

**THAT OLD-TIME RELIGION:**  
THREE JOURNALISTS IN THE TRIANGLE OF RACE, RELIGION,  
AND LIBERALISM IN THE SOUTH AT THE CUSP OF THE  
MODERN CIVIL RIGHTS ERA, 1950-1953

Thomas Clark Terry

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Approved by:

Dr. Donald Shaw

Prof. Harry Amana

Dr. Rhonda Gibson

Dr. Harry Watson

Dr. Joel Williamson

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## ABSTRACT

THOMAS CLARK TERRY: “That Old-Time Religion: Three Journalists in the Triangle of Race, Religion, and Liberalism in the South at the Cusp of the Modern Civil Rights Era, 1950-1953.”

(Under the direction of Dr. Donald Shaw)

This dissertation is a historical work and examines the underlying motivations for and the campaign against the Ku Klux Klan in the early 1950s, a campaign by Leslie Thompson and Willard Cole of *The Whiteville News-Reporter* and Horace Carter of the *Tabor City Tribune*. The campaign earned the *Tribune* and *The News-Reporter* the 1952 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. The purpose of this dissertation is to mine the influences that motivated these three men to stand up to the Klan.

The dissertation determined that their religious beliefs were the primary motivations within the context of race. Adherence to the law also buttressed their coverage. Liberalism was there, but as an echo. Carter, Cole, and Thompson represented a liberal newspapering tradition in the South that included Hodding Carter, Jr. and Ralph McGill, also Pulitzer Prize winners.

## DEDICATION

To my wife Cathy, as ever

And to our children: James, William, and Elizabeth

LAUS DEO

IN MEMORY

Willard Cole and Leslie Thompson

Elizabeth and James Terry, my parents

TO

Horace Carter

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*“Writing a book is an adventure. To begin with, it is a toy and an amusement; then it becomes a mistress, and then it becomes a master, and then a tyrant. The last phase is that just as you are about to be reconciled to your servitude, you kill the monster, and fling him out . . . ”*

*– Winston Churchill*

• *Dr. Marvin Kleinau.* Dr. Kleinau is emeritus professor of communications at and the former dean of the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. To him goes my deepest appreciation.

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- *Elizabeth and James Terry*. My parents, who gave me roots and wings and an abiding passion for newspapering.

“OLD-TIME RELIGION” (Spiritual)

*Refrain*

Give me that old-time religion,  
Give me that old-time religion,  
Give me that old-time religion,  
And it's good enough for me.

It was good for our mothers.  
It was good for our mothers.  
It was good for our mothers.  
And it's good enough for me.

*Refrain*

Makes me love everybody.  
Makes me love everybody.  
Makes me love everybody.  
And it's good enough for me.

*Refrain*

It has saved our fathers.  
It has saved our fathers.  
It has saved our fathers.  
And it's good enough for me.

*Refrain*

It will do when I am dying.  
It will do when I am dying.  
It will do when I am dying.  
And it's good enough for me.

*Refrain*

It will take us all to Heaven.  
It will take us all to Heaven.  
It will take us all to Heaven.  
And it's good enough for me.

*Refrain*



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INERTIA AND TIMIDITY

*“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”*

– *Genesis, 6:5*

Old buildings moan and creak and shiver in the dark as the heat of the day settles out of their aging timbers. Willard Cole was oblivious to the night noises surrounding him. They were comfortable, predictable, and usual. The clatter of the old Underwood typewriter filled the room. Every so often he would pause to pluck a key back into the machine or untangle several jammed. His fingers were stained with nicotine and ink, ink from the typewriter ribbon and from the newspapers piled everywhere in his office. He would take a sip of very weak whiskey. Several small rings of moisture remained on the desk next to the small caliber revolver.



Horace Carter, editor of the weekly *Tabor City Tribune*, stared numbly as a snaking parade of twenty-nine cars retreated down Highway 701 East towards the South Carolina line in the gathering dark of a warm, summer North Carolina Saturday night. The lead car bore a two-foot high “brightly-glowing red cross” above its radiator, the letters “KKK” scrawled on its windshield. Inside the vehicles were 100 armed men all cloaked in the white robes and hoods of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>1</sup> They had just driven through “the bottoms” of Tabor

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<sup>1</sup> Horace Carter, *Virus of Fear* (Tabor City, North Carolina: Atlantic Publishing, 1991), 10-11.

City where the black residents lived. It was market day in Tabor City that July 1950 evening and Carter was surrounded downtown by stunned fellow citizens – both black and white.



Leslie Thompson closed the book he was reading in his study and folded the hand-scrawled letter that was on the porch when he took the dog out for an evening walk. The curtains were closed against the night air and an undefined wariness, though the windows were open. Cars drove by occasionally, and he waited to see whether any slowed down. He could hear his wife in another part of the house. At dinner, they had both expressed their relief that their daughter was away at college. The telephone rang again. He ignored it. He was thinking about the upcoming loan payment he had to make to the bank. He made a mental note to ask the bookkeeper whether the monthly bills had gone out yet.



Thomas Hamilton carefully adjusted the cans and the flour sacks and the boxes of sugar on the shelves behind the counter of his grocery store in Leesville, South Carolina. In those days in small grocery stores most of the groceries were behind the counter and customers asked for what they wanted. But Hamilton was distracted, like he was increasingly distracted. Since he had gained authority and confidence in the Masons and the Ku Klux Klan, he was committing more and more of his time to those activities and not the activities that kept food on his own table. It was 1949, and he had decided to sell his grocery store and devote himself to the movement.

He smiled to himself. He thought North Carolina – Charlotte, maybe – would be fertile ground. And maybe down in the southern part of the state, near the state line.

Whiteville, he thought. Whiteville is certainly an appropriate name for a town. The bell jangled as a customer walked in the front door. Hamilton did not bother to look up; he was still smiling to himself.



