

**“To be Part of Somethin’”—The Ku Klux Klan and Its Appeal to Working Class North  
Carolinians During the 1960s**

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### **Abstract**

Despite adamant resistance from Southerners in Congress, 1964 saw the passage of a comprehensive Civil Rights Act. One of the key components of the Act was a section that mandated equal employment opportunity in the private sector. Among the white working class, this provision was perceived as an imminent threat to their economic livelihoods. The resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan during the Civil Rights Era was a backlash against an upheaval in the racial status quo, particularly in North Carolina, which had the most Klan-affiliate members out of any state in the union during the 1960s. This project explores the motivations for working class whites, most of whom had not belonged to any subversive organization previously, to join the Klan. On the basis of analysis of historical documents, this thesis suggests that the threat to their economic livelihood and a feeling of not being heard or seen by the federal government was a prime motivator, and as the Klan presented itself as an alternative means for political, social, and economic organization, membership surged.

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## Introduction

In 1967, the House Committee on Un-American Activities declared North Carolina to be the state in the union with the most members of a Ku Klux Klan-affiliated group. The report on the state of the Ku Klux Klan by the committee stated: “It is estimated that there were approximately 7,500 active members in the Realm of North Carolina as of January 1967, and the organization was continuing to move forward.”<sup>1</sup> This was an announcement that came as a shock to most of America and most North Carolinians.

The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 included a clause prohibiting discrimination in employment, and “ended virtually immediately and completely all forms of public segregation in the nation.”<sup>2</sup> This legislation was not received well in the South, and its threat to segregation was the main factor in the subsequent reorganization of several white supremacy groups, especially those affiliated with the Ku Klux Klan.

Much of the research surrounding the “third wave” of American Klan activity has overlooked North Carolina.<sup>3</sup> Instead, scholars have focused on other states such as Alabama and Mississippi, which are more salient in their hardline pro-segregationist policies during the Civil Rights era and their resistance to federal legislation following the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Indeed, one of the most prominent Klan affiliates in North Carolina was the United Klans of America (UKA), led by

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<sup>1</sup> *The Present Day Ku Klux Klan Movement: Report by the United States Congress Committee on Un-American Activities*. Ninetieth Congress: Session 1. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Loevy, Robert D. “A Brief History of the Civil Rights Act of 1964” from *The American Presidency*, ed. Kozak, David C. and Kenneth N. Ciboski. Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> The “first wave” of the KKK was the original group of Confederate veterans that gathered in 1866 in Pulaski, Tennessee to form a fraternal organization. Its campaigns of intimidation served as the model for an expansion of the group throughout the South before the turn of the century. The rebirth or “second wave” of Klan activity coincided with the release of D. W. Griffith’s film *Birth of a Nation* and took place in the 1920s. The first recorded instance of a burning cross took place at Stone Mountain, GA, where minister William J. Simmons revived the Klan before the Atlanta premiere of the film. Throughout the 20s, the Klan grew extensively, but by the 50s had effectively died out as a populist force in North Carolina and much of the South (Cunningham 2013). See Historical Background.

Robert Shelton and headquartered in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. In North Carolina, the UKA was formed from the remnants of the North Carolina Knights, led by James “Catfish” Cole, and the U.S. Klans, led by Eldon Edwards, though still under the auspice of Shelton. Shelton gave orders to Bob Jones to organize North Carolina for the UKA, and Jones subsequently held nearly nightly public rallies and cross burnings all over the state. By 1965--the year that Civil Rights gained another tremendous victory with the Voting Rights Act--there were approximately 12,000 members of the UKA, organized into about 200 “klaverns” or chapters across the state, more than the rest of the South combined.<sup>4</sup>

### **Historical Background**

#### **The Three Manifestations of the Klan**

The Ku Klux Klan was formed by six Confederate veterans led by General Nathan Bedford Forrest in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866. In his book *Klansville, U.S.A.*, David Cunningham writes that at first, the Klan’s activities “bent toward amusement,” with nightriders playing so-called pranks such as posing as angry ghosts. However, these tactics echoed antebellum slave patrols and helped to serve the purpose of intimidation and preservation of racial hierarchy that soon became the Klan’s main goal as membership increased.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the Klan in its original iteration professed to have as its “main and fundamental objective” the maintenance of white supremacy, although to also protect the Constitution and to uphold societal morals such as protection of widows and orphans, language which was used by the subsequent two waves as well to

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<sup>4</sup> Owens, Peter B., David Cunningham, and Geoff Ward. (2015). "Threat, Competition, and Mobilizing Structures: Motivational and Organizational Contingencies of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan." *Social Problems*, 62 (4), The Klan used various organizational terms: a “klavern” referred to a local chapter of the Klan. In 1966, North Carolina had 192 klaverns, to which over 50% of the United Klans of America’s members belonged.

<sup>5</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 18.

legitimate their purpose.<sup>6</sup> The Klan was strong in Democratic-controlled areas, where its campaign against a Republican siege against Southern culture was accepted as legitimate. As the fringe vigilante groups that associated themselves with the Klan grew increasingly violent and disconnected from the original organization, Forrest disavowed the violence and the federal government launched an investigation into the Klan between 1870 and 1871, leading to mass arrests of members and effectively killing the Klan. The committee that investigated Klan activity accused the group of “demoralizing society and holding men silent through the terror of its acts and its powers for evil.”<sup>7</sup> Klan nostalgia would occur in the subsequent decades and would manifest itself in paramilitary organizations such as the Red Shirts in North Carolina, which in 1898 launched a campaign of white supremacy leading to a massacre of black citizens and sympathizers in Wilmington.<sup>8</sup>

The second iteration of the Klan was founded in Stone Mountain, Georgia, on a wave of Klan nostalgia brought about by the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Civil War. Its re-founder, William J. Simmons, an Atlanta salesman, used a Klan ritual found in D.W. Griffith’s film adaptation of the Thomas Dixon novel *The Clansman, Birth of a Nation*.<sup>9</sup> Membership in this second wave of the Klan grew exponentially after a New York Times expose of the group, which gave it media exposure and helped it gain popularity in a variety of cities, inside and outside of the South. Charles Carpenter, writing as editor of a pamphlet called *The Houghton Line* in April 1923, expressed his thoughts on the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan as it appeared in the 1920s. He attended a rally to see what it was all about, and admits, “Perhaps had I lived in the South at that time, I would have been a member of the Klan, for I can realize how there must have been

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<sup>6</sup> *The Present Day Ku Klux Klan Movement: Report by the United States Congress Committee on Un-American Activities*. Ninetieth Congress: Session 1. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1967. pp. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 20-23.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 23-24.

much to fear... In a depleted, poverty stricken country, which had just been conquered,” however, as much as Carpenter can relate to the feelings of the original members of the Klan, he is puzzled by the necessity of its existence during the 1920s.<sup>10</sup> The Klan did become a formidable presence in civic and political life during the 1920s, however, influencing both Democrat and Republican party platforms and helping to contribute to rising nativist sentiment. A series of scandals among its leaders helped to deal it its death blows, however, although white supremacy remained a force in American life throughout the thirties, forties, and fifties, as various groups would periodically resurrect the Klan in response to waves of immigration or advances in civil rights.<sup>11</sup>

The *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* case that ruled “separate but equal” accommodations in public schools unconstitutional in 1954 was a catalyst for the third wave of the Klan that would arise during the Civil Rights Era. Throughout the South, various organizations were vocal in their opposition to *Brown*; the Klan was just one of many, including the Citizens Councils, which were more middle-class and acceptable segregationist groups to join.<sup>12</sup> Bob Jones, who organized much of North Carolina for the United Klans of America, explained his “reason for ...joining the Klan in the first place... I was worried about the 1954 Supreme Court decision on school desegregation—the Black Monday decision.”<sup>13</sup> Desegregation of the schools was resisted throughout the South for the next decade or so, and it was not until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that the desegregation of the rest of public life was federally ordered.

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<sup>10</sup> Carpenter, Charles E., ed. *The Houghton Line*. Vol. XXIX No. 4, April 1923. Issue on the Ku Klux Klan. E. F. Houghton & Co. Philadelphia, PA. Box 1. The Ku Klux Klan Collection, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

<sup>11</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 24-31.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 31.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 124.

The third-wave Klan came gradually to North Carolina in the late fifties and early sixties, with Klan activity increasing as civil rights for its black citizens increased, particularly in the “Black Belt” of the eastern part of the state. Former civil rights activist John “Hunter Bear” Salter, of Lumbee heritage, worked on a campaign to register voters in Halifax county, which was part of this Black Belt, which he calls, “rigidly segregated, thoroughly repressive, Klan-infested.”<sup>14</sup> He cites an article from the *Southern Patriot*, which notes the grassroots attempt to begin to register black voters who had previously been disenfranchised through various means and that “[i]n reaction, a resurgence of Ku Klux Klan activity is also developing in this area.”<sup>15</sup> This eastern part of the state, which was poorer and more agricultural, was a place where lower-class whites stood to lose from the economic empowerment of blacks, as previously, Jim Crow “reserved certain work for whites [and] artificially suppressed interracial competition for many of these jobs.”<sup>16</sup> In the east as well, white ownership of land occurred at a significantly lower rate than in the other parts of the state—two-thirds of whites were sharecroppers or tenants in the eastern part of the state, and with only 7% of black farmers owning their own land, the chance that whites and blacks had to compete for agricultural work was higher. As the state became more industrialized, “the ascendance of manufacturing provided a sort of racial pressure valve for white workers,” who could find work in textile mills or other industry if they could not find agricultural work. Most mills only hired black workers into unskilled roles such as custodial work, leaving manufacturing jobs for whites.<sup>17</sup> This pattern was reflected across the state in the state’s other two major industries, tobacco and furniture. Thus lower-class white North Carolinians stood to lose from a federal mandate to desegregate all aspects of public life, which

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<sup>14</sup> Salter, John “Hunter Bear.” “In very early 1964...” [www.hunterbear.org](http://www.hunterbear.org). Oct 3 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 107.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 108.



would come with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. According to the House Un-American Activities Report of 1967, the Klan seized on the Act's passage to "portray the bill as the beginning of the extinction of the white race and the start of Negro domination in the South."<sup>18</sup>

### **The Civil Rights Act of 1964**

Passage of a stronger Civil Rights Act was desperately needed after two weak bills in 1957 and 1960 that did little to affect racial segregation in the U.S. In February 1963, President Kennedy had sent Congress a message about the imperative need for stronger Civil Rights legislation:

"The Negro baby born in America today...has about one half as much chance of completing high school as a white baby born in the same place on the same day—one third as much chance of completing college—one third as much chance of becoming a professional man—twice as much chance of becoming unemployed...a life expectancy which is seven years less—and the prospects of earning only half as much."<sup>19</sup>

Kennedy's efforts were stymied, as other civil rights legislation had been before, by Southerners in Congress, whose support was critical for the Democratic Party's cohesion and for the upcoming 1964 election—they were a caucus not to be alienated. In particular, he faced strident opposition from House Rules Committee Chairman Howard Smith of Virginia and Senate Judiciary Committee Chair James Eastland from Mississippi, both figures whose opposition was a major obstacle to any attempted civil rights legislation. The threat of a filibuster from Senate

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<sup>18</sup> *The Present Day Ku Klux Klan Movement: Report by the United States Congress Committee on Un-American Activities*. Ninetieth Congress: Session 1. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1967.

