 19 years later, the Alabama attorney general indicted three Klansmen for Edwards' murder. But a judge threw out the indictments on a legal technicality, and the men were never brought to trial.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

15 • SEPTEMBER • 1963

ADDIE MAE COLLINS
DENISE McNAIR
CAROLE ROBERTSON
CYNTHIA WESLEY

SCHOOLGIRLS KILLED IN BOMBING
OF 16TH ST. BAPTIST CHURCH
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

As the summer of 1963 waned, blacks in Birmingham, Alabama, had reason to celebrate. They had bravely withstood police commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor's fire hoses and attack dogs while marching through city streets in opposition to segregation. Stung by harsh criticism of these repressive measures, local and federal officials were dismantling laws which prohibited black access to public institutions.

But the Ku Klux Klan, holding firm to its belief in white supremacy, intensified its efforts to intimidate blacks. In the early morning hours of September 15, Klan members planted a bomb at Birmingham's prominent 16th Street Baptist Church. Some eight hours later, as Sunday worship services were about to begin, an explosion ripped through the brick structure. Four young

The 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham provoked international outrage. The perpetrator went unpunished for 14 years.

girls — Addie Mae Collins, 14, Denise McNair, 11, Carole Robertson, 14, and Cynthia Wesley, 14 — were instantly killed.

The FBI identified the group of Klansmen responsible for the bombing, but inexplicably no one was charged. It wasn't until the Alabama attorney general reopened the case 14 years later that an arrest was made. Klansman Robert Chambliss, then 73, was found guilty of first degree murder and spent the remainder of his life in prison.

2 · MAY · 1964

HENRY HEZEKIAH DEE
CHARLES EDDIE MOORE

KILLED BY KLAN
MEADVILLE, MISSISSIPPI

The civil rights struggle in Mississippi was fought on many fronts during the summer of 1964. College students from the North descended on Mississippi in response to the call of civil rights leaders for an all-out campaign to expose the injustices of racial segregation. White opponents fought back with a bloody campaign of beatings, church-burnings and murders.

The Mississippi White Knights, known as the South's most violent Ku Klux Klan organization, led this campaign of intimidation. Their most noted victims were three civil rights workers killed near Philadelphia, Mississippi. But one month before those murders, two White Knights were implicated in the murder of a pair of young men near the southwest Mississippi town of Meadville.

Charles Eddie Moore, 20, had just been expelled from college for participating in a student demonstration. Henry Hezekiah Dee, 19, worked in a local lumber yard. Two White Knights — James Ford Seale, 29, and Charles Marcus Edwards, 31 — were convinced that the two young men were part of a rumored Black Muslim uprising in the area, Edwards said later. (Their information was groundless.) They abducted the young black men, took them into a nearby forest, beat them unconscious, and dumped them into the nearby Mississippi River where they drowned. Nearly two-and-a-half months passed before their remains were found.

Edwards and Seale were arrested for the murders. Edwards, a paper mill worker, gave the FBI a signed confession, but his admission of guilt was insufficient to convict him. A justice of the peace threw out the charges without explanation, and the case was never presented to a grand jury.

This pattern of law enforcement indifference to Klan-related crimes was repeated throughout the South until federal intervention forced local officials to prosecute the perpetrators of racial violence. But that shift in attitude came too late for justice to be done for Henry Hezekiah Dee and Charles Eddie Moore. Their murderers were never punished.

21 · JUNE · 1964

JAMES CHANEY
ANDREW GOODMAN
MICHAEL SCHWERNER

CIVIL RIGHTS WORKERS ABDUCTED
& SLAIN BY KLAN
PHILADELPHIA, MISSISSIPPI

Nothing enraged Mississippi Klansmen like a Northerner helping blacks achieve racial justice in their state. And if that "outsider" was a Jew, their hatred was even more intense.

Michael Schwerner, 24, epitomized the Klan stereotype of a Yankee agitator. The outspoken, self-confident Schwerner was a social worker from New York who came to Meridian, Mississippi, to work with the Congress of Racial Equality in early 1964. He quickly earned the enmity of local Mississippi White Knights, and soon they talked openly of killing him. His efforts to build a Freedom School in Philadelphia, Mississippi, provided the opportunity.

Schwerner had developed a working relationship with James Chaney, a black native of Meridian. Chaney, 21, had convinced the members of the Mount Zion Methodist Church to host the Freedom School. The church's elders previously had been reluctant to use their building for civil rights activities out of fear that the Klan would retaliate. On Sunday, June 21, their concerns were realized: arsonists firebombed the church, reducing it to a charred rubble.

A Mississippi deputy sheriff delivered these three civil rights workers into the hands of the Klan, who murdered them.

Schwerner, Chaney and Andrew Goodman, 21, a newly arrived civil rights worker from New York, were on their way from Mt. Zion to Philadelphia, Mississippi, when they were stopped by Neshoba County Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price. Price charged Chaney with speeding and arrested Goodman and Chaney on the absurd charge of burning Mt. Zion. Now the stage was set for local Klansmen to murder Schwerner and his accomplices.

Around 10 p.m., Price released the three civil rights workers and ordered them to return to Meridian. They had traveled only a short distance when Price, accompanied by two carloads of Klansmen, pulled the men over again. The Klansmen drove them to an isolated area where they were shot at point-blank range, one by one. They were buried in a nearby earthen dam.

The disappearance of the three men prompted a national cry of outrage. Blacks had been terrorized for decades in the South, but the violence against two white men finally moved the federal government to action. President Lyndon Johnson ordered the FBI to give the case top priority.

After a massive investigation, officers found the bodies of the dead men after paying an informant $30,000 for information on the murders.

Mississippi officials never brought charges against the murderers of Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman. The Department of Justice accused 19 men of federal civil violations in connection with the incident. Seven were found guilty, but none received a sentence greater than 10 years.

11 • JULY • 1964

LT. COL LEMUEL PENN

KILLED BY KLAN
COLBERT, GEORGIA

Although the U.S. Armed Forces was integrated after World War II, the American South in the 1960s remained hostile to blacks — service members or not. So when Army reserve officer Lt. Col. Lemuel Penn, 49, left his home in Washington, D.C., in June 1964 to attend summer training at Ft. Benning, Georgia, he timed his trip to avoid unnecessary stops.

His attempt to escape confrontation proved tragically unsuccessful. While he and two other black army officers were driving back to Washington on July 11, Penn was accosted outside of Athens, Georgia, by a carload of Klansmen and shot at point-blank range. The three assailants were members of a violent Klan group called the Black Shirts. They were searching for "out-of town niggers [who] might stir up some trouble in Athens," the driver of the car confessed later.

An investigation implicated the Athens Klansmen in the crime. Cecil William Myers and Joseph Howard Sims were tried on first-degree murder charges, but an all-white jury acquitted them despite the driver's confession. Later, the Department of Justice brought civil rights charges against Myers, Sims and four other Klansmen. After a lengthy proceeding, which went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, Myers and Sims were convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Their accomplices were set free.

(MISSING POSTER) GETTY IMAGES

Viola Liuzzo died on a lonely stretch of highway in Alabama, a white victim of the Klan.

25 · MARCH · 1965

VIOLA GREGG LIUZZO

KILLED BY KLAN WHILE
TRANSPORTING MARCHERS
SELMA HIGHWAY, ALABAMA

On the night of Sunday, March 7, 1965, Americans received a close-up view of the harsh methods employed by Southern law enforcement officers against civil rights activists. News broadcasts that evening showed Alabama state troopers brutally beating participants in a voting rights march as they crossed the Edmund Pettus bridge in Selma, Alabama. It was a critical turning point in the civil rights movement in America.

Many viewers merely expressed outrage at the incident. Viola Gregg Liuzzo, a mother of five from Michigan, was moved to action. She traveled to Selma to participate in the struggle for racial equality and soon was ferrying marchers on the road between Selma and Montgomery as the demonstrations in support of voting rights continued.

Liuzzo's presence in Selma and the casual way she interacted with black marchers enraged a group of Klansmen who were assigned to terrorize the protesters. They chased down Liuzzo's Oldsmobile on the highway between Selma and Montgomery, and one of the group shot her through the car window. She died instantly.

The men charged with Liuzzo's murder were set free by an all-white jury. As it became increasingly clear that state prosecutors were unable or unwilling to bring these criminals to justice, the Department of Justice stepped up its use of the Civil Rights Act to bring charges against the Klan. A federal jury convicted three of Liuzzo's murderers, and the judge gave them 10-year prison terms.