Rural North Carolina in 1950 was a different place, but in many ways wholly typical of the South at the time. One story of Horace Carter's from his memoirs – and he has many others – illustrates in a chilling way, what that time, what that place, and what many of those people represented.

The late Harry Bell and I stopped in for breakfast at a Conway [South Carolina] café one morning before daylight . . . The cook-proprietor was talkative. 'I killed me a nigger this morning,' he said with a strange grin . . . He sassed me . . . That was too much to take from an uppity nigger that was a tenant on my farm . . . (H)e didn't outrun that .22 bullet . . . I pulled him out of the road and sent one of the hands to tell his ma where to find him.<sup>2</sup>

It was Carter, Thompson, and Cole's great accomplishments that they approached coverage of race issues from different directions, ones well out of pace with virtually all southern mass media. For Carter, he had little to lose. His wife told him they arrived in Tabor City with nothing and could leave with nothing.<sup>3</sup> Thompson decided to wager his business – which was still partially mortgaged – on something he regarded as righteous . . . and he set Cole loose, who was eager to take on the Klan.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 14-15. No arrest was made in the "incident."

<sup>3</sup> Horace Carter, interview by author, tape recording, Tabor City, North Carolina, September 27, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> James High, interview by author, tape recording, Whiteville, North Carolina, March 28, 2007.

## THE KLAN – HISTORICAL ECHOES, A CONTINUING PRESENCE

The Ku Klux Klan, of course, has had a separate history, but it has abided in the same region and in the daily lives of all the players in the drama of this dissertation; in fact, it represents the enigma and the demons of Southern history that Horace Carter, Willard Cole, and Leslie Thompson rose up against from their positions as editors and publishers of *The Whiteville News-Reporter* and the *Tabor City Tribune*.

Like a storm-whipped wave, the Ku Klux Klan has advanced and retreated numerous times since its founding. The Klan was spawned amidst the chaos of the postbellum South, just after the Civil War “during the restless days when time was out of joint . . . and the social order was battered and turned upside down,” David Chalmers stated in his history of the clandestine organization.<sup>5</sup> An entire civilization, two centuries in the building, had crumbled. Carpetbaggers, scalawags, and former African-American slaves were in power, many in positions of authority formerly occupied by whites. The economy was shattered, cash was worthless, and agriculture was practically ruined. Land redistribution was carried out on a small scale, and property was sold to settle back taxes. Many children were orphaned and women widowed. The South was stricken, sullen, and hungry. The Ku Klux Klan was founded by half a dozen ex-Confederate soldiers in Pulaski, Tennessee, in a lawyer’s office on Christmas Eve, 1865.<sup>6</sup> And the Klan was still in North Carolina nearly a century later in the 1950s.

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<sup>5</sup> David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: the History of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York and London: New Viewpoints, 1981), 2.

<sup>6</sup> J.C. Lester and D. L. Wilson, *Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, Growth and Disbandment*, 1905 reprint with an introduction by W. L. Fleming (New York: AMS Press). 19-21. The Ku Klux Klan may have taken its name from that of the Kuklos Adelphon fraternity, founded in 1812 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. “Some authorities believe that the unusual Klan rituals were copied from the Kuklos Adelphon rules and procedural manual,” Chester Quarles noted. The English words circle and cycle are derived from the Greek word Kuklos and which can also be interpreted as a circle of friends. Chester L. Quarles, *The Ku*



**Foreshadowing.** Renewed white patrols – a continuation of those from before and during the Civil War – were part of the broader trend of Black Codes and antivagrancy laws, all aimed at controlling the behavior and movement of freedmen, and passed in the first two years after the end of the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> However, these attempts “to reinstitute widespread slavery through legal chicanery prompted swift, unilateral action by the United States Congress in 1867” with the Reconstruction Act of that year.<sup>8</sup> By 1867, according to scholar Sally Hadden, “Klan members routinely resorted to violence . . . to punish freedmen for their political convictions and to prevent the enforcement of the Fourteenth Amendment.”<sup>9</sup> The unique Klan uniforms were not initially intended to be frightening, but once their effect was seen on newly freed slaves, raised in an atmosphere of terror, superstition, and even voodoo, they were retained. Appearing suddenly out of the pitch-black, the ethereal apparitions could seem to the gullible and the frightened to be the ghosts of dead Confederate soldiers.<sup>10</sup> Historian Allen Trelease claimed the Klan was “transformed into a terrorist organization aimed at the preservation of white supremacy . . . a counterrevolutionary device to combat . . .

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*Klux Klan and Related American Racist and Anti-Semitic Organizations: A History and Analysis.* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, Inc, 1999), 32.

<sup>7</sup> Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas*, Harvard Historical Studies 138 (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 200.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>10</sup> Daryl Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships: A Black Man's Odyssey in the Ku Klux Klan* (Far Hills, NJ: New Horizon Press, 1998), xvi.

Reconstruction policy in the South.”<sup>11</sup> Trelease added, “For more than four years [the Klan] whipped, shot, hanged, robbed, raped, and otherwise outraged Negroes and Republicans” and anyone else who crossed it.<sup>12</sup> The Klan was never a monolithic organization as popularly portrayed, although its most prominent leader was former Confederate Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest.<sup>13</sup> In 1868, several hundred black voters were murdered in Louisiana. A year later, alarmed either by the increasing violence, murders, and kidnappings or, more likely, because of the publicity and unwanted attention to the organization, Forrest ostensibly disbanded the organization, calling on whatever nominal power he wielded.<sup>14</sup>

Forrest’s action failed to stem the escalating and continuing violence, so Congress, goaded by President Ulysses Grant, reacted with the Ku Klux Klan Acts of

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<sup>11</sup> Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), xi.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Lester and Wilson, *Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin*, 18. The concept of “one” cohesive Klan is an inaccurate one; there have been many over the 135 years of its existence, although a semblance of hierarchical organization has existed. Some of the names the Klan has been known by include the United Klans of America, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the Invisible Empire, the Christian (or Aryan or Confederate) Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the Original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, and the Dixie Klan. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> At Ft. Pillow, Tennessee on April 12, 1864, Confederates under the command of General Forrest successfully overran Union defenses, leading the Union troops – comprised of substantial black units as well as white – to surrender. Black soldiers, unarmed and often wounded, were singled out and shot. Contemporary Confederate accounts called it an “indiscriminate slaughter.” In a letter home, Confederate Sgt. Achilles V. Clark told his family, “Words cannot describe the scene. The poor deluded negroes would run up to our men, fall on their knees and with uplifted hands scream for mercy before being shot.” Subsequently, “Remember Ft. Pillow!” became a rallying cry for black soldiers. Apologists for Forrest would later try to distance him – with limited success – from complicity in these atrocities. John Cimprich, “The Fort Pillow Massacre,” John David Smith, ed. *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 157-158.