<sup>19</sup> Loevy, Robert D. "A Brief History of the Civil Rights Act of 1964" from *The American Presidency*, ed. Kozak, David C. and Kenneth N. Ciboski. Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 1985.

Democrats was also very real.<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, who faced a volatile global situation with the Cold War, could also ill afford losing credibility over a domestic policy battle, so he did as much as he could without Congressional approval, which was to “appoint ... blacks to important government jobs and order the Justice Department to help black and white integrationists arrested in civil rights demonstrations.”<sup>21</sup> However, the violence that would soon occur against nonviolent demonstrators led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Birmingham, Alabama, in May of 1963 helped to draw the public’s eye to the situation in the South and the injustice of Jim Crow and made stronger legislation a priority for President Kennedy.<sup>22</sup> This increase in non-southern white people’s awareness of the violence occurring for the sake of Jim Crow’s maintenance and the subsequent change in public opinion spurred Kennedy to introduce the most radical Civil Rights bill ever in June of 1963, which would desegregate public accommodations and also gave the U.S. Attorney General the power to sue state governments that resisted desegregation of public schools.<sup>23</sup> Added to the bill in the House Judiciary Committee was a fair employment provision, and the bill headed to the Rules Committee, where Chairman Smith intended it to die in mid November, around the same time that President Kennedy went to Dallas to court Texas Democratic support in his upcoming reelection campaign.<sup>24</sup>

After Kennedy’s assassination, one of Johnson’s top priorities was the Act’s passage, despite the resistance from Southerners that had always stymied civil rights legislation previously. Johnson, a Southerner himself, “seized on the civil rights bill as the perfect

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<sup>20</sup> Loevy, Robert D. “A Brief History of the Civil Rights Act of 1964” from *The American Presidency*, ed. Kozak, David C. and Kenneth N. Ciboski. Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 1985.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

instrument for establishing his credentials with northern and western liberals.”<sup>25</sup> Johnson invited prominent Civil Rights leaders to meetings at the White House, as well as making his position on the issue clear to Congress, where many had known him as the Senate majority leader before his election as Vice President in 1960.<sup>26</sup>

Johnson made sure all his other major bills were passed in the Senate before pushing for civil rights, signaling that “he would not care if the Senate did not do another thing for three months until the civil rights bill was enacted.”<sup>27</sup> Once the Southern filibuster began, he made it clear to the public that a minority was frustrating the will of the majority, and he eventually convinced enough Republicans to join moderate Democrats in stopping the filibuster through a vote for cloture in June of 1964. The bill passed, with an explicit provision for equal opportunity in employment.<sup>28</sup> Loevy writes:

“The Civil Rights Act of 1964... ended virtually immediately and completely all forms of public segregation in the nation, both North and South. The threat of cutting off U.S. funds to government programs and business concerns that discriminate against minorities has made “equal employment opportunity” and “affirmative action in hiring” fixed institutions in American life.”<sup>29</sup>

This federal mandate for an end to segregation in general and particularly in employment sparked outrage from pro-segregationists and white supremacists. The white North Carolina working class, which would now have to compete with black labor where it had not before, felt that their interests had been sacrificed in favor of civil rights. This anger would be a prime

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<sup>25</sup> Loevy, Robert D. “A Brief History of the Civil Rights Act of 1964” from *The American Presidency*, ed. Kozak, David C. and Kenneth N. Ciboski. Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 1985.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

motivation for joining white supremacist groups such as the Klan. Bob Jones, who would become one of the most successful recruiters for the United Klans of America, the biggest KKK affiliate of the time, took advantage of the resentment towards the Civil Rights Act and subsequent pushes to desegregate schools, public facilities, and employment. The Klan saw a rise in activity in 1964 in “towns such as Greensboro, Kannapolis, Rich Square, Statesville, Hawville and Eden, where ... blacks began to enter the textile mills that so dominated the state’s manufacturing sector.”<sup>30</sup> And as previously mentioned, the eastern agricultural region of the state saw a tremendous increase in Klan activity as the civil rights movement gained traction.

### **Main Question**

The main question that I hope to investigate in this project is why resistance to the passage of the Civil Rights Act and subsequent desegregation manifested itself in the huge growth in Klan membership in North Carolina during the 1960s. I became interested in this topic after stumbling upon the HUAC statistic, and wanted to investigate how this increase in Klan membership in North Carolina was related to federal policy.

This research question is incredibly important, as there is still a pressing need to address the legacy and continuation of racism and racial hatred in the South and in the rest of the U.S. By allowing the Klan to maintain its separation in the public mind from mainstream white culture during this period, much of that same mainstream culture has escaped the blame that should be placed upon it for implicitly condoning the existence of the Klan. Membership in the Klan was often seen as a valid form of civic participation by the white community—in the question that I am exploring, the Klan was seen as a fairly mainstream means of acting politically once a group of marginalized whites felt their livelihoods were threatened. Something that has become

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<sup>30</sup> Drabble, John. “THE FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina, 1964-1971.” John Hope Franklin Center Lecture Series: Duke University, Sept 24, 2003.

increasingly evident in the past few years, with the rise of right-wing political insurgencies, is the potential widespread appeal of white supremacist language to mass audiences, especially when such language is coded with the use of phrases like the need to “restore law and order.” When we as a society do not learn from the past, it haunts us. The fact that an extremist racist group held rallies that attracted thousands of otherwise fairly moderate citizens speaks to the danger of discounting fringe opinions and not acknowledging that ideas’ times can come, and when they do, we should be prepared to call them out for what they are.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **North Carolina as a ‘Progressive Southern State’**

The widespread view of North Carolina in the 1950s and 60s as the most liberal of all states in the Jim Crow South was legitimated to some extent by the 1960 election of a “southern liberal,” Terry Sanford, as governor. Sanford was careful to not come out in outright favor of integration—he sought to avoid the kind of racial politics that had hurt candidates in the past, especially his mentor Frank Porter Graham, who had been attacked for his support of black voter rights in the 1950 election. Governor Sanford did view racial exclusion as inhibiting the progress of the state’s economy and education, however.<sup>31</sup> Sanford’s establishment of Good Neighbor Councils to encourage businesses to see the sense in desegregation worked to gradually promote integration and was prototypical of the more moderate “North Carolina way”—a lack of institutional support for segregationist policies.

In stark contrast to North Carolina is the example of Mississippi, a state where official governmental institutions actively resisted the federal push for integration. In Mississippi, where the state actively monitored and repressed suspected civil rights activists, the courts refused to

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<sup>31</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 83.

prosecute white defenders who committed crimes against civil rights groups and activists. Moreover, young black community leaders were expelled from schools, and the business community was hostile to black workers and those in need of loans. The presence and activities of the Klan were nearly redundant in a state with such institutional mechanisms to prevent the advance of civil rights. Thus the Klan in North Carolina was much more distanced ideologically from mainstream institutions than its counterpart in other Southern states, leaving it at the center of the pro-segregationist movement whose goal was the preservation of the Jim Crow status quo.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Klan as Representative of Lower Class White Interests**

Cunningham and Phillips (2007) showed that the most klaverns, and thus the strongest centers for mobilization and organization of Klan activity, were in the middle to eastern parts of the state. They investigated five factors in conjunction with klavern presence. The first was the percentage of non-white residents in a county, a proxy for racial threat felt by white residents. The second was median white income, which was a measure of the degree of economic vulnerability of the white population of a county. The third, degree of racial overlap in manufacturing sectors, which could indicate a more specific kind of racial threat felt by low-income white residents of a county, as blacks came to be seen as competitors for jobs. The fourth, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) mobilization, was an indicator of the presence of civil rights groups that could spark an antagonistic reaction from white supremacy groups. Finally, the fifth factor was a strong legacy of previous racial violence, a general measure of race relations in the county's history, mapped through

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<sup>32</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. and Owens, Peter B., David Cunningham, and Geoff Ward. (2015). "Threat, Competition, and Mobilizing Structures: Motivational and Organizational Contingencies of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan." *Social Problems*, 62 (4).

occurrences of lynchings and other violent acts meant to terrorize the black population of an area.<sup>33</sup>

They found that “general white poverty” and “large black population” were two of the most necessary conditions for both klavern development and attendance at Klan rallies by the general public, while political threat, in terms of efforts on the part of blacks to regain voting rights, was also important, and in counties where there had been previous racial violence, there was almost always a high level of mobilization by the Klan.<sup>34</sup> Racial competition theory has been utilized by several scholars in conjunction with the example of the UKA in North Carolina, linking the idea of a racial threat with the mobilization of a group. Owens, Cunningham, and Ward (2015) found that mobilization depends on the “ethnic challengers” capacity to capitalize on shared grievances and to prove their viability to potential members, just as the Klan presented itself to North Carolinian whites as the only true representative of white interests. It also depends on the legacy of racial violence in the community, which would validate vigilantism.<sup>35</sup>

The Klan was fundamentally a kind of vigilante group that took the campaign for racial justice into its own hands. This was especially true in North Carolina, where a more moderate, progressive Southern government faced stringent opposition by a vocal minority in support of the segregationist status quo. Cunningham writes that states that offered little institutional support for defying federal mandates

“...in the process paradoxically broadened the Klan’s pool of potential adherents.