10 · JANUARY · 1966

VERNON DAHMER

BLACK COMMUNITY LEADER
KILLED IN KLAN BOMBING
HATTIESBURG, MISSISSIPPI

Vernon Dahmer was a business and political leader in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, whose success as a farmer, sawmill operator and merchant had earned him the admiration of black and white residents alike. But his outspoken support of voting rights for blacks earned him the enmity of the violent White Knights of Mississippi.

For years, the White Knights stalked Dahmer. When the time was right, they planned to burn his home — or kill him, if possible. After Dahmer offered to pay the poll taxes of blacks too poor to register to vote, the Klan decided to strike. They attacked Dahmer's home and grocery store with guns and fire bombs. His 10- year-old daughter was hospitalized with third degree burns; Dahmer died from the injuries he suffered in the blaze.

During the Civil Rights Movement, Klansmen expected the support of whites (or at least their quiet acquiescence) after they attacked civil rights leaders. The reaction to the Dahmer murder was

(LIUZZO CAR) BETTMANN/CORBIS; (LIUZZO) BETTMANN/CORBIS; (DAHMER) AP IMAGES

Vernon Dahmer was murdered in his home for helping fellow blacks register to vote.

different. The entire community — black and white — rallied around the Dahmer family and helped rebuild their burned-out house. Local law enforcement officials aggressively investigated the crime. Three Klansmen were convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

Dahmer's death was not in vain. In the wake of his murder, city officials began reforming local segregation laws, just as Dahmer had been asking them to do for years. Equally important, the prosecutions and loss of support from the white community diminished the power of the White Knights. After conducting a reign of terror for a decade, this group of violent white supremacists began to lose its grip on the people of Mississippi.

10 • JUNE • 1966

BEN CHESTER WHITE

KILLED BY KLAN
NATCHEZ, MISSISSIPPI

Among all of the Klan victims in the struggle for civil rights, Ben Chester White seems the most unlikely. He was a quiet, unassuming man who worked his entire life on a plantation near Natchez, Mississippi. He avoided protests against segregation and wasn't even registered to vote.

But White's race was enough to make him a target of local Klansmen. Members of the Cottonmouth Moccasin Gang, a faction of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, conspired to kill the 61-year-old man on the false premise that he favored school integration. They had an ulterior motive. They hoped the murder would lure Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (then leading a protest march through Mississippi) to Natchez so they could kill him and establish themselves as heroes among their fellow Klansmen.

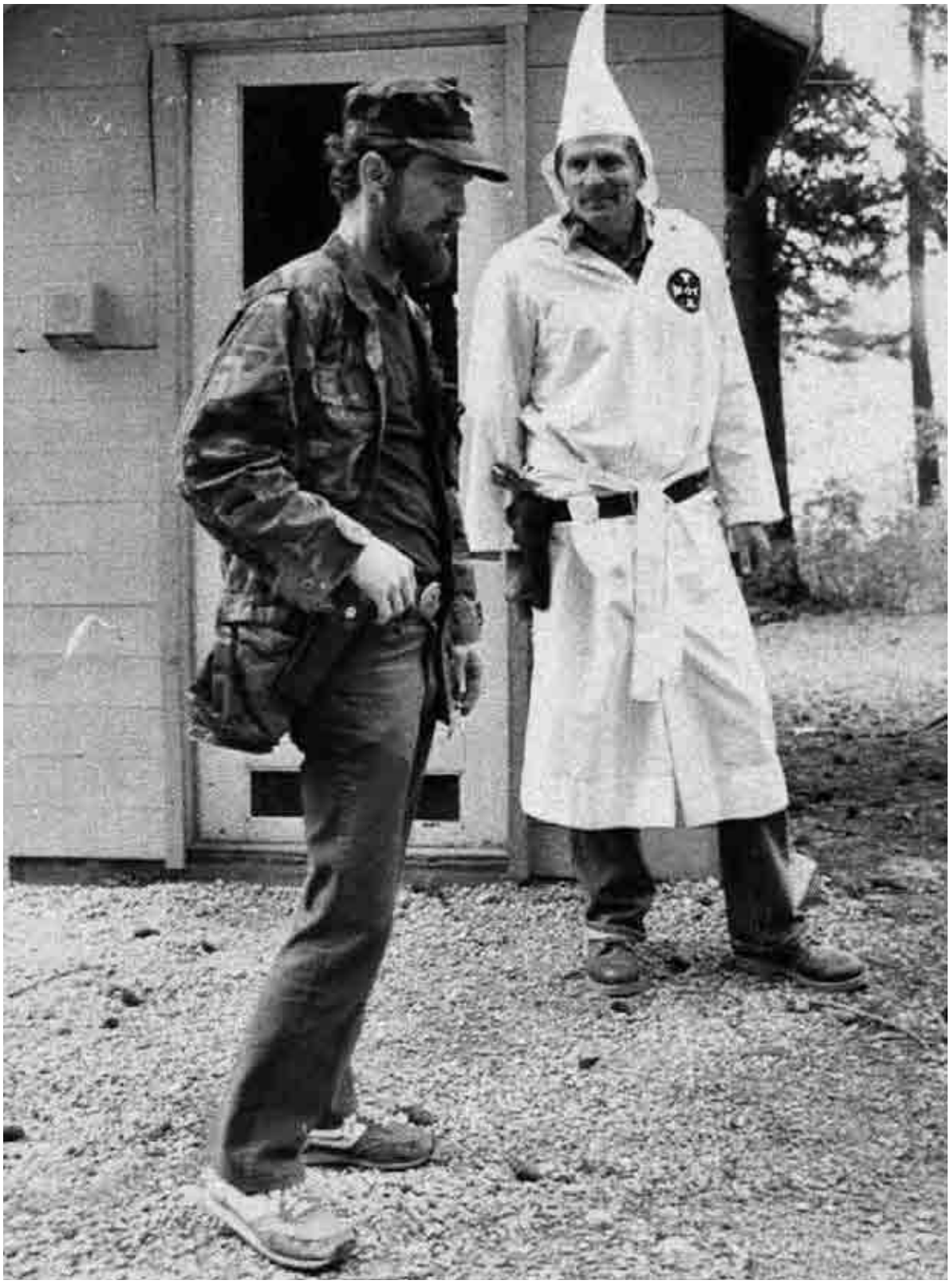
Gang members James Jones, Claude Fuller and Ernest Avants took White to a secluded area outside Natchez on the pretext that they were looking for a lost dog. There, Fuller shot and killed the unsuspecting man. On orders of Fuller, Avants fired his shotgun into White's lifeless body. The men dumped White's corpse in a nearby creek.

Wracked with guilt, Jones admitted his role in the slaying. Despite his admission, the jury was unable to reach a verdict against him and set him free. Local authorities arrested Avants, but he was found innocent after arguing that he had shot a dead body. Fuller, the triggerman, was never tried.

White's son vowed to see the killers punished. He filed a $1 million civil suit against the White Knights for conspiring to violate the civil rights of his father. The judge found in favor of the plaintiff, marking the first time civil damages were assessed against the Klan for the actions of its members.

The Civil Rights Memorial honoring movement activists is at the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama.

(DAHMER CAR) BETTMANN/CORBIS ; (BEN CHESTER WHITE) BEN CHESTER WHITE FAMILY PHOTO; (MEMORIAL) MICHELLE LELAND



ASSOCIATED PRESS

The two faces of the new Klan

PART FOUR

CON MEN AND THUGS

THE 'NEW' KLAN OF THE 1970S

During the late 1970s, it looked as if the Klan was heading for a revival to match its third incarnation during the Civil Rights struggle. Between 1975 and 1979, Klan membership jumped from 6,500 to 10,000 with an estimated 75,000 active sympathizers who read Klan literature or attended rallies but weren't card-carrying members.

Much of the Klan's gain was due to an improved public image fashioned by David Duke. A former neo-Nazi, Duke formed the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in 1975 and traveled the country soliciting radio and television appearances. Duke was articulate, well-dressed and willing to conceal his extreme racism for the general public. Soon journalists everywhere began writing about "the New Klan." Many of the recruits to the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan were people who wrote to Duke after seeing him on television. Klan groups that had been inactive for years also saw their membership growing.

Duke and others tried to translate the newfound attention into political power, with some surprising results but little real success. Duke ran for the Louisiana Senate in 1975 and received a third of the vote. In 1980, California Klan leader Tom Metzger won the Democratic nomination for a seat in the U.S. Congress, but lost the general election.

Defeated for the state Senate again in 1979, Duke lost his hold on the Knights when a rival Klan leader accused him of offering to sell his membership list. Don Black, who replaced Duke in 1980, tried unsuccessfully to sustain the image of Klan respectability. Black had been in charge of the Knights for only a year when he was arrested with other Klansmen and neo-Nazis for attempting to overthrow the government of Dominica.