1871 and the Enforcement Acts,<sup>15</sup> permitting suspension of habeas corpus and allowing federal intervention.<sup>16</sup> Martial law was instituted in places by President Grant.<sup>17</sup> Several counties in South Carolina were virtually in insurrection in 1870 and troops were quartered there until April 1877, well after they had been withdrawn from other former Confederate states.<sup>18</sup> The withdrawal of federal troops and the end of Reconstruction – and the return of authority to the traditional white elites – did not diminish the need for the nightriders in their eyes and though the organization ostensibly withered, it did not disappear altogether. There is considerable evidence that the organization merely went underground and became truly an Invisible Empire.<sup>19</sup> According to Walter L. Fleming, nearly all southern white men in the post-Civil War period took part in the wider movement that modern observers call the Klan.<sup>20</sup> Fleming's scholarship runs counter to many if not most histories of the Klan that either imply or state explicitly that Klansmen were a distinct minority among Southern men.<sup>21</sup> Forrest estimated there were 550,000 members of various Klan-style organizations throughout the South during

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<sup>15</sup> These laws would be applied again during the 1960s.

<sup>16</sup> Patsy Sims, *The Klan* (Lexington, Kentucky: the University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 85. In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the Enforcement Acts and the Klan Acts almost entirely unconstitutional and laid the groundwork for its separate but equal decision in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, xix-xx.

<sup>17</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Hadden, *Slave Patrols*, 216-17.

<sup>19</sup> Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan and Related*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Fleming introduction, Lester and Wilson, *Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. One of the authors, former Confederate Captain J. C. Lester, was one of the original half dozen who launched the Klan. The other author, Rev. D. L. Wilson, was not a Klansman, although he was a sympathizer.

Reconstruction, a number Fleming considered plausible if the numbers of all similar groups were counted as well.<sup>22</sup>

**Postbellum North Carolina Klan.** The Klan first appeared in North Carolina in late 1867, according to Hadden's research.<sup>23</sup> In the ensuing three years, the Klan committed at least 26 murders and 213 floggings and operated with impunity in the Piedmont area.<sup>24</sup> It was particularly strong in Caswell, Orange, and Alamance counties, where the sheriffs, their deputies, and perhaps all local officials belonged to the Klan.<sup>25</sup> African-Americans were not always cowed by Klan threats and violence and on one occasion "marched armed only with fence rails near Wilmington and ended Klan activities there for a while."<sup>26</sup> The Klan may have had as many as 40,000 members in North Carolina in the years after the Civil War.<sup>27</sup> Klansmen mainly did not operate in counties with few ex-slaves; there simply were not enough votes to be able to change, and their efforts were wasted, according to historian William S. Powell, though they did attempt to intimidate blacks wherever and whenever they could.<sup>28</sup> Hangings, drownings, beatings, and shootings were typical methods, usually committed by Klansmen from one

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>23</sup> Hadden, *Slave Patrols*, 210.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> William S. Powell, *North Carolina through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 397.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 398.

county for others in an adjacent county as a favor to their brethren and as a tactic to avoid identification.<sup>29</sup>

To combat rising Klan violence, State Senator T. M. Shoffner secured General Assembly passage in 1869 of a bill written by U. S. Senator John Pool, giving the North Carolina governor broad powers.<sup>30</sup> On February 26, 1870 in Graham, North Carolina, a group of mounted Klansmen kidnapped the unfortunately named Wyatt Outlaw, leader of the local black Union League and a state Republican leader.<sup>31</sup> He was hanged in a courthouse square.<sup>32</sup> Three months later John W. Stephens, a Union League member and state senator, was surprised in the Yanceyville courthouse basement, bound and stabbed to death.<sup>33</sup> Governor William Holden called out the militia under Colonel George W. Kirk, suspended habeas corpus, and arrested a number of prominent men before the federal courts freed them.<sup>34</sup>

Major violent episodes occurred periodically across the state. Blacks burned barns and the Klan retaliated.<sup>35</sup> A “perfect orgy of arson” occurred in late June 1870 as Loyalty League members torched nine barns, a hotel, a row of brick houses, and the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Shoffner was reportedly bribed to introduce the bill.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 399. It was 65 years before the true events and participants became known. The leader of the group was Frank Wiley, a pre-war sheriff, who was being lobbied by Stephens to become a Republican candidate for sheriff. Upon the death of the last person involved, a sealed document, revealing all the details of the incident, was opened in the state archives where it had been placed.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 399. The campaign has become known as the Kirk-Holden War. In March 1871, Governor Holden became the first U.S. governor to be both impeached and convicted; a former Klan member tabled the resolution for impeachment.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 197.

tobacco crops of several prominent whites.<sup>36</sup> Over a two-year period, 763 Klan members were indicted under the federal Ku Klux Klan Act, a majority of them in Rutherford County.<sup>37</sup> When the arrest warrants were served in that county, a U.S. marshal thought it prudent to be accompanied by “a troop of mounted infantry.”<sup>38</sup>