The UKA eagerly sought to fill this vacuum, presenting itself as an alternative

<sup>33</sup> Cunningham, D., & Phillips, B. T. (2007). Contexts for Mobilization: Spatial Settings and Klan Presence in North Carolina, 1964–1966. *American Journal of Sociology*, 113(3).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Owens, Peter B., David Cunningham, and Geoff Ward. (2015). "Threat, Competition, and Mobilizing Structures: Motivational and Organizational Contingencies of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan." *Social Problems*, 62 (4).

vehicle to address grievances that otherwise fell outside the pale of institutional politics.”<sup>36</sup>

The election of Governor Dan Moore in 1965 further drove home this point. Moore campaigned as “hard on race,” meaning pro-segregation, but then was a proponent of more moderate policies while in office, leading segregationists who had voted for him feeling like their interests were not represented by the state government. This group of disillusioned voters was a ready-made audience for the Klan’s recruitment rhetoric as the decade progressed.<sup>37</sup> Given that the elites of the state government offered no public support for Jim Crow’s continuation, and--as noted above-- counties with a large population of blacks and poor whites exhibited the highest rates of Klan involvement, I hypothesize that the Klan’s widespread support in North Carolina was primarily a middle- to lower-class phenomenon among whites who felt isolated from civic institutions and that they lacked a means to express their frustration with their potential economic loss. The way in which the Klan used strategic rhetoric to become a fairly mainstream means through which lower class white North Carolinians could express their frustration and fear and feel that they belonged to an organization that truly represented their interests is a subject that has not been investigated thoroughly before. As such I hope to build on Cunningham’s theory of lack of an institutional presence to make an original contribution to the literature on the mid-century iteration of the Ku Klux Klan. Where he focused more on institutional factors that made the Klan’s growth possible, I will focus on the psychological factors that contribute to group formation, particularly a group whose resurgence was catalyzed by racial angst.

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<sup>36</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 97.

<sup>37</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 97.



The Klan thus offered an opportunity for a form of political engagement for people who felt as though their state government had become distanced from their interests. Terry Sanford's apparent reluctance to oppose Lyndon B. Johnson and a federal government that poor whites saw as forcing upon the South changes that were threats to their very livelihoods helped to spur the growth of the Klan, in particular the UKA. I will attempt to show that the UKA's growth in Civil Rights era North Carolina was due to the fact that it recruited members by linking racial grievances with mainstream morals and the idea of Americanism for true Americans, i.e. whites.

#### **Hypothesis and Observable Implications**

Given that most of the activity of the resurgent Ku Klux Klan during the period took place in counties with high populations of both blacks and poor whites, my hypothesis is that:

Klan membership was made up largely of lower- and middle-class whites that felt that the loss of white supremacy would mean disaster for their livelihoods and place in society. I hypothesize that the ways in which the Klan used language that linked mainstream morals with white supremacy helped foment a feeling of representation within the group that many working class whites did not feel from other institutions. Thus the spike in Klan membership during the Civil Rights Era was a product of economic fears coupled with a sense that the Klan spoke the truth about the threat against white rights and that it was the organization that would stand up for those interests.

If this is true, I expect to see an overwhelming amount of Klan literature referencing Christianity, anti-Communism, and the idea that white rights were being trampled. In the language of the primary sources that illustrate how the Klan recruited its members, I would expect to see

language appealing to the lower classes, which would feel both a threat to their employment security and isolation from the elites in government.

### **Methods**

In order to answer my questions and test my hypothesis, I intend to explore the different elements of the Ku Klux Klan's presence in North Carolina through analysis of primary sources from the Klan itself including flyers, pamphlets, and cartoons, as well as newspaper articles and oral histories. As I am focusing on events that occurred during the Civil Rights era, specifically 1960-1970, it is not feasible for me to take a survey to measure current racial makeup, attitudes, or civic engagement, because the events in question took place nearly fifty years ago. Although I had originally wanted to conduct interviews of participants in these events, such as former law enforcement or Klan members themselves, or their family members, I soon realized that finding candidates would be extremely difficult and tedious, and that I could investigate this topic sufficiently without conducting interviews. Thus, the best way for me to approach my question was to examine the available relevant historical documents, newspaper archives, memoirs, and oral histories.

### **Data**

The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Greensboro, NC, was formed in 1979 to address the healing of the city after Klan-incited violence. A report published by the commission contains important findings about the Klan presence in the state more generally during the struggle over civil rights, and I will use the commission's final report as well as transcripts of their public hearings, which can be found on their website at [www.greensborotrc.org](http://www.greensborotrc.org). In 1967, the federal government released a transcript of the Ku Klux Klan hearing at the House Committee on Un-American Activities, which contains a plethora of

information about the Carolina Klan and its leadership, tactics, and goals. The full text of this report is available on the Internet Archive at [archive.org](http://archive.org). The Southern Historical Collection at the Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is dedicated to the study of Southern History and contains a collection of about seventy items entitled “Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s.” It contains flyers, applications for membership, guidelines for meetings, periodicals, cartoons, as well as other items from groups in North Carolina and other Southern states, though the North Carolina materials will obviously be the most relevant and important to my research. To address my question as it relates to these sources, I plan to code the information I find to locate references to “poverty,” “racial conflict,” “segregation,” “purity” (racial), and other thematic elements that will become apparent as I begin compiling my research.

For the analysis of the historical documents, I plan to identify common factors or points of agreement or disagreement with my hypothesis. I will also use the historical information throughout the text in a less systematic way, to support a more narrative structure. I plan on organizing the information chronologically, exploring events and relationships in the order in which they occurred in order to construct a narrative of the KKK’s activities in North Carolina and its relationship with the poor white population. The coding of the information I gather will be useful also in deciding where the data fits into the narrative.

## **Results and Analysis**

### **Resistance as Backlash Against Elites**

On August 14th of 1964, a cross was burned on the lawn of the governor’s mansion in Raleigh. This was intended to, and did, make a statement about how segregationist interests within the state viewed Terry Sanford’s accommodation of the federal Civil Rights Act. Sanford’s statement following the discovery of the cross was that it was a “badge of honor to have such

hoodlums against [him],” in reference to the Klan.<sup>38</sup> And against him they were—the Klan aligned itself firmly against state authorities, which UKA leader Bob Jones painted in no uncertain terms as traitors to their fellow white people. He and other UKA leaders “frequently framed all mainstream institutions as “behaving like niggers.” The Klan thus served as a singular “pure white” institution, hostile to the communists, “white niggers,” and other enemies that populated its surroundings.”<sup>39</sup> I will discuss the anti-communist bent of the Klan later in this project, but it was tremendously important to the Klan’s success in positioning itself as the representative for true white people that it was able to paint Sanford and other state liberals as less than fully white, establishing a clear dichotomy—this rhetoric often bypassed North Carolina lawmakers and went straight to the instigator of the federal law himself, President Johnson.

Dargan Frierson, a former FBI agent who worked in Greensboro during the 1960s, said that the Klan experienced a huge gain in popularity in North Carolina during Johnson’s administration “because they broadened the scope of their hatred from just the usual things of their ranting about the blacks and integration and stuff and started including Lyndon Johnson and blaming him for it.”<sup>40</sup> According to Frierson, the expansion of the Klan’s ire to include Johnson and Washington in general was a large draw for people who would not otherwise be interested in a group with such a violent reputation. Much of the rhetoric of the Klan after the passage of the Civil Rights act draws on classic conservative catch phrases about Washington’s distance from everyday Americans and the idea that Johnson and Congress were pushing an agenda that would

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<sup>38</sup> “Cross.” *Raleigh News and Observer*, Dec 16 1964. pp. 11. Infoweb.newsbank.com. 18 Oct 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 65.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Dargan Frierson. November 10, 1989. Greensboro Voices/Greensboro Civil Rights Oral History Collection. [12 Sept 2016].

benefit the few at the expense of the rights of the majority (i.e. white Protestants, the true Americans).

This invocation of conservatism in many cases purposefully used a comparison of Lyndon B. Johnson to King George III, as well as associating the “true Americans” who would stand up to Johnson’s disregard for their interests with the the founding fathers, their ideological ancestors, who had bravely resisted federal tyranny before. As UKA leader Bob Jones said in 1965, “I’ve been called a bigot, a demagogue, a racist, and every other name in the book, but that’s all right with me... they said the same things about Patrick Henry, John Hancock, Ben Franklin, and Governor George Wallace, so I figure I’m in good company.”<sup>41</sup> Aligning himself with these household names, themselves bywords for patriotism, helped to accomplished Jones’ objective of making the Klan analogous in the public mind to these first American patriots.

The “Personal Newsletter” of the National States Rights Party, the political wing of the Klan, was published in 1966, a crucial election year for Congress. The Newsletter declares that, “Our America is suffering from a more evil tyranny and from a more vicious suppression of our God-given rights than our forefathers who wrote and fought for the Declaration of Independence beginning in 1776...”<sup>42</sup> The comparison of Lyndon B. Johnson and his administration to King George III makes quite the statement, but also aligns the NSRP and its mission with the founding fathers and theirs. The NSRP reminds its readers that Americans had the bravery to stand up to elites then, and that they must do so now. In a particularly salient attempt to align the Klan’s ideals with those of the founding fathers, the pamphlet “An Introduction to the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan” features a message from Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton on the back:

<sup>41</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 143.