Confrontational Klansmen

By that time, there was another Klan leader receiving national attention — not for his apparent moderation but for his brazen militancy. Invisible Empire Imperial Wizard Bill Wilkinson liked to appear in newspaper photos with a sneer on his face and two bodyguards by his side, each holding up submachine guns for the camera. He boasted about the weapons his Invisible Empire members typically brought to rallies: "These guns ain't for killing rabbits, they're for wasting people."

Wilkinson followed Duke's lead in recruiting youth to the Klan, but he took the indoctrination a step further by setting up a Klan camp in Alabama where kids could learn weapons training along with racist ideology. The children learned early on the art of intimidation. In one 1979 incident, about a dozen teenagers wearing Invisible Empire T-shirts burned an old school bus while assembled Klan members cheered.

Invisible Empire leader Bill Wilkinson often boasted about his group's militancy.

Wilkinson's Invisible Empire deliberately sought confrontations. The most notable was a campaign of harassment against blacks in the town of Decatur, Alabama. In 1978, a 26-year-old retarded black man named Tommy Lee Hines was convicted of raping three white women. Blacks in the community launched several protests, arguing that Hines lacked the mental capacity to plan the rapes.

Sensing racial tensions were ripe for an explosion, Wilkinson took his Klan members into the area and held a series of rallies that drew from 3,000 to 10,000 participants. In May 1979, 80 Invisible Empire members armed with pistols, shotguns and clubs confronted a "Free Tommy Lee Hines" parade in downtown Decatur. Two blacks and two Klansmen were shot in the ensuing battle. Ten Invisible Empire members, including Wilkinson's Alabama grand dragon, were indicted on civil rights violations. (Hines' conviction was later overturned on appeal, and he was declared mentally incompetent to stand trial.)

Louis Beam, a grand dragon under David Duke, was developing his own confrontational style in Texas. Beam, a Vietnam veteran, instructed his Texas Knights in guerrilla warfare during the late 1970s and formed a paramilitary arm of the Knights called the Texas Emergency Reserve. When tensions developed between American and Vietnamese fishermen in Galveston Bay, Beam offered paramilitary training to the American fishermen. After burning a Vietnamese boat and issuing threats against the refugee fishermen, the Texas Knights were sued and subsequently ordered to end the harassment and the paramilitary training.

In 1979, a group of Klansmen and Nazis planned a confrontation with members of the Communist Workers Party, who were demonstrating against the Klan in Greensboro, North Carolina. The joint Klan/Nazi contingent arrived at the protest site, brought out their weapons and opened fire on the protesters, killing five. They were acquitted of criminal charges but later found civilly liable for the killings. While they were on trial, another group of Klan and Nazi members were arrested for plotting to bomb parts of Greensboro if their friends were found guilty. Members of that group were convicted and sentenced to prison.

BETTMANN/CORBIS

From Robes to Combat Boots

The story of a white supremacist group formed in North Carolina in the 1980s epitomizes the evolution of the Klan from traditional rituals to more militant underground tactics.

Glenn Miller was a member of the National Socialist Party of America, a neo-Nazi group, when he participated in the 1979 confrontation in Greensboro that resulted in the deaths of five anti-Klan protesters. Believing that the swastika would not appeal to large numbers of white Southerners, Miller founded the Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan a year later. He drew members from other less active Klan groups in the state and began building a network of klaverns (local units). He staged well-publicized marches with his members dressed in the traditional Klan robes; he started a newspaper, *The White Carolinian*, and solicited members through numerous radio talk show broadcasts. During 1984, Miller and several other Carolina Knights ran for public office. Despite losing, they generated a flurry of publicity for the group.

By 1985, Miller's organization had 23 local units and an estimated 1,000 members. They operated 27 taped message hotlines, which delivered a racist recruitment spiel. But the marches, taped messages and political campaigns were only one side of the story.

Miller, like other Klan leaders in the early 1980s, began to see the value of more militant tactics. He maintained his alliance with the National Socialist Party and held joint meetings with other white supremacists in North Carolina. His group engaged in paramilitary training, which he publicized in order to attract more young male recruits. He published descriptions of the training in his newspaper, complete with photos of armed and camouflaged Klansmen, as if he had nothing to hide. But in fact, he did.

For Glenn Miller, the weapons training was much more than a clever recruitment tool. It was part of a long-range plan for a total white revolution.

In 1985, Glenn Miller changed the name of the Carolina Knights to the Confederate Knights and preached the need to secure the Southern United States for a white homeland. He told his followers at one rally, "We're building up a White Christian Army. We're going to get our country back. We hope to keep bloodshed to a minimum, but anyone that gets in the way is going to be sorry."

With the name change, Miller's group took on a new look — instead of wearing Klan robes to rallies and marches, members wore camouflage uniforms and army boots.

THE PRIVATE ARMY

As the group adopted a more militant image, Miller delighted in issuing wildly provocative statements. But the public front was mild compared to the covert preparations for violence that had preoccupied him for years.

During 1983, several of Miller's followers had carried on a campaign of harassment against a black prison guard, and as a result of the victim's lawsuit, the entire organization was prohibited from conducting paramilitary training. As evidence emerged that Miller was operating an underground organization, investigators for the Klanwatch project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which had represented the black prison guard, began to look into Miller's group and discovered an astounding illegal army.

Not only was Miller conducting the training he wrote about in his newspaper, he authorized his second-in-command to purchase a whole array of weapons that had been stolen from military bases. They included dynamite, claymore mines, grenades, plastic explosives, AR-15 rifles, gas masks, night scopes, chemical warfare items and light-weight anti-tank weapons capable of piercing up to 11 inches of armor. Miller also hired a military weapons expert to train his men in small teams at night, sometimes as often as twice a week.

In the summer of 1984, Miller later admitted, he had received $200,000 of money stolen by members of the revolutionary group, The Order. In late 1984, Miller hooked the Carolina Knights into the Aryan Nations Liberty Net, a computer bulletin board which listed activities of various radical white supremacists around the country. The investigation that led to indictments of The Order revealed that Glenn Miller was the group's "civilian administrator" for the Southeast. His code name was "Rounder."

In the 1980s, some Klan organizations began paramilitary training.

In 1986, Miller, his lieutenant Stephen Miller (no relation), and their organization, now renamed the White Patriot Party, were found guilty of violating the order that banned them from conducting paramilitary training. They were both sentenced to brief prison terms; Stephen Miller's was suspended. But while they were out on bond waiting for their appeal to be heard, they took their radical strategy to its extreme.

DECLARATION OF WAR

Several months after his conviction, Stephen Miller and four other White Patriots were arrested after they plotted to rob a Fayetteville, North Carolina, restaurant, buy stolen military explosives, blow up the Southern Poverty Law Center and kill Law Center Director Morris Dees. (Dees, SPLC's Legal Director Richard Cohen and U.S. Attorney Sam Currin had conducted the contempt of court prosecution of the Millers.) Two of the conspirators pleaded guilty; Stephen Miller and another were convicted and sentenced to prison. The fifth man was acquitted.

In April 1987, Glenn Miller, then in hiding, issued a "declaration of total war" against the government, blacks and Jews. In his declaration, Miller assigned a point system for the assassination of key minority, government and civil rights leaders, with Dees heading the list. Ten days later, Miller was captured in Missouri along with three other White Patriots and a cache of weapons that included grenades, pipe bombs, automatic rifles, shotguns, pistols and crossbows.

HARDCORE REVOLUTIONARIES

Miller, who had become a hero in the eyes of the most militant white supremacists for his bold lawlessness, was suddenly in serious trouble. Already saddled with the contempt of court conviction, he now faced bond, weapons, and potential civil rights violations. In a move that shocked his former allies, Miller agreed to plead guilty to one count of illegal weapons possession and testify against his former colleagues in the white supremacist movement. (He has since served as a government witness against white supremacists in several trials, including the 1988 seditious conspiracy trial against 10 top leaders of the extremist movement.)

Miller left behind a core of violent revolutionaries who were determined to carry on despite the White Patriot Party's demise and Miller's change of heart. Partly as a result of Miller's cooperation, authorities charged two of his followers with killing three men and injuring two others at a Shelby, North Carolina, adult bookstore in January 1987. The former White Patriot Party members believed that their targets were gay.

In seven years, Glenn Miller had taken a small band of Klansmen, turned them into an underground paramilitary army, educated them in the ideology of revolution, and inspired their crimes of intimidation, threats, thefts and murder. Although they were numerically a tiny group, the White Patriots demonstrated the primary lesson of recent white supremacist history. The danger lies not in the length of the membership roll but in the zeal of the members.

JP LAFFONT/SYGMA/CORBIS

In 1981, robed and armed Klan members boarded fishing boats in an attempt to intimidate Vietnamese fishermen in Galveston Bay. A court order later ended their campaign of harassment.