Because of its nearness to Washington D.C., historian Stanley Horn claimed the Klan “in North Carolina appear[ed] to have attracted more attention” than elsewhere and at one point the state bordered on insurrection.<sup>39</sup> In fact, according to Horn, “directly as a result of the terrifying reports of depredations and bloody disorders in North Carolina,” President Grant launched the Congressional investigation in 1871.<sup>40</sup> The Klan’s organization in North Carolina was similar to the pattern elsewhere. Blacks organized “their Loyal Leagues” and were “drilling at night, stationing their sentinels on the highways, halting white people on the roads and causing them to pass around” where blacks were meeting.<sup>41</sup> At the rallies, there were “inflaming addresses” that stirred the former slaves to “rage . . . riot and bloodshed.”<sup>42</sup> The ex-slaves were told the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 207, 209.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>39</sup> Stanley F. Horn, *Invisible Empire: The Story of the Ku Klux Klan 1866-1871*. 2d Edition. Publication No. 81: Patterson Smith Reprint Series in Criminology, Law Enforcement, and Social Problems (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969), 189.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. Early Klan behavior to terrorize the former slaves involved a false head covered with the Klan hood that could be removed and handed to a terrified man. Klansmen cultivated the belief, widespread, that they were Confederate ghosts. With a funnel attached to a hose, a Klansman would drain a bucket of water and exclaim it was “the first drink I’ve had since I was killed at the Battle of Shiloh; and you get mighty thirsty down in Hell.” This became “the favorite and standard joke” and a “hall-mark of a Klan raid – none genuine without it.” Ibid., 19.

“pleasant myth” that the former slave owners’ property would be divided among them in 40-acre tracts, with a mule or horse thrown into the bargain.<sup>43</sup> In North Carolina, the Confederate governor of the state, Zebulon B. Vance, was “generally supposed to be the Grand Dragon of the [North Carolina] Realm.”<sup>44</sup>

**In 19<sup>th</sup> Century Southern newspapers.** Southern newspapers praised the Klan and its mission. In Montgomery, Alabama, the *Selma Times and Messenger* urged its readers to “organize a Ku-Klux Klan whenever ‘blacks’ organize a [Union] League.”<sup>45</sup> The *Mobile Register* echoed that, urging whites to organize “Ku Klux Clubs.”<sup>46</sup> The editor of the Tuscaloosa *Monitor*, Ryland Randolph, formed and led a Klavern.<sup>47</sup> The *Ku Klux Kaleidoscope* was published for a time in Goldsboro, North Carolina.<sup>48</sup> Texas had a pair of like newspapers: the *Ultra Ku Klux* in Jefferson and the *Daily Kuklux Vedette*.<sup>49</sup> The *Forest Register* in Mississippi changed its name to the *Ku Klux* before an 1871 election.<sup>50</sup> Other newspapers were less obvious in their affiliation with the Klan, but no less committed. The Oxford, Mississippi *Falcon* in 1868 published the names of all local

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>45</sup> G. Michael Bush, “Partners in Crime: Southern Newspaper Editors and the Ku Klux Klan (paper, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, n.d.): 12.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. *Selma Times and Messenger*, July 31, 1868; and the Athens (Ala.) *Post*, August 6, 1868 (quoting the *Mobile Register*).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>48</sup> Trelease, *White Terror*, 60.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

blacks who voted.<sup>51</sup> Colonel William L. Saunders, editor of the *Wilmington Journal* in North Carolina, was a leader of the Klan in 1867.<sup>52</sup>

**The Klan reemerges.** The Klan reappeared in 1915, its new visibility stimulated by D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, a romantic portrayal of the Klansman as the epitome of Southern chivalry.<sup>53</sup> This time its impact would spread far beyond the South. The rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl by Leo M. Frank, her Jewish (and northerner) employer in Georgia, fanned racial and ethnic flames.<sup>54</sup> After his death sentence was commuted in the wake of a trial widely condemned as unfair, Frank was lynched. A Methodist minister, William Joseph Simmons, took advantage of the racial tensions and formally reorganized the Klan in Georgia on Thanksgiving Day with a ceremony on Stone Mountain.<sup>55</sup> According to Quarles, the Klan was "depicted as the savior of the white race against the ravages and criminality of the black race."<sup>56</sup>

The Klan attracted more adherents outside the South than within.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps five million Americans belonged to one of the affiliated Ku Klux Klans during its height in

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<sup>51</sup> Bush, "Partners in Crime," 12. Oxford (Miss.) *Falcon*, June 28, 1868.

<sup>52</sup> Powell, *North Carolina through Four Centuries*, 397.

<sup>53</sup> Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan and Related*, 53. President Woodrow Wilson considered this one of his favorite movies and screened it numerous times in the White House for friends.

<sup>54</sup> *Klan-Destine Relationships*, xx.

<sup>55</sup> Arnold S. Rice, *The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1962), 1. Simmons was eventually ousted by Hiram Evans, a dentist from Dallas, Texas, after a number of lawsuits by both contenders. The number of professionals, such as dentists, physicians, and ministers, as members in the Klan contradicts an oft-expressed impression that Klansmen were rural, uneducated, and unsophisticated. Hugo Black, later a Supreme Court Justice and defender of civil liberties and free expression, was a Ku Klux Klan member in his native Alabama.

<sup>56</sup> Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, xx.