<sup>42</sup> “Personal Newsletter” sent to subscribers from the National States Rights Party. Augusta, GA. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 6. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

DEONDRA ROSE 12/6/16 9:33 PM

**Comment [1]:** Great point. It would be helpful to add 1-2 additional sentences here to elaborate on this and to drive home the main point that the information reveals.

“We do not choose to be common men. It is our right to be uncommon if we can. We seek opportunity—not security. We do not wish to be a kept citizen, humbled, dulled, by having the state look after us. We want to take the calculated risk: to dream and to build: to fail or succeed.”<sup>43</sup>

The phrasing of this exhortation is directly lifted from Thomas Paine’s classic pamphlet *Common Sense*, which alerted the colonists to rebel against London’s tyranny. Shelton’s use of this wording reflects his urging of his fellow white men to “join with us in an eloquent tribute to the chivalry and patriotism of the past.”<sup>44</sup> Where King George had unjustly imposed taxation without representation, Johnson had imposed integration.

These accusations of tyranny stemmed from the way in which Johnson had aggressively pushed for the passage of a Civil Rights Act and succeeded in doing so, in the process alienating Southern Democrats. A leaflet entitled the Revere Report, distributed in Durham and Hillsborough and presumably named for Paul Revere and his midnight ride that alerted Bostonians of the imminent coming of the British, noted, “It’s understandable why our forefathers kicked the KING habit nearly 200 centuries ago, now all we have to do is kick the LBJ and GREAT SOCIETY habit. We’re trying. Are you?” The leaflet was published in Durham in 1966, and also accuses Johnson of dictatorial takeover of executive power in the passage of the Civil Rights Act—use of powers recently acquired by the executive “for a variety of objectives for which they were not intended...he can impose his will on wide areas of the economy and for objectives that greatly affect our personal lives.”<sup>45</sup> The United Klans of

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<sup>43</sup> “An Introduction to the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan” published by the UKA. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 3. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> The Revere Report #17 Durham and Hillsborough, NC. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 8. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

America's newsletter, the *Fiery Cross*, eviscerates Johnson and his legacy: "the image of Johnson beside the greatness of Jefferson and Lincoln fades into nothingness... the forces of destruction loosed by Johnson... may well corrupt the entire power structure of this nation and plunge it into an era of lawlessness from which it will never recover."<sup>46</sup> The *Fiery Cross* also deems the Great Society "a poorly veiled scheme to enslave the American people" funded by "confiscatory taxation," once again linking Johnson to George III.<sup>47</sup>

By linking Johnson's administration to King George III and themselves to the founding fathers who righteously resisted an overstep of power, segregationist factions made a powerful statement about the legitimacy of Johnson's administration and its actions. The American colonists justified their resistance to unjust laws and their decision to abolish their current system of government in the Declaration of Independence, and similar language about unjust laws (i.e. federal laws mandating desegregation), and crucially, the duty to resist them, is used throughout Klan recruitment literature.

A flyer entitled, "President Johnson Has Declared War on the Ku-Klux-Klan" reads, "We wish we could hear that President Johnson had also declared war on city riots, sex orgies, lawlessness, and Commies within our national borders," calling into question Johnson's priorities and use of power.<sup>48</sup> The Klan promised to restore the Constitution, which had been ostensibly violated by Johnson in his single-minded and tyrannical imposition of Civil Rights legislation. Shelton insists that every member of the Klan "is sworn to uphold the law at all

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<sup>46</sup> "The Fiery Cross." Vol. 2, No. 8. Published by United Klans of America, Tuscaloosa, AL. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 3. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. pp.7.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> "President Johnson has declared war on the Ku-Klux-Klan" flyer. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 7. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

times,” but this is clearly contingent on the justice of the law in question, as it becomes the duty of members of the Klan to resist federal tyranny as manifested in desegregation.<sup>49</sup>

This focus on restoring the Constitution and invocation of traditional conservatism was particularly effective. It was easier to justify joining an organization such as the Ku Klux Klan for many right-leaning but mostly moderate North Carolinians on the basis of preserving the Constitution rather than on the basis of holding extremist views themselves. The Klan strategically emphasized its support for upholding the Constitution in a tremendous amount of recruitment materials. In a pamphlet that describes the seven symbols of the Klan, which include the Bible, the cross, the flag, the sword, the water, and the robe, and the hood, the author elaborates on the flag—“It is the symbol of the Constitution of the United States of America, free speech, free press, free schools, freedom of worship, and *all Constitutional laws*, both state and national [emphasis added];” what is implied in the Klan’s commitment to uphold all Constitutional laws is their tacit rejection of a commitment to uphold unconstitutional laws, such as the mandating of desegregation, which would detract from the rights of the states.<sup>50</sup>

This commitment to states’ rights was echoed in former Alabama governor George Wallace’s presidential campaign, whose slogan “Stand Up for America” reflected the urgency of a return to Constitutional values. “We shall continue this movement until our Constitution is restored... until we have national leadership which does not condone and explain away lawlessness... which defends, not destroys, the right of ownership of private property” proclaims a pamphlet exhorting Americans to support George C. Wallace for President in 1968.<sup>51</sup> Wallace’s anti-segregation, pro-Constitution message fell on fertile ground, as this rhetoric was

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<sup>49</sup> “An Introduction to the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan” published by the UKA.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> “Stand Up For America” pamphlet supporting George Wallace for President in 1968. George Wallace Campaign, Montgomery, AL. From the papers of Lloyd Jacobs.



common in Klan recruitment literature. The “Revere Report” proclaimed that “...we will no longer tolerate the lawlessness that is apparent in every departure from the Constitution.”<sup>52</sup> A pamphlet distributed by the United Klans of America, the Klan affiliate most active in North Carolina, lists principles and beliefs that the Klan holds dear, taking care to note:

“WE BELIEVE in the upholding of the Constitution of these United States...By upholding the Constitution is meant the whole Constitution. One who violates one clause of the Constitution would just as quickly break every other one if it served his purpose to do so.”<sup>53</sup>

This implicit reference to Johnson, who had violated states’ rights with the imposition of integration, was meant to inspire fear of Johnson as a tyrant who would have no problem violating the rest of the Constitution, since he so easily justified his past breach with the necessity of civil rights legislation. For lower class Southern whites, who had come to associate growth in the federal government with a growth in the rights and status of blacks in their societies, the threat of federal tyranny seemed very real indeed. This fear was specifically expressed in calls to protect property rights and the rights of states, which will be explored in depth in the next section.

When not attacking him as a tyrant, the segregationist media framed Johnson as clueless and as a race traitor. Fig. 1 (next page) shows a donkey with a question mark above its head lifting up its tail to emit some flatulence, with the caption, “Johnson (has) spoken!!” [as part of the page is torn off, I am making the assumption that the word “has” makes the most sense in the context of the cartoon]. This portrayal of the President as a clueless ass with nothing of

<sup>52</sup> The Revere Report #17 Durham and Hillsborough, NC.

<sup>53</sup> “The Principles of the United Klans of America, Inc.” published by the UKA, Tuscaloosa, AL. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 3. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

importance to say is a clear expression of utter contempt for Johnson and his administration and what they stand for, particularly civil rights.



Fig. 1. "Johnson [Has] Spoken" cartoon. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 7. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries, Chapel Hill, NC. 27 Jun 2016.

In volume 2 of the 8th edition of the *Fiery Cross*, the United Klans of America's newsletter, a good amount of space is given over to other cartoons, such as the following:



Fig. 2. "The Fiery Cross." Vol. 2, No. 8. Published by United Klans of America, Tuscaloosa, AL. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 3. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries, Chapel Hill, NC. 27 Jun 2016.

David Cunningham describes the way in which the UKA painted white liberal politicians as traitors to the white race: "...While the UKA always invited the "white public" to its rallies, liberals were considered "nigger lovers" and therefore not authentically white, regardless of their race."<sup>54</sup> This cartoon exemplifies that view, in this case of President Johnson, a Southerner himself and therefore the worst kind of race traitor. He is shown stabbing a figure representing "The South" in the back with a spear, upon which are written the names of various civil rights groups, such as the NAACP and the SCLC; the puddle of blood that has subsequently flown from the back of this prone figure has the words "honor," "world war bravery," and "pride" written in it, indicating the contributions that Southerners had made to America as a whole, which had been disregarded in favor of the interests of civil rights groups. Johnson, with exaggeratedly Jewish features, also holds a smoking gun, with "Intergration [sic] filth" in the cloud of smoke.

This image and the idea that the grand heritage of Southern culture was being tarnished and betrayed was particularly poignant to many people, particularly those who felt like they were losing their place in society, i.e. lower class whites who felt that they stood to lose from black advancement. The aforementioned written piece in the same issue of the *Fiery Cross* that declared the Great Society a "poorly veiled scheme to enslave the American people by the worst administration this country has ever known," is interesting in its choice of the word "enslave," which would ironically reflect white men's fear of losing their rights to same the extent that they had deprived others.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 65.

<sup>55</sup> "The Fiery Cross." Vol. 2, No. 8. Published by United Klans of America, Tuscaloosa, AL. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 3. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. pp.7.