JOHN VAN BEEKUM

American Nazis

At the same time Klan organizations experienced a surge in membership, there was heightened public attention to another growing white supremacist faction in America, the neo-Nazis. These were white Americans who, like the Klan, believed in the superiority of the white race but dressed in military-like uniforms instead of robes. They revered Adolf Hitler as their hero.

Like the Klan, the neo-Nazis were small in number and highly fragmented. The two groups pursued similar, if somewhat paradoxical, courses during this period: striving for mainstream respectability while at the same time practicing confrontational tactics.

Politics was the arena where the Nazis hoped to establish a broad following. In 1975, three National Socialist Party of America (NSPA) members made surprisingly strong, but ultimately unsuccessful showings in their campaigns for city aldermen in Chicago. In 1976, a National Socialist White People's Party member whose campaign ads featured a swastika won almost 5,000 votes in his race for mayor of Milwaukee. The most astounding election results came in 1980 when NSPA leader Harold Covington drew 56,000 votes in his losing bid for attorney general of North Carolina. The same year, Nazi Gerald R. Carlson won the Republican nomination for a Michigan congressional seat. Although Carlson was defeated in the general election, he polled 32 percent of the vote.

At the same time they were running for office, Nazis were seeking confrontation — the most infamous was a riot begun by 200 rock-throwing youths and NSPA members in Chicago's Marquette Park in 1976. The youths had gathered to counter a black protest against inadequate public housing, and when the protesters failed to show up, they attacked the police and passing motorists with

rocks and bottles. An off-duty police officer was shot and at least 200 cars were damaged.

The next summer, NSPA members led another group of 1,500 angry whites to confront black demonstrators in Marquette Park. A riot erupted, and 16 police officers were injured.

The Chicago rallies followed an aborted attempt by the NSPA to march in Skokie, Illinois, a predominantly Jewish suburb. When the town tried to prevent the march, NSPA leader Frank Collin sued, and the case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which upheld the lower court's ruling that the Nazis must be allowed to march. The march was abandoned after Collin received permission to use a Chicago park, but the NSPA had already gained enormous publicity from the lawsuit.

Klan/Nazi Allies

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, Klansmen and Nazis were beginning to see the value of cooperating with each other. Although they had roots in different traditions — the Klan in the post-Civil War South and the neo-Nazis in Hitler's Germany — they shared the same enemies and the same fanatic obsession with white supremacy.

Some Klan leaders, like David Duke and Don Black, started out as Nazis. Former Nazi Glenn Miller incorporated the military fatigue uniform and the Nazi salute into his Klan organization in North Carolina. Ed Fields in Georgia brought both Klansmen and Nazis into the National States' Rights Party; his virulently anti-Semitic publication, the *Thunderbolt* (later renamed *The Truth At Last*), was read by both groups.

The combination of the Klan, with its historical foothold in American society, and the Nazis, with a modern militancy that appealed to many younger ideologues, resulted in a racist front whose potential for danger was evident by the early 1980s.

Paramilitary Training

The Nazi influence radicalized traditional Klansmen. In secret camps across the country, white supremacists of all descriptions began training in the use of assault weapons, grenades, rocket launchers and explosives — all in preparation for what they believed would be a nationwide race war.

• In 1981, more than 1,000 people learned advanced guerrilla warfare techniques at an annual paramilitary training camp sponsored by the Christian Patriots Defense League in Louisville, Illinois, which had ties to the white supremacist pseudo-religion, Christian Identity.

• At a Posse Comitatus "survival school" in 1982, members received instruction in the demolition of roadways, dams and bridges.

• At the Covenant, Sword and Arm of the Lord survivalist compound, members stockpiled weapons and explosives, and trained in urban warfare, martial arts and wilderness survival in preparation for "the coming war." An FBI raid on the compound in 1985 yielded hundreds of weapons and bombs, and enough cyanide to poison the water supply of an entire city.

Aggressive law enforcement and new legislation in many states halted much of the paramilitary training of the early 1980s, but white supremacists continued to advocate arms training and preparation for a race war.

In the span of a decade, the white supremacist movement had expanded in so many directions that it no longer made sense to talk about the Ku Klux Klan alone. In addition to Nazis, there were survivalists, Identity churches and Posse Comitatus factions — the most diverse collection of white supremacist groups this country has ever seen. These dangerous allies would evolve into the new hate movement of the 1980s.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Members of the Invisible Empire attacked marchers in Decatur, Alabama, in 1979.

THE WOMAN WHO BEAT THE KLAN

BEULAH MAE DONALD WANTED THE WORLD TO KNOW WHAT THE KLAN DID TO HER SON

BY JESSE KORNBLUTH

In her dream, there was a steel gray casket in her living room. Who was the dead man laid out in a gray suit? She couldn't tell. And every time she moved closer to the coffin, someone she didn't know said, "You don't need to see this." But Beulah Mae Donald knew that she did, and so she woke from her dream at two in the morning in Mobile, Alabama, on March 21, 1981. The first thing she did, she later said, was to look in the other bedroom, where her youngest child slept. Michael, 19, wasn't there. Though Michael watched television with his cousins in the evening, he had left before midnight.

Mrs. Donald drank two cups of coffee and moved to her couch, where she waited for the new day. At dawn, Michael still wasn't home. To keep busy, she went outside to rake her small yard. As she worked, a woman delivering insurance policies came by. "They found a body," she said, and walked on. Shortly before 7 a.m., Mrs. Donald's phone rang. A woman had found Michael's wallet in a trash bin. Mrs. Donald brightened — Michael was alive, she thought. "No, baby, they had a party here, and they killed your son," the caller reported. "You'd better send somebody over."

Beulah Mae Donald

GILLES PERRES

A few blocks away, in a racially mixed neighborhood about a mile from the Mobile police station, Michael Donald's body was still hanging from a tree. Around his neck was a perfectly tied noose with 13 loops. On a front porch across the street, watching police gather evidence, were members of the United Klans of America, once the largest and, according to civil rights lawyers, the most violent of the Ku Klux Klans. Less than two hours after finding Michael Donald's body, Mobile police would interview these Klansmen. Lawmen learned only much later, however, what Bennie Jack Hays, the 64-year-old Titan of the United Klans, was saying as he stood on the porch that morning. "A pretty sight," commented Hays, according to a fellow Klansman. "That's gonna look good on the news. Gonna look good for the Klan."

For Bennie Hays, the 25 policemen gathering around Michael Donald's body represented

the happy conclusion to an extremely unhappy development. That week, a jury had been struggling to reach a verdict in the case of a black man accused of murdering a white policeman. The killing had occurred in Birmingham, but the trial had been moved to Mobile. To Hays — the second-highest Klan official in Alabama — and his fellow members of Unit 900 of the United Klans, the presence of blacks on the jury meant that a guilty man would go free. According to Klansmen who attended the unit's weekly meeting, Hays had said on Wednesday, "If a black man can get away with killing a white man, we ought to be able to get away with killing a black man."

On Friday night, after the jurors announced they couldn't reach a verdict, the Klansmen got together in a house Bennie Hays owned on Herndon Avenue. According to later testimony from James "Tiger" Knowles, then 17 years old, Tiger produced a borrowed pistol. Henry Francis Hays, Bennie's 26-year-old son, took out a rope. Then the two got in Henry's car and went hunting for a black man.

Michael Donald was alone, walking home, when Knowles and Hays spotted him. They pulled over, asked him for directions to a night club, then pointed the gun at him and ordered him to get in. They drove to the next county. When they stopped, Michael begged them not to kill him, then tried to escape. Henry Hays and Knowles chased him, caught him, hit him with a tree limb more than a hundred times, and when he was no longer moving, wrapped the rope around his neck. Henry Hays shoved his boot in Michael's face and pulled on the rope. For good measure, they cut his throat.

Around the time Mrs. Donald was having her prescient nightmare, Henry Hays and Knowles returned to the party at Bennie Hays' house, where they showed off their handiwork, and, looping the rope over a camphor tree, they raised Michael's body just high enough so it would swing.

Michael Donald's lifeless body hangs from a tree in Mobile, Alabama.

It took two years, two FBI investigations and a skillfully elicited confession to convict Knowles of violating Michael Donald's civil rights and Henry Hays of murder. Hays, who received the death sentence, is that rarest of Southern killers: a white man slated to die for the murder of a black.

At that point, a grieving mother might have been expected to issue a brief statement of gratitude and regret and then return to her mourning. Beulah Mae Donald would not settle for that. From the

moment she insisted on an open casket for her battered son — "so the world could know" — she challenged the silence of the Klan and the recalcitrance of the criminal justice system. Two convictions weren't enough for her. She didn't want revenge. She didn't want money. All she ever wanted, she says, was to prove that "Michael did no wrong."