<sup>57</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 115-116.



the mid-1920s.<sup>58</sup> Governorships, U.S. Senate seats, and state legislative majorities were captured in Texas, Oregon, Colorado, Indiana, and Georgia in the 1920s.<sup>59</sup>

Overlaying its traditional hatred of blacks, the Klan ladled on a loathing of Jews, Catholics, union members, and foreigners.<sup>60</sup> There were “impressive riots” in Pennsylvania, and in California Klan violence was as brutal as anywhere in the South.<sup>61</sup> In Taft, California, “the police and best citizens turned out to watch an evening of torture in the local ball park.”<sup>62</sup> The Klan held its own primaries in Arkansas. In Texas, there was a Klan Day at the state fair that drew 75,000 “brothers-beneath-the-robe.”<sup>63</sup> Texas and Oklahoma state governments were “for a time almost completely under the domination of the Klan.”<sup>64</sup> Members of the 250,000-strong Ohio Klans engaged in a pitched battle with “alien[s]” in the Mahoning Valley.<sup>65</sup> There was a Klan organization in every New Jersey county.<sup>66</sup> In Maine, “the Invisible Empire helped boost Owen Brewster into the governorship.”<sup>67</sup> Irishmen and Klansmen clashed in Massachusetts.<sup>68</sup> During the 1920s,

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<sup>58</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. According to one unsubstantiated source, President Warren G. Harding took his Klan oath in the White House. *Inside the Klavern: The Secret History of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*, David A. Horowitz, ed. (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>60</sup> “Ku Klux Klan,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago and London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1966), 936.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 115-16.

<sup>65</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

“racism in regimented form was spread over the whole country” by the “new” Klan.<sup>69</sup>

More than 40,000 Klansmen paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., in 1924.<sup>70</sup>

Thrusting itself into the political arena proved the Klan’s undoing, Chalmers contended; the Klan simply could not deliver.<sup>71</sup> Its organization was splintered by factionalism and the greed and immorality of its leaders.<sup>72</sup> Klan violence “initially brought respect and members, but eventually created revulsion. The godly came to realize that the Klan was not. Terror went too far,” according to Chalmers.<sup>73</sup> The Depression also contributed, in Davis’s view, to the pullback of the Klan.<sup>74</sup> In addition, the Klan had expended considerable energy and political capital opposing Catholic Alfred E. Smith’s bid for the presidency in 1928 and, whether because of that or other reasons, it experienced a sharp decline in membership after that election. Its image became one of “popular disrepute,” in Rice’s view.<sup>75</sup> By scholar William Moore’s reckoning, in 1930 there were only 35,000 Klansmen nationwide, a startling decline in half a decade.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 115-16.

<sup>70</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 3-4.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, xxi.

<sup>75</sup> Rice, *Ku Klux Klan in American Politics*, 92.

<sup>76</sup> William Vincent Moore, “A Sheet and a Cross: A Symbolic Analysis of the Ku Klux Klan” (PhD diss, Tulane University, 1975), 4.

**Moralistic and nativist views.** There was a strong moralistic and nativist strain to the Klan. In both its first and second iterations, the Klan, according to historian Kathleen Blee, “linked sexual morality to racial and religious hatreds by depicting Jewish, Catholic, and black men as sexual savages.”<sup>77</sup> Blee noted, “Wrapping political issues in the mantle of moral concern obscures underlying political agendas.”<sup>78</sup> Through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the paragon of white female purity and the risk to it by sexually predatory black men, was a ubiquitous image that helped unite southern whites politically, splitting 1890s populist and reformist movements in the South and leading towards Jim Crow segregation and the disenfranchisement of blacks, according to Joel Williamson.<sup>79</sup> In North Carolina in the election of 1898, this process was given powerful impetus by Josephus Daniels of the *News and Observer* of Raleigh. His newspaper repeatedly demonized blacks and appealed to the fears of whites for jobs and the safety of white women. Poll taxes and literacy tests were swiftly instituted and the political system of the South was fashioned for half a century.

This action can be seen as a postbellum southern fear, part of what Williamson calls “the older fear,” that blacks would “rise massively and kill whites, or do them bodily injury, or destroy their property.”<sup>80</sup> Whether it was Nat Turner’s Revolt in 1830 that involved the massacre of dozens of whites, or an amorphous, undefined fear, the

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<sup>77</sup> Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 70-71.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>79</sup> Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 309.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

mere hint of a slave revolt could paralyze communities. The Klan stoked this primal white southern terror.

The post-World War I Klan “attempted to integrate the language of women’s rights with an agenda of support for conventional moral standards,” according to Blee.<sup>81</sup> The Klan added “the victimization of white Protestant women by Jewish businessmen, sexually sadistic Catholic priests, and uncivilized black men.”<sup>82</sup> This enraged and united white men. To appeal to white women, it used “a language of rights, arguing that vice and immorality denigrate white Protestant women” and promised to “enforce marital monogamy, punish wife beaters, and restrict alcohol, gambling, and other vices.”<sup>83</sup> The Klan even called for greater law enforcement. Charles Alexander termed this moral authoritarianism and part of it was clearly rooted in the Klan’s mid-Victorian origins.<sup>84</sup> Moore called this virtuous symbolism, tying the Klan to traditional American values.<sup>85</sup>

The Klan saw newly enfranchised women in the 1920s as a source of political power, too, and insisted it was “the best guarantor of white Protestant women’s rights.”<sup>86</sup> Moreover, the Klan attempted to create a parallel women’s order to “safeguard women’s suffrage and expand women’s other legal rights while working to preserve white

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<sup>81</sup> Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 72.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>84</sup> Charles C. Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1966). The Klan tried to burnish its image by donating to charitable and religious causes, even going so far as to appear during church services in full regalia to present money to ministers. Klansmen even distributed American flags.

<sup>85</sup> Moore, “A Sheet and a Cross,” 79.

<sup>86</sup> Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 1.

Protestant supremacy,” according to Moore.<sup>87</sup> The Klan tried to shrug itself into the mantle of women’s rights, and it succeeded to a remarkable degree. Blee believed women’s role in the Klan has been largely ignored by scholars. At its height in the 1920s, she estimated, as many as half a million women belonged to the affiliated Women of the Ku Klux Klan (WKKK), representing, perhaps, 10 percent of the group’s total membership.<sup>88</sup> In some states, women made up almost half of Klan membership and were substantial minorities in others.<sup>89</sup> While women were not part of the visible Klan activities – night riding, beatings, and political corruption – they participated in what Blee termed “poison squads,” spreading “rumor and slander [and organizing] consumer boycotts.”<sup>90</sup>

The Internal Revenue Service played an important part in the suppression of the national Klan in the 1940s. Since Simmons’s revival of the Klan in 1915, all affiliated Klans had owed at least nominal allegiance to a national imperial wizard. According to Rice, the IRS “hounded” the national Klan, which it formally disbanded to avoid paying past taxes amounting to nearly \$700,000.<sup>91</sup> This did not mean the suspension of Klan activities, but it did play a role in reducing its organizational efficiency and public image. However, the IRS action also allowed locally and regionally autonomous leaders to emerge without the interference of any national authority.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>91</sup> Moore, “A Sheet and a Cross,” 114, 108. A “Klonvokation” was held in Atlanta on April 23, 1944 when all Klan charters were voided and all offices were vacated.