### White Rights

To elaborate on the threat of Johnson and his administration as tyrants and how that resonated with working class white North Carolinians whose place in society was maintained by the maintenance of white supremacy, much of the language used in recruitment literature by white supremacist groups in response to the passage of the Civil Rights Act had to do with the need to maintain white rights. Much as the anti-LGBT factions in today's society have often phrased their resistance to advancement in LGBT rights as a battle for religious freedom, much of the language used in Klan recruitment materials framed the conflict as a sacrificing of white rights, in particular property rights, in order to acquiesce to the demands of a minority. Often the white supremacist primary sources do not even mention black Americans—George Wallace's campaign pamphlet declares him "the undisputed leader in the fight for personal and property rights, and against excessive taxation and the takeover of personal rights by the 'great society'."<sup>56</sup> The passage of the Civil Rights Act and its mandate for equal opportunity in employment was seen as a threat to business owners and an encroachment upon their right to hire whomever they chose. "We do not believe that the majority of American citizens yet realize the destructive momentum of the 1964 Civil Rights Act," writes the author of a leaflet entitled "PRESIDENT JOHNSON HAS DECLARED WAR ON THE KU-KLUX-KLAN." He or she continues: "Full enforcement of this act totally deprives citizens of their private property rights, limits states rights, and almost totally destroys free enterprise."<sup>57</sup>

Much of the language in pamphlets and flyers distributed to the general public was intended to arouse anger at the federal government without specifically referring to white

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<sup>56</sup> "Stand Up For America" pamphlet supporting George Wallace for President in 1968. George Wallace Campaign, Montgomery, AL. George Wallace Campaign, Montgomery, AL. From the papers of Lloyd Jacobs.

<sup>57</sup> "President Johnson has declared war on the Ku-Klux-Klan" flyer. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 7. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

supremacy. This language subtly linked white supremacy to other ideas that were accepted as good and legitimate, and was extremely effective particularly in framing civil rights as an issue of white rather than black rights. The idea that Johnson and his administration were actively violating the rights of white citizens was astonishingly effective in reframing the conversation in such a way that a segregationist could claim not to oppose civil rights, but only to oppose the encroachment upon white rights by the federal government. The common call to action that emphasized the need to restore the rights of white people was evoked in the pamphlet mentioned above, which declares that “[o]ur Government cannot continue to condone lawlessness under the title of Civil Justice. The white man, property owners, and employees must have their rights and their freedoms restored to them immediately!”<sup>58</sup> This hearkens back to the language of tyranny and Constitutionalism discussed in the previous section, where unjust laws enacted on shaky Constitutional basis spark righteous resistance on behalf of the Klan and other white supremacist groups.

One of the sources that uses this language of anger at lost rights is a parody of an application to join the NAACP, in which the “applicant” can indicate that he lives in an automobile, provide father’s name (if known), and source of income, whether from gambling or welfare. The pledge at the end of the application, under which the applicant signs, reads: “I promise to praise Lyndon B. Johnson and the Supreme Court and I promise not to snicker when the white man complains he is being persecuted. I know I has more rights than the white man and I understand that by signing this pledge I do not give up my rights to further relief checks.”<sup>59</sup> This poignantly illustrates the idea that was taken as dogma by the Klan and subsequently

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<sup>58</sup> “President Johnson has declared war on the Ku-Klux-Klan” flyer. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 7. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>59</sup> “NAACP Membership Application” flyer. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 7. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

disseminated in their recruitment literature that gains in black rights, or any attempt by black Americans to rise above the place in society designated theirs by white supremacist institutions such as Jim Crow, directly detracted from white rights. The rhetoric of focusing on the potential loss of property rights instead of the gains in rights to previously oppressed black citizens was a way of veiling the explicit racism behind not supporting the Civil Rights Act and appealing to a broader range of potential members who would be more comfortable fighting for the rights of white people than fighting against the rights of black people. The language of “rights and freedoms” fell on the receptive ears of economically disadvantaged white men who saw their legal superiority to blacks as their one saving grace in a society still controlled by the elite. C. P. Ellis, former exalted Cyclops (president) of the Durham klavern of the UKA, expressed this feeling, which was common among white men of his class, who had to work hard every day of their lives but felt like they could never get anywhere:

“Maybe they’ve had bitter experiences in this life and they had to hate somebody.

So the natural person to hate would be the black person. He’s beginnin’ to come up, he’s beginnin’ to learn to read and start votin’ and run for political office.

Here are white people who are supposed to be superior to them, and we’re shut out.”<sup>60</sup>

The core of what white supremacy meant to lower-class North Carolinians was that no matter how hard their lives were, they still were not black. Any gain in the social status of blacks was thus seen as a direct threat to their position in society, especially economically.

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with C.P. Ellis. “Why I Quit the Klan” from *American Dreams: Lost and Found* by Studs Terkel. The New Press: New York, 1980.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 finally gave the federal government the means to enforce *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the key Supreme Court decision that in 1954 had ruled “separate but equal” accommodations in the public schools unconstitutional. Most of the South had resisted court-ordered school integration through various means, and the threat of long-dreaded desegregation of the public schools also prompted a protest from Klan groups that the rights of whites were being violated. This language of rights allowed for the Klan to find its niche as the true defender of white political rights, where the federal government had trampled these rights in favor of minorities.

### **The Klan as the Representative of the White Protestant**

As lower-class and working-class North Carolinians began to feel compelled by the idea that the federal government was sacrificing their interests for the interests of civil rights demonstrators and thus that there was no longer any reason to place trust in the elites, it became increasingly easy for the Klan to position itself as the true defender of “real” white people. As Bob Jones said, justifying the UKA’s existence: “Everybody’s organized except the white Protestant.” As David Cunningham notes, Jones was not oblivious to the fact that most positions of power within North Carolina were held by white Protestants, but was rather making the point that “these white elites did not represent his vision of authentically white interests.”<sup>61</sup> It was this worldview, where elites had turned their backs on the working class because they had betrayed their race, which helped to convince white working class North Carolinians that the Klan was the best way to rectify these wrongs and to find a political and economic voice. This supports

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<sup>61</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 97.



Cunningham's central thesis about why North Carolina was such a fertile recruiting ground for the Klan.

C.P. Ellis expands upon this point when he talks about the moment he realized he wanted to become a member of the Klan—having had a heart attack from all the work he was doing running a service station, which he had borrowed money to pay for, he began to get angry, and needed an object of his anger. As his father had been a member of the Klan, he realized that it would be natural for him to hate black people, and that the Klan “was the only organization in the world that would take care of the white people.”<sup>62</sup> As will be discussed in more depth later, these working-class people had been raised on the American dream and were often deeply patriotic—it would have been tantamount to treachery and Communism to find America herself unfair to the working class. Easier was casting white grievances as the natural result of black advancement, as Bob Jones and his ilk often did. The Raleigh *News and Observer* quoted Jones in 1965 as saying, “It’s getting harder and harder all the time to be a white man in this country...the whole government appears to be on the side of the minorities and very few people ever speak up for the white majority;” it cannot be emphasized enough how much this message resonated with the white working class, who faced an economic threat from the end of segregation.<sup>63</sup>

As the Klan in its first iteration was a primarily upper-class phenomenon, and the second iteration a middle-class phenomenon, the third iteration was geared toward the working classes. Though the UKA bragged that it had the support of white collar workers as well, it was a simple fact that “klansmen came predominantly from the lower and lower middle classes, typically engaged in either skilled trade or semi skilled or unskilled manufacturing work,” as Cunningham

<sup>62</sup> Interview with C.P. Ellis. “Why I Quit the Klan” from *American Dreams: Lost and Found* by Studs Terkel. The New Press: New York, 1980.

<sup>63</sup> “Rally Hears Klan Leader.” *Raleigh News and Observer*, Jan 18 1965. pp. 9.

notes.<sup>64</sup> Lower-class men found the idea of a fraternal organization with a connection to chivalrous and patriotic organizations of the particularly appealing, and the Klan made sure to appeal to the manhood of its potential adherents in its recruitment literature.

Robert Shelton's exhortation in the pamphlet "An Introduction to the Ku Klux Klan," that echoes Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and was discussed above, includes the Josiah Gilbert Holland poem "God, give us men!," which was used in a few different sources I examined:

GOD, give us men! *The Invisible Empire*<sup>65</sup> demands  
 Strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands;  
 Men whom the lust of office does not kill;  
 Men whom the spoils of office can not buy;  
 Men who possess opinions and a will;  
 Men who have honor; men who will not lie;  
 Men who can stand before a demagogue  
 And damn his treacherous flatteries without winking!  
 Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog  
 In public duty, and in private thinking;  
 For while the rabble, with their thumb-worn creeds,  
 Their large professions and their little deeds,  
 Mingle in selfish strife, lo! Freedom weeps,  
 Wrong rules the land and waiting Justice sleeps.<sup>66</sup>

For downtrodden, working class men who saw their livelihood and means of providing for their families (a true measure of their manhood) slipping away, this call to arms resonated. It was a way to take action, to stand up for their women and children against forces who sought the moral degradation of American society (for discussion of white womanhood, see next section).

According to the UKA's literature, "what the Klan is" is "a fraternal order...an association of Real Men who believe in being something, in doing something worthwhile."<sup>67</sup> This idea of helplessness as the antithesis of manhood was echoed in a leaflet entitled, "What Will You Tell

<sup>64</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 127.

<sup>65</sup> The original poem here says "a time like this demands"

<sup>66</sup> "An Introduction to the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan" published by the UKA.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Your Children?” which asks how concerned citizens will explain to their children what they did to resist tyranny once America has been lost... “will you tell him you played golf or went fishing...while your nation went down the drain?”<sup>68</sup>

Beyond even just an expression of manhood, Klan literature also limned Klan membership as the destiny of the exceptional, not just the common, man. This language was also particularly appealing to the lowest echelon of white society, especially as they saw their elites failing them. The ritualism and special language of the Klan itself helped to reinforce this impression of selectivity. The “Kloran” was the title of the membership handbook of the Klan, listing the Klan Creed, as well as various ceremonies for opening a meeting, initiating members, and explanations of the various words and titles used within the Invisible Empire, some drawn from ancient languages, as “KLABEE—The Treasurer, from Kaba—to keep and Kees, an ancient Egyptian word meaning a purse.”<sup>69</sup> This link to antiquity was also proclaimed in a leaflet distributed by C.P. Ellis when he worked as a janitor at Duke University during the 1960s entitled, “The Invisible Empire: The History of the Ku Klux Klan.” This leaflet claims that the Invisible Empire had existed since “the dawn of civilization wherever men banded themselves together to fight for liberty and freedom,” asserting that the Sons of Liberty were themselves members, and that when General Forrest first formed the Klan, he was approached by the holders of the archives of the Sons of Liberty, and thereby the Invisible Empire was continued.<sup>70</sup> Thus membership in such a venerated institution was not for the average man—as the pamphlet “The Practice of Klanishness” declared: “YOU are no ordinary man. YOU are a K-L-A-N-S-MAN!”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> “What Will You Tell Your Children?” 1965-1968. Box 1. The Ku Klux Klan Collection, Rubenstein Library, Duke University Libraries, Durham, NC. 10 Aug 2016.