Mrs. Donald's determination inspired a handful of lawyers and civil rights advocates, black and white. Early in 1984, Morris Dees, co-founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center, suggested that Mrs. Donald file a civil suit against the members of Unit 900 and the United Klans of America. The killers were, he believed, carrying out an organizational policy set by the group's Imperial Wizard, Robert Shelton. If Dees could prove in court that this "theory of agency" applied, Shelton's Klan would be as liable for the murder as a corporation is for the actions its employees take in the service of business.

Mrs. Donald and her attorney, State Senator Michael A. Figures, agreed to participate in the civil suit. In February 1987, after 18 months of work by Dees and his investigators, the case went to trial. Although Mrs. Donald hadn't attended the 1983 [criminal] trial, she decided to push herself and go to the civil proceeding "If they could stand to kill Michael," she reasoned, "I can stand to see their faces." But she couldn't look at "Tiger" Knowles, the first witness, as he gave the jurors an unemotional account of the events leading up to the murder. And she cried silently when Knowles stepped off the witness stand to demonstrate how he helped kill her son.

Mrs. Donald was more composed when former Klansmen testified that they had been directed by Klan leaders to harass, intimidate and kill blacks. She had no difficulty enduring defense witnesses — the six Mobile Klansmen and the lawyer for the United Klans of America cross examined Dees' witnesses, but called none of their own. Just four days after the trial had started, it was time for the closing arguments.

At the lunch break on that day, Knowles called Dees to his cell. He wanted, he said, to speak in court. "Whatever you do, don't play lawyer," Dees advised him. "Just get up and say what you feel."

When court resumed, the judge nodded to Knowles. "I've got just a few things to say," Knowles began, as he stood in front of the jury box. "I know that people's tried to discredit my testimony ... I've lost my family. I've got people after me now. Everything I said is true ... I was acting as a Klansman when I done this. And I hope that people learn from my mistake ... I do hope you decide a judgment against me and everyone else involved."

Then Knowles turned to Beulah Mae Donald, and, as they locked eyes for the first time, he begged for her forgiveness. "I can't bring your son back," he said, sobbing and shaking. "God knows if I could trade places with him, I would. I can't. Whatever it takes — I have nothing. But I will have to do it. And if it takes me the rest of my life to pay it, any comfort it may bring, I will." By this time, jurors were openly weeping. The judge wiped away a tear.

"I do forgive you, " Mrs. Donald said. "From the day I found out who you all was, I asked God to take care of y'all, and He has."

Four hours later, the jury announced its $7 million award to Mrs. Donald.

In May 1987, the Klan turned over to Mrs. Donald the deed to its only significant asset, the national headquarters building in Tuscaloosa, sold later for $55,000. Mrs. Donald's attorney made a motion to seize the property and garnish the wages of individual defendants. And on the strength of the evidence presented at the civil trial, the Mobile district attorney was able to indict Bennie Hays and his son-in-law, Frank Cox, for murder .

WILLIAM THOMAS CAIN/GETTY IMAGES

PART FIVE

WILL THE TERROR CONTINUE?

THE KLAN AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

By the late 1980s, the Klan was once again in decline. The resurgence of a decade earlier had fizzled, and the Klan was down to around 5,000 members — much smaller than during the Civil Rights era and a mere fraction of its size during its heyday in the 1920s. The ebb in Klan fortunes continued into the 1990s, and

observers of the Invisible Empire began to question whether the organization would play any significant role in the extremist movement in the 21st century.

A number of lawsuits against various factions contributed to the Klan's demise. The fear of litigation made Klan groups leery of organizing into chapters, naming officers and expanding across state lines.

The Klan also reeled under the weight of internal squabbles over money and power. The Klan had always been rife with petty infighting and jealousy among its leaders, and this natural inclination toward discord was exacerbated during the lean years of the 1980s and 1990s. Further dividing the movement was a disagreement over tactics: Some factions favored a cleaned-up organization that emphasized public relations, while rivals sought to revive the more militant tactics of earlier Klan incarnations.

But competition from other extremist groups was the real drag on Klan membership and influence. Racism and bigotry still existed in the United States in the latter part of the 20th century; the Klan just no longer seemed a relevant vehicle for expressing it. Meanwhile, the nation's reinvigorated neo-Nazi organizations filled the void, outpacing the Klan in sheer numbers, influence and militant activism. In the 1990s, many extremists, who once would have gravitated to the Klan, joined the anti-government Patriot movement, especially its militia wing. The philosophy of the Patriot movement, as well as its commitment to armed paramilitary training, had more appeal than the worn-out rhetoric of the Klan.

But if the Klan's numbers were dropping, its terrorist philosophy was still influencing the extremist movement. Many of the leaders of neo-Nazi and Patriot organizations started in the Klan and continued to espouse the hooded order's racist ideology in their new roles. This legacy of hate was a testament to the power of the Klan and its enduring influence for over a century.

Lawsuits Take Their Toll

Civil lawsuits had a chilling effect on the activity of many Klan groups. Although it is difficult

to measure the deterrent value of such litigation, evidence suggests that Klan leaders began to fear the legal consequences of their members' acts. Klan outfits toned down their rhetoric and propaganda, altered their recruiting tactics, and banned weapons, alcohol and drugs from their rallies and meetings.

In 1987, an all-white Mobile, Alabama, jury awarded a $7 million judgment against the United Klans of America for the lynching of a young black man named Michael Donald. To satisfy the terms of the judgment, the group turned its headquarters over to the victim's mother and went out of business. (See *The Woman Who Beat the Klan,* page 41).

The Southern Poverty Law Center, which filed the suit on behalf of Mrs. Donald, used this legal strategy against another Klan group with an equally sordid history of violence. Over the years, the members of the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, had been convicted of crimes ranging from cross burnings and bombings to assaults and murder. At its peak, it was the nation's largest Klan organization, operating in at least 20 states from coast to coast.

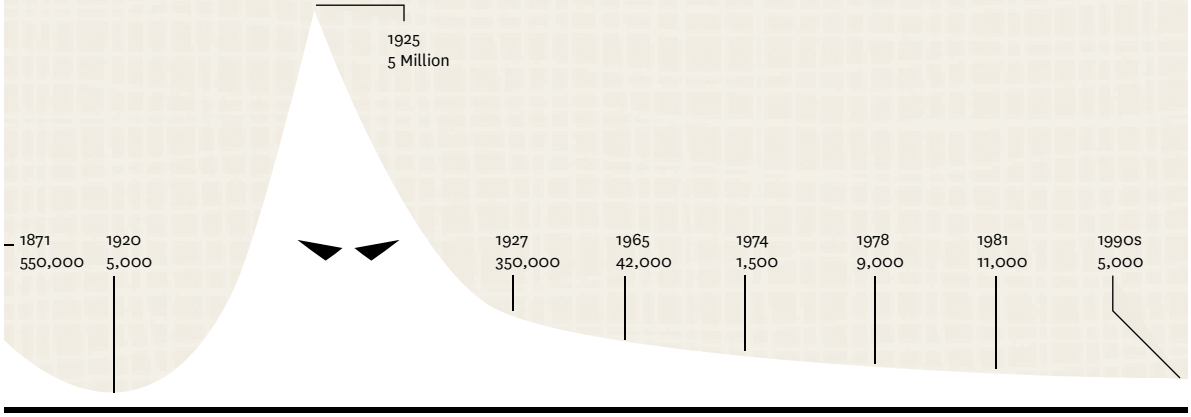
A 1987 attack by the Invisible Empire on a peaceful civil rights march in all-white Forsyth County, Georgia, proved to be the organization's undoing. SPLC filed suit and in 1988, a federal jury ordered the Invisible Empire, the Southern White Knights (another participant in the violence) and 11 individual Klansmen to pay the marchers nearly $1 million in damages.

In 1996, four members of a North Carolina-based Klan admitted to the burning of the century-old Macedonia Baptist Church near Bloomville, South Carolina.

In the settlement, the Invisible Empire's leader, James Farrands, agreed to relinquish all the group's assets — including its name —and personally pay $37,500 to the civil rights marchers. By the summer

The Rise and Fall of the Hooded Order

KLAN MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INEXACT BECAUSE OF THE CLANDESTINE NATURE OF THE ORGANIZATION. FURTHERMORE, ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN THE KLAN ONLY TELLS A PART OF THE STORY. THESE FIGURES DO NOT INCLUDE VAST NUMBERS OF SYMPATHIZERS WHO MAY READ WHITE SUPREMACIST LITERATURE AND ATTEND RALLIES BUT WHO ARE NOT OFFICIAL MEMBERS.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

of 1993, the Invisible Empire was defunct as a consequence of settling the lawsuit.