**Klan rejuvenation.** The Klan was rejuvenated again just after World War II, by an Atlanta physician, Dr. Samuel Green, who styled himself grand dragon. Again at Stone Mountain, Georgia, this time on May 9, 1946, the Klan tried to rise once more from its own ashes.<sup>92</sup> The Klan's postwar popularity was spurred and given focus by President Harry Truman's July 1948 integration of the military and the report of his Committee on Civil Rights, released in October 1947. Green's untimely – or fortuitous – death in August 1949 deprived the Invisible Empire of its only truly national leader until David Duke in the 1970s.<sup>93</sup> Into that vacuum in the early 1950s in the Carolinas stepped Thomas L. Hamilton, self-styled grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, an Augusta, Georgia, then Leesville, South Carolina grocer, who had attended the Stone Mountain resurrection ceremony. He was initiated, along with 500 others, into the Klan, and was made an officer of the reborn Klan.<sup>94</sup>

Shortly before his death in April, Green issued a charter to Hamilton for the Thomas L. Hamilton Klavern No. 42 in Langley, South Carolina.<sup>95</sup> Upon Green's death, in a brief power struggle, former Georgia Bureau of Investigation Director Sam Roper wrestled the national Klan leadership from Hamilton and proclaimed himself imperial wizard of the newly-formed Associated Klans of America. After his defeat, Hamilton moved to Leesville and organized the Association of Carolina Klans without Roper's permission. Hamilton there anointed himself grand dragon and created his first klavern in

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<sup>92</sup> Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, 6.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>94</sup> Walter Campbell and Martin Clark, "Thomas Lemuel Hamilton and the Ku Klux Klan," Carter-Klan Documentary Project, Center for the Study of the American South at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, at <http://www.bluehorseink.com/hcarter/Hamilton.html>, accessed January 10, 2007.

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

Charlotte.<sup>96</sup> To counter the upstart grand dragon, Roper dispatched a subordinate to rally klaverns to his banner across North Carolina, while terming Hamilton a “traitor.”<sup>97</sup>

**Violence as a salutary effect.** “Violence has for centuries enjoyed a legitimacy in Southern culture that has shocked and baffled outsiders,” in historian Peter Williams’ view. This is “expressed in such forms as dueling, lynching, or even overly aggressive stock-car racing” in addition to the violent outrages of the Klan.<sup>98</sup> According to one Klansman active in the 1950s, Simeon Enser, Klan violence had a salutary effect on people. In fact, some men joined the Klan to avoid becoming its target.<sup>99</sup> “It kept a lot of people that was raising hell, and beating their wives, and running around, damn, if it didn’t keep a lot of them home,” Simeon Enser recalled. “Now, I’ll tell you that. It did.”<sup>100</sup> Some Baptist preachers were in the Klan at that time, according to Enser.<sup>101</sup> Frequently, Klansmen would burst into a church service on Wednesday nights or Sundays and parade up and down the aisles, intimidating parishioners and clergy, while at the same time heartening church members who belonged to the Klan.<sup>102</sup> On several instances, Klansmen even took over the pulpit and harangued the congregation,

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Peter W. Williams, *America’s Religions: Traditions and Cultures* (London and New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1990), 267.

<sup>99</sup> J. C. Phipps, interview by Martin Clark and Walter Campbell, tape recording, Tabor City, North Carolina, October 27, 2003.

<sup>100</sup> Simeon T. Enser, interview by Martin Clark and Walter Campbell, tape recording, Tabor City, North Carolina, October 27, 2003.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Horace Carter, interview by author, tape recording, Tabor City, North Carolina, September 27, 2002.

threatening those who disagreed with them.<sup>103</sup> A group of Klansmen, on one occasion, essentially hijacked Sunday morning worship at the Dogwood Baptist Church in Horry County, South Carolina, just across the state line far from Tabor City. They “went up [to the] pulpit and made some remarks about how they were going to punish the people who were not living up to God’s will and Ten Commandments,” Carter recalled.<sup>104</sup> Carter believed that racial prejudice, such “that existed in the formation of the Carolina Ku Klux Klan,” was essentially hereditary, and that made it all the more difficult to overcome, both by those who held it and also by those who opposed it.<sup>105</sup>

**Civil rights just stirring.** In the early 1950s, the Civil Rights movement was just stirring. Times were again unsettled in the South.<sup>106</sup> There was considerable talk about whites using the same hotel rooms as blacks, eating together in restaurants, having their children go to the same schools, and competing for public jobs.<sup>107</sup> President Truman’s unilateral integration of the military portended nothing good for Southern whites, many fretted. The southern “situation . . . seemed conducive to Klan reorganization.”<sup>108</sup> Carter believed that the “1950 KKK differed from the Civil War Klan in many ways. Few of its members were really community leaders,” he pointed out.<sup>109</sup> “Indeed, most were

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<sup>103</sup> Enser interview, October 27, 2003.

<sup>104</sup> Horace Carter, interview by Martin Clark and Walter Campbell, tape recording, Tabor City, North Carolina, October 27, 2003.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, 15.