<sup>69</sup> “Kloran” published by the Confederate Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Greensboro, NC.

<sup>70</sup> “The Invisible Empire: The History of the Ku Klux Klan.” From the papers of Lloyd Jacobs, “king kleagle” of the Durham Klan, lent to Robert Korstad by Kathy Jacobs.

<sup>71</sup> “The Practice of Klanishness.” Published by the UKA. 1960.

The implications of the word “Klan” itself are profound—it is defined in the Kloran as “a number of men of kindred purpose who are bound together by an oath and who are very determined to enhance and protect each other’s interest and welfare.”<sup>72</sup> This sense of belonging in a group that had been ordained to protect the welfare of every man that had joined was particularly appealing to many men who felt economic pressure as a result of the Civil Rights Act. The Klan offered a network of economic support, almost like a union, although they were as virulently anti-union as they were anti-Communist. In the pamphlet entitled, “The Practice of Klanishness,” in which the author exhorts men to exhibit certain traits deemed necessary in order to be the kind of man who belongs in the Klan, members are urged to provide each other with economic support.

“Trading, dealing with and patronizing Klansmen in preference to others.

Employing klansmen in preference to others whenever possible... It is presumed there is a profit to be made in the transaction if consummated, then do your part in endeavoring to turn the profit to a klansman... Apply this method in regard to klansmen who are doctors, lawyers, dentists, merchants, barbers, opticians, carpenters, insurance men, taxi cab owners, automobile dealers and ANY and ALL other vocations of men.”<sup>73</sup>

The idea that the Klan recruits real men who want to fight for the preservation of Southern culture was appealing to a class of downtrodden Southern men who wanted to find a kind of brotherhood and a chance to prove themselves. As Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton exhorted potential members, “I want you to join with us in an eloquent tribute to the chivalry and

<sup>72</sup> “Kloran” published by the Confederate Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Greensboro, NC.

<sup>73</sup> “The Practice of Klanishness.” Published by the UKA. 1960. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 3. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries, Chapel Hill, NC. 27 Jun 2016.

patriotism of the past.”<sup>74</sup> Chivalry and patriotism sound very good to a worn-down textile worker or gas station employee who want to be part of something bigger than themselves or to find a group that represents what they’ve always believed to be true about themselves.

When some local members asked if C.P. Ellis would be interested in joining, Ellis said, “Boy, that was an opportunity I really looked forward to! To be part of somethin’.”<sup>75</sup> His interview also refers to the ritual of the Klan as something that beckoned to him—

“I was led into a large meeting room, and this was the time of my life! It was thrilling. Here’s a guy who’s worked all his life and struggled all his life to be something, and here’s the moment to be something. I will never forget it. Four robed Klansmen led me into the hall. The lights were dim, and the only thing you could see was an illuminated cross. I knelt before the cross.”<sup>76</sup>

Ritual, a sense of historical destiny and importance, and an appeal to manhood all worked together to make the Klan an appealing option for white working class men who felt deeply left behind by the new social order. Ellis summed it up succinctly when he said, “Deep down inside, we want to be part of this *great society*. Nobody listens, so we join these groups” (emphasis added).<sup>77</sup> The white working class felt heard by the Klan, who offered them reassurance that they would fight for their rights—namely, that they would work to preserve whites’ place in the social order. The true voice of white Southerners was the Klan, and whites who did not adhere to the Klan’s ideology were traitors. Cunningham also frames the resistance to elites thus: “UKA leaders frequently framed all mainstream institutions as “behaving like niggers.” The klan thus

<sup>74</sup> “An Introduction to the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan” published by the UKA. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 3. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with C.P. Ellis. “Why I Quit the Klan” from *American Dreams: Lost and Found* by Studs Terkel. The New Press: New York, 1980.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

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Comment [2]: Source?

served as a singular “pure white” institution, hostile to the communists, “white niggers,” and other enemies that populated its surroundings.”<sup>78</sup> Imperial Kludd (national chaplain) of the UKA George Dorsett railed against the Highway Patrol for taking license plates down at a rally, as they were wont to do, exclaiming that “[they] must be part nigger... if they had any guts, if they were decent white men, they would take off their guns and badges and be resurrected and join the Klan.”<sup>79</sup> The Klan’s image and perception of itself as the only true defender of white people and their interests was thus solidified. UKA leaders recognized their base’s feeling of alienation from institutions, and capitalized upon it. As Cunningham puts it:

“By framing the UKA as an organization working to preserve an increasingly beleaguered “real” white America, and then providing an outlet for members to act collectively in “authentically” white settings, klan recruiters sought to align their aims with those of white southerners threatened by civil rights gains.”<sup>80</sup>

#### **Miscegenation Fears**

A classic way in which the Klan built off innate racial fears and simultaneously appealed to the masculinity of Southern men was through the threat to their women. The threat of miscegenation was traditionally a facile way to scare whites out of indifference toward the advancement of blacks in society, and built off the appeal to Southern manhood, further characterizing Klansmen as the potential saviors of their race. The rise of blatantly white supremacist power structures after the Wilmington massacre of 1898 was predicated on this language of miscegenation and the purity of white womanhood, which was increasingly threatened as blacks gained rights. Leading up to the white supremacist campaign in Wilmington, the *Raleigh News & Observer* under editor

<sup>78</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp.65.

<sup>79</sup> Drabble, John. “THE FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina, 1964-1971.” John Hope Franklin Center Lecture Series: Duke University, Sept 24, 2003.

<sup>80</sup> Cunningham pp. 126.

Josephus Daniels published “sexualized images of black men and their supposedly uncontrollable lust for white women. Newspaper stories and stump speeches warned of “black beasts” who threatened the flower of Southern womanhood.”<sup>81</sup> This imagery had been common for decades, centuries even, and was a common backlash to abolitionist ideas and any proponents of black rights.

Opponents of Frank Porter Graham, one of Terry Sanford’s mentors, in the 1950 North Carolina gubernatorial election, stoked the fear of desegregation’s impact on the textile industry; mill workers heard that “a vote for Graham would mean a nigger at a machine next to a white woman.” Graham was soundly defeated.<sup>82</sup> The threat of miscegenation was a common theme in Klan and other white supremacist literature, though sometimes fairly subtly, as in the case of the idea of education and saving white children from the dangers of integrated schools.

One of the common “rights” which was seen as threatened by integration was a right to determine the course of one’s children’s schooling—thus a campaign of the Klan’s that had widespread appeal was the idea that the schools needed to be “saved.” A pamphlet distributed by the UKA laments the new forces at work in the public schools, which have become “Dewey-oriented jungles,” a clearly racialized phrase echoed in a flyer from the “Liberty Lobby,” soliciting funds to fight integration, which proclaims that the “law of the jungle” now rules in American schools.<sup>83</sup> As the American public schools are destroyed by federal mandates to integrate, “terror and degeneracy” have increased, along with violence, most of it racial violence, as the UKA claims, citing the example of “a White Brooklyn, NY high school teacher was

<sup>81</sup> Tyson, Timothy. “The Ghosts of 1898: Wilmington’s Race Riot and the Rise of White Supremacy.” *Raleigh News & Observer*. 17 November 2006.

<sup>82</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>83</sup> “Save our Schools” pamphlet distributed by the UKA. Granite Quarry, NC; “Save Our Schools,” distributed by the Liberty Lobby. Washington, DC.

brutally assaulted by a gang of Black students and later set afire in the hall of the school;” the Liberty Lobby flyer echoes this claim with the similarly sensational proclamation that “in Philadelphia, a 17-year-old White girl was dragged to the boiler room of a high school and raped by 30 Negro students.”<sup>84</sup> The final warning, tame in comparison, is simply that, “Forced integration has resulted in a sharp rise in interracial dating. The great majority of interracial dating involves *Black males dating White females*.”<sup>85</sup>

The fundamental danger of miscegenation in Klan literature was the weakening of the white race, which had been ordained as superior by God—thus the prevention of intermarriage was the fulfillment of a God-given duty, and not simply a dislike of blacks, although Klan literature also backed up the innate inferiority of the descendants of African slaves through pseudoscience. A flyer distributed by the Klan proclaims, “Scientists Say Negro Still in Ape Stage: Races Positively Not Equal,” and demonstrates the inferiority of black to white by walking the reader through various comparisons, from intellectual to physical—“the front of the Negro’s skull is much smaller than the white man’s thus giving the Negro less room for the higher faculties”... “The Negro has had just as long as the white man to develop. Tens of thousands of years have passed by and the Negro has not produced a civilization. Where is his art, his science, his religion?”<sup>86</sup> The idea that the black man is only civilized because of the influence of whites is echoed in a flyer entitled “The Tragedy of Truth,” which paints Africa as a land of riches with diamonds for the taking, though the African “never picked one up from the dust until a white man showed to him its glittering light.”<sup>87</sup> These documents, meant to prove the

<sup>84</sup> “Save our Schools” pamphlet distributed by the UKA. Granite Quarry, NC; “Save Our Schools,” distributed by the Liberty Lobby. Washington, DC.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> “Scientists Say Negro Still in Ape Stage: Races Positively Not Equal” leaflet. Box 1. The Ku Klux Klan Collection, Rubenstein Library, Duke University Libraries, Durham, NC. 10 Aug 2016.

<sup>87</sup> “The Tragedy of Truth” Klan essay. North Carolina. Box 1. The Ku Klux Klan Collection, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.



basic and innate inferiority of black to white, were highly effective in stoking fears of what would become of the white race if miscegenation became widespread, with these documents also acknowledging the superiority of black genes, which could easily destroy the white race.