In 1996, SPLC filed a civil action against the North Carolina-based Christian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and four of its members on behalf of a black church in South Carolina that had been destroyed by arson the previous year. The century-old Macedonia Baptist Church, located near Bloomville, South Carolina, burned to the ground on June 21, 1995, the night after another black church, Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church in nearby Greeleyville, was destroyed by fire. (The arsons were among a string of over 30 suspicious fires at black or predominantly black churches from 1995-96.) The complaint, which asked for punitive and compensatory damages, contended that the Christian Knights "encourage their members to commit acts of violence and intimidation" against blacks in order to promote the organization's goals.

While lawsuits have a proven history of disrupting and even disbanding white supremacist organizations, they also deliver a powerful warning to others in the movement — hate violence can be expensive.

Internal Struggles

A series of internal disagreements over leadership and tactics further decimated the Klan in the closing decades of the 20th century. Klan groups historically were rife with infighting and jealousy, but strong figures usually emerged to bridge the chasms and provide direction. No such individual appeared to reverse the group's failing fortunes.

When the Invisible Empire crumbled in 1993, Thom Robb's Arkansas-based Knights of the Ku Klux Klan became the country's largest Klan organization by default. In the early 1990s, Robb won invaluable publicity by appearing on nationwide television talk shows and in a *Time* magazine article on the hate movement. Aside from Duke, no modern Klan leader was more adept at exploiting television than Robb. The television appearances helped him gain a national following, but they also earned him the scorn of militants in the white supremacist movement who despised the "all talk and no action" posture of Robb's organization.

Robb's public relations campaign produced only short-lived gains for his organization. In time, Robb's television act suffered from overexposure and lost much of its novelty and shock appeal. In 1994, the irreverent television series, *TV Nation,* aired a segment that lampooned Robb and his followers. The comical portrayal exposed the anti-black, anti-Semitic underbelly of Robb's sanitized bigotry. His many critics in the white supremacist world had a field day, deriding Robb as a "Hollywood Klansman" leading a group of "Ku Klux Klowns."

GREG SMITH/CORBIS

Thom Robb was the dominant Klan figure in the 1990s, when his organization succumbed to factionalism.

Later that year, the Knights splintered, and Robb found himself scrambling desperately for members. The schism gave birth to a militant offshoot with strong neo-Nazi leanings called the Federation of Klans, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. The leader of the group was Robb's former Illinois Grand Dragon Ed Novak, who at one time had been affiliated with the National Socialist Party of America and the American Nazi Party. The Federation of Klans took more than a third of Robb's membership

Neo-Nazi organizations flourished by appealing to the growing racist skinhead movement.

nationwide, including leaders and members from Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, California, Missouri and Texas.

Most of the defectors to Novak's group were hard-core militants who chafed under Robb's purportedly moderate, non-violent policies and his timid racism. Novak said his group would be more militant than the Knights and would avoid the limelight Robb so avidly sought. After the split, Novak operated quietly behind the scenes, organizing rallies on private property and recruiting. But the militant Klan umbrella organization Novak hoped the Federation would become never materialized.

The Knights went through another upheaval in 1994 when a renegade group took what remained of Robb's Midwest stronghold. The new group's leader, Michigan Klansman David Neumann, appointed himself imperial wizard. Despite a threatening letter from Robb's lawyer, he vowed to continue to use the Knights' name. Neumann's group tried to oust Robb as national director and claimed that they controlled the Knights. Robb dismissed the new faction as a mere "blip on the radar screen," but the two massive defections in less than one year delivered a devastating blow to his organization.

Neo-Nazis and Patriots

As Klan influence faded in the 1980s and 1990s, the white supremacist movement began to chart a new course. The Order, a terrorist group that committed murder, armed robbery and counterfeiting in the early 1980s, became the new standard for bold action on behalf of white supremacy. The members of the Order were seen as people of action and conscience, fighting to the death, in the words of leader Bob Mathews, for "blood, soil and honor." Mathews had lived the ideal, dying after a shootout with federal agents in 1984.

The Klan in contrast looked plodding, cowardly, even foolish. The old-line, traditional Klan came to be viewed as outdated and out-of-touch, all talk and no action.

Militants left the Ku Klux Klan in droves. As the Klan faltered, neo-Nazi organizations like Aryan Nations and the National Alliance, as well as other white supremacist factions like the Church of the Creator and Tom Metzger's White Aryan Resistance, rose to prominence during the 1980s and 1990s.

Where the Klan had failed in recruiting and keeping members, the neo-Nazi groups and other racist organizations succeeded spectacularly by focusing on the one thing that was vital to the hate movement's long-term survival — enlisting the next generation. To that end, they aggressively pursued the young, ruthless, neo-Nazi Skinheads and recruited heavily on high school and college

JEROME POLLOS/GETTY IMAGES

The Evolution of a Klansman

"Peaceful change ... is no longer possible. There should be no doubt that all means short of armed conflict have been exhausted."

LOUIS BEAM, 1984

Louis Ray Beam personifies the evolution of the racist right in the last quarter of the 20th century from a movement led by the Ku Klux Klan to one where neo-Nazis and armed militias set the agenda. Beam has been at the forefront of this transformation: where he has led, extremists have followed.

As a Klansman in the 1970s, he was a vocal supporter of paramilitary training. When the Klan began to stagger under the weight of lawsuits and internal struggles in the 1980s, he transferred his allegiance to other white supremacist groups. His radicalism influenced the neo-Nazi movement that spawned violent terrorist outfits. In the early 1990s, Beam devised the strategy for the anti-government Patriot movement and its armed militia wing.

Throughout his career, Beam has been a fierce advocate of violent insurrection. His willingness to carry out his deeply-held beliefs sets him apart from other leaders in the white supremacist movement whose actions fall short of their rhetoric. Beam didn't just talk about going underground — he went off the grid. He doesn't just rail against the government — he develops tactics for revolution.

THE PARAMILITARY KLAN

Beam honed his tactical skills in Vietnam where he saw action as a helicopter tail gunner with the U.S. Army. When his tour of duty in Southeast Asia ended, Beam returned to Texas and joined the United Klans of America, at the time the nation's largest and most violent Klan organization. In the mid-1970s, Beam jumped to David Duke's Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, eventually becoming Texas Grand Dragon.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he established five training camps throughout Texas and recruited active-duty soldiers and veterans to the ranks of his Klan army, which he called the Texas Emergency Reserve. Beam directed his racist activities at minorities in general and Vietnamese immigrants in particular. In 1980, Beam was charged with assaulting China's then-Deputy Premier Deng Xiaoping who was visiting Houston. When a group of Vietnamese fishermen relocated to the Texas Gulf Coast, Beam deployed his Klan troops to the area to drive the recently-arrived immigrants out of the state.

Beam's flagrant campaign of intimidation and violence against the fishermen attracted the attention of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which won an injunction against Beam and his paramilitary Klan in 1981. The court order effectively disbanded the organization, forcing Beam to regroup.

As his Klan group dissipated, Beam moved to Idaho to join the ranks of Aryan Nations as "ambassador-at large." Beam used the neo-Nazi group's Hayden Lake, Idaho, headquarters as a base of operations for many years. While in Idaho, Beam met a young racist named Robert Mathews who was about to launch a violent terrorist campaign against Jews, blacks and the United States government. In the fall of 1983, Mathews formed a terrorist gang, later known as the Order, that carried out murder, counterfeiting and armored car robberies in preparation for an international revolution of white people. The gang was eventually captured, and Mathews died in a shoot-out with federal agents.

Beam's alleged involvement with the Order brought charges that he, along with others, had plotted to overthrow the U.S. government. Beam fled to Mexico to evade the charges and landed on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list in the summer of 1986. He was eventually captured in Guadalajara after a gun battle, during which his wife seriously wounded a Mexican police officer.

Beam, Aryan Nations leader Richard Butler, white supremacist Robert Miles and several members of the Order went on trial in Ft. Smith, Arkansas, in early 1988 on charges that ranged from civil rights violations to seditious conspiracy. After seven weeks of testimony, an all-white jury acquitted the defendants. Immediately after the decision, Beam delivered a gloating, impromptu speech at a Confederate memorial

across the street from the courthouse, crowing that the acquittals represented victory over the government.

LEADERLESS RESISTANCE

After the trial, Beam went underground for several years and began publishing a newsletter called *The Seditionist*. In early 1992, he announced that he was folding his newsletter. His final edition contained an essay that would set the course of right-wing extremists for the next decade.