<sup>107</sup> Horace Carter, *Virus of Fear* (Tabor City, North Carolina: Atlantic Publishing, 1991), 14.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>109</sup> Horace Carter, *A Man Called Raleigh* (Tabor City, North Carolina: Atlantic Publishing, 1988), 239.



adventure-seeking local rednecks looking for excitement wherever they could find it.”<sup>110</sup>

However, the corruption, both in government and amongst “regular” citizens, struck many whites after World War II as somehow like the post-Civil War environment, Carter added.<sup>111</sup>

Not all African-Americans in North Carolina ducked down and tried to hide from the Klan. In North Hampton, NAACP branch leaders urged blacks to arm themselves, especially when going to and from meetings.<sup>112</sup> The Klan was chased out of Roper by blacks who opposed them and who guarded civil rights activists.<sup>113</sup> Neighborhood watch groups were formed in Anson County; some blacks patrolled with guns.<sup>114</sup> None of those tactics were employed in Columbus County, North Carolina and Horry County, South Carolina, however, where Thompson, Carter, and Cole confronted the Klan.

**A widespread rebirth.** After being routed by the FBI and law enforcement, the Klan did not disappear entirely in North Carolina and enjoyed new popularity there and throughout the South in the wake of U.S. Supreme Court decisions overturning the South’s “separate but equal” method of public school education.<sup>115</sup> Leaders in the late 1950s and 1960s – in what was called the “fourth-era” revival – included Eldon Edwards

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Carter interview, October 27, 2003.

<sup>112</sup> William Powell Jones, “The NAACP, The Cold War, and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement in North Carolina, 1943-1960” (master’s thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996), 10.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Luther H. Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse: Six Years as Governor of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 121.

and Robert M. Shelton.<sup>116</sup> After 1954 and several landmark Supreme Court desegregation decisions, the Klan experienced a widespread rebirth. By 1958, as many as 100,000 new Klansmen were recruited and more than 500 additional klaverns were added nationwide.<sup>117</sup> This Klan was different, according to Chalmers. It did not so much patrol “the borders of race relations,” borders that were crumbling from assault by the federal courts and the federal government, but became a “deadly . . . expressive form of poor-boy politics.”<sup>118</sup>

Four young girls, ages 11-14, were killed in a bombing at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama on Sunday, September 15, 1963.<sup>119</sup> They were Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, and Carole Robertson, all blacks.<sup>120</sup> Twenty-two children were injured.<sup>121</sup> Despite FBI stonewalling and local indifference, Robert Chambliss was finally convicted of murder in 1977 after an initial attempt at prosecution failed.<sup>122</sup> Bobby Cherry and Thomas Blanton were convicted in 2000.<sup>123</sup> All three were Ku Klux Klan members.

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<sup>116</sup> David Chalmers, *Backfire: How the Ku Klux Klan Helped the Civil Rights Movement* (New York and Oxford: Rowan and Littlefield, 2003), 108.

<sup>117</sup> Rice, *Ku Klux Klan in American Politics*, 18.

<sup>118</sup> Chalmers, *Backfire*, 109.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 102. Spike Lee created a film in 1997 on this tragedy, “4 Little Girls.”

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 158.

In August 1964, three Mississippi civil rights workers were arrested for supposedly speeding.<sup>124</sup> Michael Schwerner, James Cheney, and Andrew Goodman, all in their early twenties, were in Mississippi to register blacks to vote. Schwerner and Goodman, from New York, were white, while Mississippian Cheney was black.<sup>125</sup> Police released them to several Klansmen, and they were subsequently murdered near Philadelphia, Mississippi.<sup>126</sup> Their bodies were not recovered until President Lyndon Johnson sent in FBI personnel to aid in the search.<sup>127</sup> Seven men were found guilty of civil rights violations in the case, but none for murder.<sup>128</sup> Democratic candidate for sheriff E. G. Barnett and the Rev. Edgar Ray Killen were freed after a jury deadlocked.<sup>129</sup> Killen was finally convicted in 2005 for the murders, through the dogged efforts of journalist Jerry Mitchell of the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, who kept the case before the state and the country.<sup>130</sup>

On February 6, 1971, a white-owned grocery store, located in a black section of Wilmington, North Carolina was firebombed in the midst of a high school boycott by black students who accused authorities of racism.<sup>131</sup> Eight blacks, most notably the Rev.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Three movies for theaters and television helped keep interest in the murders alive: *Attack on Terror: The FBI vs. the Ku Klux Klan* (1974), *Mississippi Burning* (1988), and *Murder in Mississippi* (1990). Mitchell was also instrumental in securing convictions in the assassinations of Medgar Evers and Vernon Dahmer.

<sup>131</sup> Powell, *North Carolina through Four Centuries*, 527.

Ben Chavis, and one white man, eventually accused of the firebombing, barricaded themselves into a church and reportedly fired upon police.<sup>132</sup> Klan members inflamed the situation. The so-called Wilmington 9 were eventually given long jail sentences; their convictions were overturned nine years later.<sup>133</sup>

On November 3, 1979, in Greensboro, North Carolina, where nearly 20 years earlier the Woolworth lunch counter sit-in galvanized the civil rights movement, a group of 30-35 armed Klansmen and Nazis in nine vehicles assembled to counter an anti-Klan rally called by members of the Communist Workers Party (C.W.P.), formerly the Maoist Workers Viewpoint Organization.<sup>134</sup> The C.W.P. was given a parade permit. Police and city officials were aware that the Klan was coming and had even given them a copy of the C.W.P.'s route, deeming it a public record.<sup>135</sup> Forty minutes before the scheduled start of the parade and with some of the police still eating lunch, a car caravan of Klansmen and Nazis headed toward where the C.W.P. marchers were assumed to be gathering in the black area of town.<sup>136</sup> Within two minutes, four people were dead, another was dying, and a sixth was permanently disabled from a fusillade of rifle and shotgun fire.<sup>137</sup> Only then did the police arrive on the scene.<sup>138</sup> Four of the five killed were white and one was a

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Chalmers, *Backfire*, 118-19.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 120. The C.W.P. had embarked on anti-Klan agitation for some time before the march and at one point disrupted a Klan showing of *Birth of A Nation*