The white supremacist literature thus portrays civil rights advocates as having the goal of the ultimate doom of the white race, as opposed to simply an increase in civil rights for minorities. The Revere Report quotes a Denver preacher who states his belief that America's race problem will only end when intermarriage makes the differences in skin color obsolete—the editors reply that “WE EARNESTLY HOPE AND PRAY THAT ALL OF THIS “REVEREND’S” CHILDREN WILL PROVIDE HIM WITH MANY MULATTO GRANDCHILDREN.”<sup>88</sup> This idea that miscegenation would lead to the irreversible downfall of American civilization was widespread in Klan literature, but white supremacists did not even give blacks the credit for wanting civil rights for the purpose of corrupting the white race—the masterminds of integration were instead the Jews and their Communist conspiracy.

The idea that the NAACP and other organizations advocating for civil rights were pawns of an international Jewish Communist or Soviet conspiracy intent on weakening American civilization features widely in Klan-disseminated literature. The authors of the “President Johnson Has Declared War on the Ku-Klux-Klan” flyer mourn that the NAACP “has nothing short of total intergration [sic] and profligate interracial marriage as their goal... we believe in opposing anything and anybody who seeks to destroy, by inter-marriage, the races and colors created by the Almighty God himself.”<sup>89</sup> Here appears, once again, the idea that races were ordained by God, which will be discussed further in the next few pages, but this linking of color

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<sup>88</sup> The Revere Report #17 Durham and Hillsborough, NC. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 8. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>89</sup> “President Johnson Has Declared War on the Ku-Klux-Klan” flyer.

to morality is tremendously important to the idea that race-mixing would bring about the downfall of America.

A 1965 pamphlet entitled “Martin Luther King and his ‘Civil Rights’ Urinators” details the supposed moral degeneracy that was part and parcel of the activities at Selma and Montgomery; “These are the kind of people, sex-crazed African savages, beatniks, prostitutes, sex perverts, homosexuals who are screaming for “Civil Rights” and “Equality” for the Negroes.” This is unsurprising to the author of the pamphlet, because Johnson’s cronies themselves are “known crooks, swindlers, congenital liars, political charlatans, homosexuals, etc.” These kinds of claims were clearly meant to offend the sensibilities of the average religious white reader, and to reveal the moral degeneracy that went hand in glove with the lifting of the sexual color barrier.<sup>90</sup>

The sexual threat to white women, and how it could be used as a weapon against America in the Cold War, is expressed clearly in a pamphlet aptly titled, “The Kiss of Death,” the top of which is illustrated with a crude rendition of a black man with animalistic features attempting to kiss a pure-looking white woman. Preservation of racial purity is essential, asserts this source, “or back to the jungle forever.” The Soviet Union knows that America will be weakened by intermarriage of the races, as “civilization would not survive if the white man is destroyed,” and is thus urging the end of Jim Crow as a means to win the Cold War.<sup>91</sup> Segregation is what “made America great,” the flyer proclaims; “remember the white man is making his last stand.... And it is what you do and say as an individual that may determine his future forever.”<sup>92</sup> The threat of intermarriage reared its head again in the *Fiery Cross*, in which the author says, “...this Republic

<sup>90</sup> “Martin Luther King and his ‘Civil Rights’ Urinators” distributed by Cinema Educational Guild, Inc, Hollywood, CA, 1965. From the papers of Lloyd Jacobs.

<sup>91</sup> “The Kiss of Death” flyer. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 7. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

can have no future if racial lines are broken and its proud citizenship sinks to the level of a mongrel breed.”<sup>93</sup> Making integration about the threat America as a whole faced if the races were allowed to marry each other was a way that white supremacist ideology became linked to the more mainstream ideal of anti-Communism, especially with the wide propagation of the belief that integration was a Communist-sponsored plot to end America as white Southerners knew it.

### **Anti-Communism**

One of the main ways in which the Klan broadened its appeal beyond people who simply held racial prejudices was the linking of the desegregation threat to the threat of Communism. Where its explicit racial appeal could alienate more moderate whites, the UKA’s “alignment with a broad field of Cold War right-wing thought, characterized by a belief in a conspiracy theory of history,” aided it in its appeal to these citizens.<sup>94</sup> The “paranoid style” of the Klan’s anti-Communist rhetoric, wherein a broad conspiracy to destroy American freedoms was a very real threat, fit into the mainstream politics of the time, as McCarthy’s heyday had just passed less than a decade before, and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover’s counterintelligence program against Communism had widespread support.<sup>95</sup> Connected also to the idea of a Communist threat was anti-Semitism—the majority Protestant white Southern population was receptive to rhetoric against Catholics and Jews. Catholics were held to be involved in a conspiracy, directed from Rome, to overthrow the separation of church and state, whereas Jews were agents of Soviet Communism set to overthrow the white race. In a flyer entitled, “Jews Behind Race Mixing,” a publication of the National States’ Rights Party that reveals the international conspiracy behind the Communist Party’s plan to ruin the white race and thus ruin America, a letter sent to Karl

<sup>93</sup> “The Fiery Cross.” Vol. 2, No. 8. Published by United Klans of America, Tuscaloosa, AL. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 3. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>94</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville USA*. pp. 137.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 138.

Marx is quoted as saying, “The Jewish People...will attain world domination by mixing the races and the abolition of nations.” The flyer also includes a photostat of a Communist Party membership card “calling for race-mixing,” as the Rights and Duties of Party Members include “To fight against all forms of national oppression, discrimination and segregation...to fight for the full social, political and academic equality of the Negro people, for Negro and white unity.”<sup>96</sup> This call for equality was seen as a call for integration and thus miscegenation, as discussed before—Cunningham notes this dissonance in belief, quoting Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal’s study of Southern white power structures: “while many civil rights activists pushed hardest for gains tied to jobs and political participation, segregationist anxieties were often rooted in efforts to maintain racial separation in social spaces.”<sup>97</sup>

This fear of a Communist plot to mix the races is also seen in the flyer “The Kiss of Death,” which presents integration as a paradoxical approach to the problem of fighting Communism, where segregation was attacked by civil rights activists as a means for the Soviet Union to slander our democratic reputation abroad: “At present we are so afraid of Communism we are refusing to build homes for our white people while Negroes are multiplying...we are accepting the only deadly thing about Communism, the Negro, in order to fight Communism.”<sup>98</sup> The author rejects that giving full rights to black citizens is a furthering of democratic ideals; rather he insists that since this is what the Communists profess to want, Americans are simply succumbing to Communism without realizing it, and thus actually weakening democracy.

<sup>96</sup> “Jews Behind Race Mixing” published by the National States Rights Party. Box 1. The Ku Klux Klan Collection, Rubenstein Library, Duke University Libraries, Durham, NC. 10 Aug 2016.

<sup>97</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 120.

<sup>98</sup> “The Kiss of Death” flyer. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 7. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Given this widespread anti-Communist paranoia, deep in the throes of the Cold War, linking black attainment of rights to the takeover of Jewish-controlled Communist interests was highly successful in stoking fear and convincing people that there needed to be actions taken—fighting Communism was a popular value, and if the Communist agenda included race-mixing for the sake of overthrowing American civilization, then integration must be resisted: according to the UKA, how could “one remain a patriotic American in the face of federal desegregation mandates? Certainly not by accepting—even grudgingly—integration policies.”<sup>99</sup> Thus the duty of whites to resist segregation was incorporated into the existent duty to resist Communism.

W. Horace Carter was the editor of the Tabor City Tribune, who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 for his campaign against the rising Klan in Horry County, which is in Southeastern North Carolina near Wilmington. As he states in an interview:

“I think that one of the reasons that the Klan got some momentum and did get some membership is because many of the things that they said almost any of us would agree with. I mean, you couldn’t oppose everything that they said. I couldn’t oppose it now. They were against Communism, and they were for Americanism; and this was, you know, long about (at least shortly before) the time of Joe McCarthy”<sup>100</sup>

An application card indicating interest in the Klan appears on the next page:

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<sup>99</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 142.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with W. Horace Carter. January 17, 1976. Interview B-0035. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Published by Documenting the American South. [12 Sept 2016].

- FIGHT COMMUNISM -

**YOU ARE ELIGIBLE TO JOIN THE UNITED KLANS OF AMERICA, Inc.  
KNIGHTS OF KU KLUX KLAN**

-If you are a Native-born Loyal United States Citizen, 18 years old, a White Gentile Person of Temperate Habits, of Protestant Faith, and believe in White Supremacy and Americansim. Please fill in below.

Place an (X) at one of the following:

-----I would like to join the United Klans of America.

-----I am a former member of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and would like to be reinstated.

My Name Is-----Age----- Sex

My Address Is-----

City----- State-----

I am employed by----- Religious Faith-----

Phone-----

Mail to the following address: P. O. Box 138  
HURDLE MILLS, N. C. (Over)

*Fig. 3. "Fight Communism" application card. United Klans of America. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 3. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries, Chapel Hill, NC. 27 Jun 2016.*

Notice that the very top of the card invites the reader to "Fight Communism." The back urges the potential member to join "in our efforts to maintain segregation of the races and fight communism that exists in America today." These two ideals were thus solidly aligned with one another in such a way that fighting communism essentially became synonymous with opposing integration. Frierson, the former FBI agent who worked in Greensboro, emphasized this part of the appeal of the Klan in his interview:

"They used to talk about the disloyalty of the Klan...when it came to loyalty to this country, they thought they were doing the right thing...The Ku Klux Klan leaders were misguided but still sincerely felt that this whole movement of the civil rights thing and the black integration at the white school and so forth was all

Communist sponsored, Communist controlled, and they felt they were fighting Communism...they thought that they were fighting Communism in their own stupid way.”<sup>101</sup>

Even before the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, the Klan was already able to appeal to the average American by opposing Communism. In the 1960s, when Civil Rights became linked to the grand Communist plot to overthrow America and her way of life, this language proved similarly effective.