Beam detailed a guerrilla strategy known as "leaderless resistance." The underground revolutionary tactic called for the elimination of leaders and identifiable groups in favor of small, leaderless "phantom cells," some with as few as one or two members. Acting without orders or commands, these cells would use violence to provoke a revolution against the federal government. Cells would operate independently so that the exposure of one unit would not endanger others.

The essay circulated throughout the extremist movement. It appeared in numerous right-wing publications, on the Internet and in manuals published by paramilitary groups. The revolutionary tactic soon gained favor among the most militant white supremacists.

In late 1992, Beam emerged unexpectedly from his self-imposed seclusion as a result of a violent incident that occurred on a remote mountaintop in the Northwest. Although no one realized it at the time, the anti-government Patriot movement was born in August 1992 as a result of the events at a ramshackle Idaho cabin owned by Randy Weaver.

A Christian Identity follower and survivalist, Weaver jumped bail on federal weapons charges in 1991 and retreated to his cabin. He avoided arrest for nearly two years, but finally gave in after law enforcement officials mounted an intense siege that resulted in the shooting deaths of his wife, teenage son and a deputy U.S. marshal.

Weaver's case energized Beam and other radicals who saw the incident as a blatant example of government oppression. Beam swore to avenge the deaths of Weaver's family members. The people who knew Beam's history never doubted his word, but no one guessed the form his vengeance would take. Observers anticipated a show of force, similar to his Klan-led assaults on the Vietnamese fishermen a decade before. But Beam was plotting a more patient — and ultimately more dangerous — course.

RENDEZVOUS AT ESTES PARK

In October 1992, two months after Weaver's surrender, Beam helped organize a strategy meeting in Estes Park, Colorado, to formulate a response to the Ruby Ridge incident. This invitation-only meeting drew more than 160 white men, some of them militant racists from Aryan Nations, Klan groups, Identity churches and other extremist organizations. During the meeting, participants adopted Beam's leaderless resistance strategy as the operating policy for underground militia units.

Four months later, government agents were involved in yet another standoff that turned deadly — this time at the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas. The religious cult was accused by federal authorities of stockpiling illegal weapons. Agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms had botched a February raid on the compound, prompting the standoff.

During the 51-day siege that followed, extremists converged on Waco, among them Louis Beam. The Waco standoff ended in tragedy when the FBI pumped tear gas into the compound's main building. The lethal inferno that followed killed some 80 Davidians.

The Waco and the Weaver incidents galvanized the country's right-wing fringe, and militias began springing up all over the country. Members of these armed groups saw the Waco and Weaver events as proof of an oppressive federal government intent on taking away the rights and the weapons of American citizens, by force if necessary.

Beam's leaderless resistance strategy guided the radical Patriot underground, and terrorist cells began to multiply in 1994. The 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City and the sabotage of an Amtrak passenger train in Arizona later that year were believed to be the work of such cells.

Beam appeared at militia gatherings and spoke at Identity and white supremacist rallies and conferences. At one such gathering in 1996, Beam said he was heartened by the new coalitions between racists and antigovernment radicals drawn to the Patriot movement. In Beam's view, these coalitions had given new energy and strength to the white supremacist cause. "For the first time in 30 years," Beam said. "I see we are no longer alone. We are everywhere and we are going to get our country back. To hell with the federal government."

In the 1990s, antigovernment militias recruited extremists who would otherwise have been attracted to the Klan.

DAN MCCOMB/AP IMAGES/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

campuses. Eager to prove their courage as radical racists, Skinheads quickly became the most violent of all white supremacists.

Prominent white supremacists also sought to manipulate and exploit the anti-government fervor of the militias that sprang up across the nation and became the most visible of the extremist organizations in the 1990s. By early 1997, the Southern Poverty Law Center's Klanwatch project and its Militia Task Force had identified 380 militias and 478 Patriot support groups. Some 101 of these groups had ties to racist groups or leaders, or had expressed racist or anti-Semitic beliefs. Camouflaged fatigues may have replaced the Klan robes, but hatred of Jews, blacks, immigrants and other minorities continued to infect the American body politic.

A Klan for the 21st Century?

As the end of the century neared, there was no single, monolithic Klan, if indeed there ever was one. The organization was in tatters, its decreasing membership scattered in scores of squabbling factions across the country, some with no more than a handful of adherents.

The once powerful Invisible Empire was gone. Its successor as the nation's largest Klan group, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, was fractured and disorganized. The most militant activists, such as Louis Beam (see accompanying article), Robert Miles (now deceased) and Tom Metzger, left the Klan years before and assumed leadership roles in other white supremacist groups.

Since its birth in the aftermath of the Civil War, the Klan experienced three periods of significant strength in American history — the Reconstruction era of the 19th century, when newly-freed slaves began to hold office and own land; the 1920s, when the country's fierce anti-immigrant mood drove Klan membership into the millions; and, finally, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, when blacks and other minorities began to demand equal treatment under the law.

These periods of growth have one common characteristic: they were eras of great social upheaval when the dominant white population felt threatened. In each of these eras, as the perceived attack receded, the Klan faded. And yet it has never completely disappeared.

Will the Ku Klux Klan rebound again as a new century begins? Will it ever vanish completely?

History would suggest a continued role for the Klan. For over a century, the Klan has always appeared on the stage whenever white Americans felt threatened by people different than themselves. Even in decline and disarray, the Klan's message of hatred endures, supported by a record of violence and terror unmatched in the history of American extremist groups.

AFTERWORD

DO KLANSMEN BLEED?

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS ON RACIAL VIOLENCE

BY MORRIS DEES

It was a sultry June day in Decatur, Alabama. I had come to meet with some of the black marchers who had been attacked on a Decatur street by 100 robed Klansmen swinging bats and sticks, and firing guns. I am a lawyer and had sued the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, and some

of its top officials for the attack. I had come to Decatur that day to hear from the marchers, first hand, about the confrontation.

Although I was not at the march, I felt as if I had been. I had spent hours viewing video news footage which showed the procession of about 75 black marchers as they were savagely assaulted by waiting Klansmen. I had studied hundreds of photo enlargements obtained by our investigators from the small army of news photographers who had covered the well-publicized march. We had identified marchers as future witnesses, and Klansmen as future defendants. As I walked into the room where the marchers were waiting to be interviewed, I immediately recognized many of their faces.

One was Hattie Brown, a rather large black woman, street wise though not educated beyond high school. On May 26, 1979, Mrs. Brown was in the front line of marchers who gathered to protest the treatment of Tommy Lee Hines, a mentally retarded black youth convicted by an all-white jury for the alleged rape of three white women. The march marked the anniversary of Hines' arrest, and Mrs. Brown was there because she believed, along with many others, that Hines was incapable of committing the crimes.

Hattie Brown was one of the first marchers to feel the full force of Klan clubs, and she narrowly missed fatal injury. I asked her about the confrontation, gingerly pressing for more details about the attack, and then, towards the end of our interview, she blurted out: "Mr. Dees, do Klansmen bleed?"

She explained that, as one white-sheeted man raced toward her with a raised club, a black man next to her drew his pocket knife and stabbed into the robe flowing around the Klansman's waist. The man kept coming. She saw no blood.

I heard in her question the genuine terror of a victim of Klan violence. The legends of ghostlike figures riding horseback across rural fields in the moonlight had been passed down through generations, and Mrs. Brown, like many Southern blacks, still viewed Klansmen as larger than life. I assured her that, yes, Klansmen do bleed.

Klan Terror

Bobby Person of Moore County, North Carolina, was the intended victim of this Klan terrorism.

Southern Poverty Law Center co-founder Morris Dees argues in court.

BRIAN BOHANNON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

After working for years as a state prison guard, he finally mustered the courage to apply to take the sergeant's examination. No black had ever held an officer's position in this prison unit.

On the night of May 30, 1983, he awoke to noise outside his small home located at the end of a dirt road, and saw the remnants of a smoldering cross. Several months later, a pickup truck slowed in front of his home and a white-robed Klansman shouted for him to "Come out, nigger!"

Mr. Person emerged to see two men standing in the back of the truck with guns pointed at him. His children were terrified. Before the sheriff arrived, the men left.

The man in the robe, I later learned from depositions taken in a civil suit filed on Mr. Person's behalf against the Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, was Jerry Michael Lewis. The other man, dressed in military camouflage, was Gregory Short. Mr. Person's bravery in allowing his name to be used as plaintiff resulted in the exposure of a Klan ring which bought stolen military supplies from soldiers at Fort Bragg and a court order enjoining the group's paramilitary activity.

Both Hattie Brown and Bobby Person were victims of Klan violence. Neither suffered the ultimate sacrifice of Michael Donald, who was lynched in March 1981 by members of the Alabama-based United Klans of America "to show Klan strength in Alabama." But Brown and Person share a much more common trauma — the modern-day reminder to blacks that free exercise of basic civil rights cannot be taken for granted.