### **Patriotism, Christianity, White Supremacy**

All of this culminates in the ultimate message of the Klan, which was that if one was a “true” American, i.e. a white Protestant, one owed it to one’s race to join the Klan and protect authentic white interests. The aligning of white supremacy with mainstream values, some of which have already been discussed, such as anti-Communism, manhood, and the maintenance of rights and the Constitution, allowed the Klan’s message to appeal to a wide range of working-class white North Carolinians during the 1960s. The Klan also very intentionally used pro-American and pro-Christian language in its publications. Combined with explicit statements of white supremacy, this helped convince the average God-fearing patriot that white supremacy as a philosophy went hand in hand with patriotism. “Whiteness and Christianity were inextricably linked” for the UKA and its adherents.<sup>102</sup>

A pamphlet entitled the “7 Point Program” for influencing one’s community as a Klansman includes a membership interest card, which one should fill out if one is “a native-born loyal United States Citizen, 18 years old, a White Gentile Person of Temperate Habits, of Protestant Faith, and believe in White Supremacy and Americanism” –the phrase “white

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Dargan Frierson. November 10, 1989. Greensboro Voices/Greensboro Civil Rights Oral History Collection. [12 Sept 2016].

<sup>102</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville USA*. pp. 144.

supremacy” is included fairly innocuously.<sup>103</sup> This fairly subtle alignment of belief in white supremacy with belief in God occurs repeatedly in Klan literature; for example, “the Klan Creed,” after expressing faith in God, states:

“I believe that God created races and nations, committing to each a special destiny and service; that the United States through its white, Protestant citizens holds a Divine commission for the furtherance of white supremacy and the protection of religious freedom’ that its constitution and laws are expressive of the Divine purpose.”<sup>104</sup>

The idea that God created the different races and in a way ordained that they be segregated is extremely common in Klan literature. A booklet distributed by the UKA entitled “God is the Author of Segregation” lays out the Biblical case for segregation. The author of this booklet walks the reader through his case, which he bases on the fact that segregation between good and evil, God and the devil, gentiles and Jews, and between nations occurs in the Bible... he then discusses Noah’s son Ham, who was apparently black and was cursed for his sins, thus showing that black people are morally inferior, natural sinners—thus it is necessary to segregate blacks and whites, so that the white race would not be tainted.<sup>105</sup>

The Klan intertwined patriotism, Christianity, and white supremacy in a way that made white supremacy seem to follow logically from one’s love of God and country. This is supported by Cunningham’s findings in *Klansville, USA*:

<sup>103</sup> “7 Point Program” published by the Confederate Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Greensboro, NC. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 1. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>104</sup> “Kloran” published by the Confederate Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Greensboro, NC. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 1. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. pp.1.

<sup>105</sup> “God is the Author of Segregation” distributed by C.P. Ellis in Durham, NC. 1967. Box 1. The Ku Klux Klan Collection, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.



“The UKA related racial anxieties over civil rights legislation to broadly shared values tied to god and country...racial identity work generalized conceptions of racial threat by clearly underlining the relationship between segregation and moral and patriotic authenticity.”<sup>106</sup>

By aligning white interests with Christian interests, the Klan was building off racist literature that portrayed blacks as inferior both morally and intellectually, and thus portrayed itself as the defender of Christian morals in a society that faced a threat of degeneration from integration. An example is the Christmas card distributed by the UKA with the cover of Christ holding the cross that says, “Keep Christ in Christmas.”<sup>107</sup> Even beyond an association with Christian morals, the Klan wanted itself known as an inherently Christian organization, which is obvious in its explicit call for Christians to join—indeed Christianity was a prerequisite for joining. Appeals such as these were highly effective. The Klan wanted people to know that it was the force keeping America a Christian nation, despite the best attempts of the Johnson administration and the Communists. W. Horace Carter discusses the moral draw of the Klan in Tabor City during the 1950s:

“we have never...tried to say anything good about the character of the people that they flogged...these beatings that they administered and their form of justice on these people, generally speaking the people that they punished had a lot lacking in their character and they deserved some kind of punishment.”<sup>108</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 147.

<sup>107</sup> “Rules and Regulations” published by the UKA, “Keep Christ in Christmas” Christmas card distributed by the UKA. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 3. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with W. Horace Carter. January 17, 1976. Interview B-0035. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Published by Documenting the American South. [12 Sept 2016]. pp. 34.

The Klan would beat men who were unfaithful to their wives or who were alcoholics—the kind of people who were moral transgressors anyway. In this way, the Klan’s upholding of morality was in line with the values of the community and made it all the more appealing to the average citizen, especially in the early years of its presence in North Carolina.

The Kloran, which is the tract containing explanation and belief of rituals of a Klan group, explains the burning cross thus: the cross reminds members that “Christ is our criterion of character, and His teachings our rule of life-blood-bought, holy, sanctified, and sublime” and that the burning of this sacred symbol expresses that “Christ is the light of the world.”<sup>109</sup> The Klan’s portrayal of itself as first a Christian organization above all else was highly effective in widening its mainstream appeal.

Part of this appeal to mainstream Christians depended on a distancing from violent tactics, which would alienate most citizens who would otherwise be drawn by rhetoric about law and order and restoring the constitution and the rights of white people. As Frierson, who attended many rallies as an FBI agent during the 1960s, recalled in his interview: “They’d be very candid about anything of course that had to do with nonviolence... I don’t remember a single instance of real violence that occurred in the Greensboro area.”<sup>110</sup> A lack of open endorsement of violence was key in legitimating the Klan’s purpose and backing up their claim to represent true white interests and not just fringe hate. However, violence did occur. Cunningham discusses two co-existing Klans:

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<sup>109</sup> “Kloran” published by the Confederate Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Greensboro, NC. Collection #04921: Ku Klux Klan Records: 1960s-1970s; Folder 1. The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Dargan Frierson. November 10, 1989. Greensboro Voices/Greensboro Civil Rights Oral History Collection. [12 Sept 2016].

“...everyday adherents contributed various resources, both material and social, that allowed the UKA to sustain itself and gather the large numbers that might provide it with a measure of political influence. Their presence also provided a sort of cover for more militant action, which was almost always planned and carried out secretly by core members...”<sup>111</sup>

Without condoning violence or acknowledging that it occurred as a product of their organizing efforts and normalization of racist language, UKA leaders had plausible deniability and could legitimate their organization’s existence and stated aims and goals. Violence was present in undertones though, and an interesting incident is described in the HUAC report, where Robert Shelton proclaimed: “our weapons are ballots not bullets...we will never night ride again, UNLESS forced to defend our homes.”<sup>112</sup> Often the use of violence was framed as such, as a righteous resistance to tyranny that aligns with the language used to compare Johnson to King George and the Klan to the founders, which all comes back to this fundamental loss of trust in elites and a turning to alternative routes to political power, which was the main draw of the Klan for lower-class white North Carolinians.

### **Conclusions and Limitations**

Through the use of mainstream ideals and by linking white supremacy to these ideals, the Ku Klux Klan was able to influence many working class North Carolinians to join during the Civil Rights Era, especially after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The fear of losing the only thing that working class whites had, which was the idea of white supremacy, helped to spur

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<sup>111</sup> Cunningham, David. *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 70.

<sup>112</sup> *The Present Day Ku Klux Klan Movement: Report by the United States Congress Committee on Un-American Activities*. Ninetieth Congress: Session 1. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1967.

many people to join this racialized kind of grassroots movement, because they saw the Klan as the only organization that truly would represent their rights. After all, despite their often desperate economic circumstances, the one thing lower class whites could console themselves with was the fact that they had more rights than blacks. A threat to this status quo prompted the new mainstream appeal of the Klan, which intertwined belief in white supremacy with Christianity, anti-Communism, and Americanism, a combination that was easily palatable to whites with little opportunity for advancement in a post-Jim Crow society.

My research, purely qualitative as it is, obviously provides little hard data in terms of, say, survey respondents from Klan members about what appealed to them most. Given that the time period in question is fifty years removed, this study had to draw from what sources it could, and thus there was little selectivity of sources as long as they came from North Carolina during the 1960s, or were from a different region but expressed views and rhetoric that I had already encountered in my research. I think that if I were writing a purely historical paper, I would have focused on a few key documents—an entire thesis could be written about the religious overtones in the Klan, for instance. As such, my hypothesis has been confirmed and I feel confident that I have deepened general understanding of the third-wave Klan's presence in North Carolina.

**Note: The 2016 Election**

When prominent Klan leader David Duke ran for Louisiana's open U.S. Senate seat this past election cycle, he was quick to note that some of his ideas, labeled racist hate speech in the past, had gained mainstream traction with Donald Trump's campaign. "After four decades, the issues that I've spearheaded and fought for are now mainstream.... I've won, in the sense that these are now mainstream," Duke said recently, referring to his beliefs in an international Jewish conspiracy, the idea of a war on Christmas and Christianity, the danger of illegal immigration, and a destruction of American cultural values.<sup>113</sup> All these ideas, which were espoused by the Civil Rights Era Klan, found a new platform recently, when such rhetoric was normalized by factions (the so-called alt-right) that supported Trump's run for the Presidency. While Trump himself never blatantly espoused such ideas, he also did not condemn the support he received from white supremacist organizations, which helped to make such language an acceptable part of mainstream political discourse, which it should not be. The fact that this language was so effective in garnering support of working-class whites, however, means that the anger and fear of this segment of society is still easily stoked, with dire consequences for race relations and the possibility of a post-racial America. Some lower-class whites still feel that federal attention to minorities' needs and issues comes at a loss to them (see earlier reference to the LGBT rights vs. religious freedom debate), and this mindset is incompatible with true progress and healing of past wounds.

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<sup>113</sup> Robertson, Campbell. "David Duke's Senate Run in Louisiana Draws Attention but Not Support." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 11 Sept. 2016. Web. 07 Dec. 2016.

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