The Other Victims

The Klan appeals to young men like Lloyd Letson, Jerry Michael Lewis and Gregory Short. They are also its victims.

Most rank-and-file Klan members I have met in over 250 court depositions, and many more personal interviews, are basically good people. They are little different than my rural neighbors or my many country relatives — with the exception that most are life's losers. The Klan meetings offer them what they have not been able to attain in their day-to-day life — social opportunities, a chance to gain leadership roles, and a forum to vent their gripes.

Klan violence, though horrible, is not the

mainstay of Klan activity. Much time is spent cursing the federal government for affirmative action employment policies, welfare programs like food stamps, and imagined Jewish plots to mongrelize the "white race."

A Klansman-turned-plaintiff's witness in the North Carolina case told me that he was the black sheep of his family — nothing he did seemed to bring him success until he joined the Klan. He quickly used his commando skills learned in Vietnam to gain respect and a leadership role in the Klan's underground paramilitary army.

Lloyd Letson, the Klansman who Hattie Brown saw "stabbed," became my friend. After we filed the Decatur suit, Letson's lawyer contacted me and a meeting was arranged for Letson and me to talk privately. He told me that he joined the Invisible Empire's Decatur Klan group after hearing a fiery speech by the charismatic Imperial Wizard Bill Wilkinson. Letson said he was "sick and tired" of the blacks holding parades on Decatur streets protesting for "that nigger" Tommy Lee Hines who was guilty of "cold-blooded rape." Letson was an ideal audience for Wilkinson, who had come from his home base in Louisiana to capitalize on local racial unrest to sign up new members.

Letson told me that he quickly saw the Klan leaders as being out for money and power. As they started talking about "the race war to come" and wanted him to get a camouflage uniform for paramilitary training, he balked. He agreed to testify against the Klan.

I visited Letson's small home, met his wife and children. Except for color, Bobby Person and Lloyd Letson are little different. Both wanted better lives for their families. If they had been neighbors, they might have been friends.

Hopefully, both victims of blind racism — the members who fill the marching ranks and the minorities who suffer the ultimate abuse — will join hands in brotherly love and friendship.

MORRIS DEES CO·FOUNDED THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER AND CURRENTLY SERVES AS ITS CHIEF TRIAL COUNSEL.

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY

RECOMMENDED READING

THE FOLLOWING WORKS PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE KU KLUX KLAN AND INTERPRETATIONS OF ITS ROLE IN HISTORY. MANY WERE USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS BOOK.

A Season for Justice, by Morris Dees with Steve Fiffer. New York: MacMillan, 1991.

Armed and Dangerous: The Rise of the Survivalist Right, by James Coates. New York: Hill & Wang, 1987.

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Blood in the Face: The Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, Nazi Skinheads, and The Rise of the New White Culture, by James Ridgeway. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991.

Brotherhood of Murder, by Thomas Martinez with John Guinther. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988.

Codename GREENKIL: The 1979 Greensboro Killings, by Elizabeth Wheaton. Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1987.

Confession of an Imperial Klansman, by Lem A. Dever. Portland, Oregon, 1924.

Conversion of a Klansman, The, by Thomas Tarrants. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979.

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Free At Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and Those Who Died in the Struggle, Montgomery, Ala.: Teaching Tolerance Project, Southern Poverty Law Center, 1989.

Hate Crimes: America's Rising Tide of Bigotry and Bloodshed, by Jack Levin and Jack McDevitt. New York: Plenum Press, 1993.

Hate Groups in America: A Record of Bigotry and Violence, by Alan M. Schwartz et al., New York: The Anti-Defamation league of B'nai B'rith, 1988.

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Klan, The, by Patsy Sims. New York: Stein & Day, 1978.

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Ku Klux Klan: An Encyclopedia, The, by Michael and Judy Ann Newton. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991.

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Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, Growth and Disbandment, by John C. Lester. New York: AMS Press, 1971.

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Masks Off, by Lem A. Dever. Vancouver, Wash., 1925.

"Media Martyrdom," by R. Watson. *Harpers,* March 1980.

"New Klan, The," by Roy Blount Jr. *Parade Magazine,* August, 1981.

My Life in the Klan, by Jerry Thompson. Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 1982.

My Undercover Years with the Ku Klux Klan, by Gary Thomas Rowe, New York: Bantam Books, 1976.

Party of Fear: The American Far Right from Nativism to the Militia Movement, The, by David H. Bennett. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988. Revised edition, 1995.

Present-Day Ku Klux Klan Movement, The, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Un-American Activities. Washington, D.C., 1967.

Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement, by Michael Barkun. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. Revised Edition, 1996.

Rise of David Duke, The, by Tyler Bridges. Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1994.

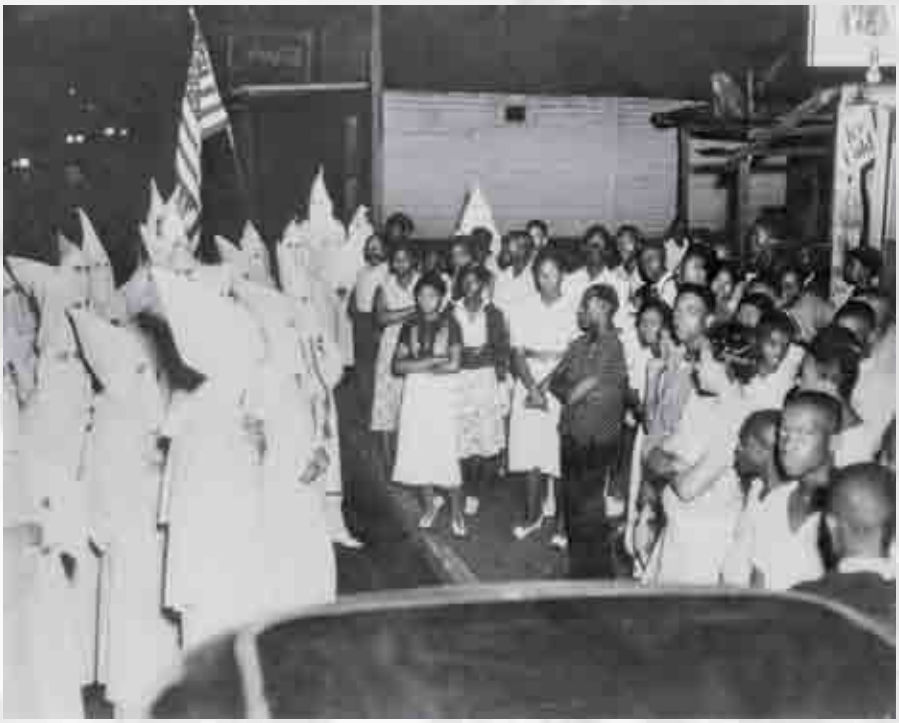
Southern Exposure, by Stetson Kennedy. New York: Doubleday, 1946.

White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction, by Allen W. Trelease, Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1971.

For more information and publications from the Southern Poverty Law Center, please visit our main website at **www.splcenter.org**

For information on extremism, see out investigative magazine, *Intelligence Report,* at **www.intelligencereport.org**

For daily updates on extremism, our blog, Hatewatch, is found at **www.splcenter.org/blog**



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This report was prepared by the Klanwatch Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Klanwatch was formed in 1981 to help curb Klan and racist violence through litigation, education and monitoring. Since then, lawsuits brought by the SPLC have resulted in federal civil rights indictments against Alabama Invisible Empire members; court orders prohibiting Klan paramilitary training in Texas and North Carolina; contempt of court convictions against North Carolina White Patriot Party members; a civil settlement requiring Alabama Klansmen who attacked a 1979 civil rights march to take a course in race relations; a $7 million judgment against the United Klans of America for the 1981 murder of a black youth in Mobile, Alabama; a $1 million judgment against Klansmen who attacked Forsyth County, Georgia, civil rights marchers in 1987; a nearly $12.5 million judgment against the White Aryan Resistance and its leaders for inciting Skinhead violence that resulted in the 1988 murder of an Ethiopian man in Portland, Oregon; a $1 million judgement against the Church of the Creator for its role in the 1991 murder of a black Gulf War veteran; a $6.3 million jury verdict in 2000 against Ranch Rescue, whose members held undocumented immigrants at gunpoint; and a 2008 verdict of $2.5 million against the Imperial Klans of America for its role in the brutal beating of a teenager at a Kentucky county fair.

KLANWATCH

& MILITIA TASK FORCE

PROJECTS OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER
400 WASHINGTON AVE ▲ MONTGOMERY, AL 36104
WWW.SPLCENTER.ORG