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 117-18.

woman. Television cameras recorded the melee. Bystanders pounded on the Klan vehicles as they wound their way into the area; someone in one of the cars fired a shot in the air, then six men piled out and began shooting.<sup>139</sup> Despite eyewitnesses and film of the scene and after a total of five state and federal trials, no one was ever sent to jail for the murders.<sup>140</sup> A civil suit did attach guilt in one of the murders to five Klansmen and Nazis, a police informant in the Klan, the Greensboro police department for failing to prevent the violence, a pair of the city's police officers, and the City of Greensboro.<sup>141</sup>

**Falling on hard times.** The Klan fell on hard times in the 1960s, victims of its own paranoia, widespread repudiation of its views, and the concerted efforts of the Federal Bureau of *Integration*, as some members dismissively referred to the FBI.<sup>142</sup> The FBI infiltrated klaverns and acquired membership rolls. According to scholar Evelyn Rich, the FBI sent letters to Klansmen at their workplaces and homes, addressed to them as Klansmen.<sup>143</sup> It sowed dissent in the ranks, sending postcards bearing the message, "Which Klan leader is spending your money tonight?"<sup>144</sup> The FBI added the Klan to its Counterintelligence Program (Cointelpro) in 1964, tossing the group in with its arch-foes, the communists.<sup>145</sup> Though the program was both illegal and top secret, it was effective

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Evelyn Rich, "Ku Klux Klan Ideology, 1954-1988 (Volumes I and II. PhD diss., Boston University, 1988), 130.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 130-31.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

against 17 Klan groups and nine related organizations.<sup>146</sup> Grand Wizard Shelton urged lie detector tests for all candidates for top office and considered clandestine use of sodium pentothal, truth serum.<sup>147</sup> Eventually, Shelton and two other top leaders – South Carolina Grand Dragon Robert Scoggins and North Carolina Grand Dragon Bob Jones – were sent to prison for contempt of Congress. Another leader, Bill Wilkinson, was exposed as an FBI informant.<sup>148</sup> A journalist, Stetson Kennedy, penetrated the Klan in the early 1950s and wrote a book about his experience.<sup>149</sup>

**The face of the modern Klan.** David Duke never had the number of followers that earlier Klan leaders did and his antics were widely disparaged, though he did gain considerable traction in his native state of Louisiana. Unlike most Klan leaders, he was polished, well spoken, and well groomed. His message, however, was the same, though more sophisticated, less blatantly racist and more appealing to mainstream whites angry over perceived reverse discrimination in education, employment, and union membership.<sup>150</sup> He insisted he was not against blacks or other groups – he allowed Catholics into his branch of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan – but in favor of white

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>148</sup> Chalmers, *Backfire*, 114.

<sup>149</sup> Stetson Kennedy, *I Rode with the Ku Klux Klan* (London: Arco, 1954). Kennedy supplied information secretly to the writers of the “Superman” radio show, who used his information for a four-part episode in which Superman took on the Klan. It may have had a negative impact on Klan recruiting. There is some controversy among scholars; some allege Kennedy exaggerated a few events, enlarged his role in others, and claimed some information was obtained undercover when it was not. Some scholars and noted oral historian Studs Terkel deride the complaints. *The Florida Times-Union* did an extensive examination of the claims and counterclaims and largely substantiated Kennedy’s version, though it did assert he dramatized parts of it. Interestingly, Woody Guthrie wrote a song entitled “Stetson Kennedy” for Kennedy’s unsuccessful 1952 campaign for governor of Florida.

<sup>150</sup> Chalmers, *Backfire*, 125.

people.<sup>151</sup> In 1981, Duke left the Klan, founded the National Association for the Advancement of White People, and launched a political career.<sup>152</sup> He was elected to the Louisiana legislature as a Republican (the Party at the national, but not the state level, loudly disavowed him). He tried unsuccessfully to win a seat in the U.S. Senate (losing 56-44 per cent to incumbent Senator J. Bennett Johnston, but capturing 57 percent of the white vote) and the Louisiana governorship (losing 61-39 per cent while still claiming a majority of white votes).<sup>153</sup>

**In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.** In 2006, there were, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, between 5,000 and 8,000 active Klan members spread across dozens of organizations that use some variation on the Ku Klux Klan name.<sup>154</sup> According to the center, there were 164 individual Klan organizations or chapters in 2006.<sup>155</sup> The factions often war with each other.<sup>156</sup> That the Klan is rather modest in size does not mean its peculiar brand of attitudes and behaviors has shriveled. Approximately 844 active hate groups are being tracked by the Intelligence Project (formerly Klanwatch) and the Center for Democratic Renewal (formerly the national Anti-Klan Network).<sup>157</sup> They include Klan, neo-Nazi, skinhead, neo-Confederate, white nationalist, and black separatist

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 130. Duke was also a former Nazi and continued to celebrate Hitler's birthday.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. When he left the Klan, he sold the membership rolls to his successor.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 132-35.

<sup>154</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, "Intelligence Project: Active U.S. Hate Groups in 2006," at <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/map/hate.jsp>, accessed January 10, 2007.

<sup>155</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, "Intelligence Project."

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

organizations.<sup>158</sup> Sims claimed some groups regard the Klan as “outmoded and tame” and are committed to a “level of violence that makes the Klan pale” by comparison.<sup>159</sup>

After victory in the Civil War, the North was content to leave the South to its own devices for nearly a century – and to ignore the systematic reinstitution of a control over African-Americans lost during Reconstruction. Scholar Charles Silberman, discussing Reconstruction, asserted, “The North washed its hands of the whole question and proceeded to look away from a principal fact of life in the United States,” giving the Klan the opportunity to breed, thrive, die, and revive several times.<sup>160</sup> Williamson in *The Crucible of Race* noted that the great sin of the North “was to destroy slavery and yet not destroy the culture that slavery had generated.”<sup>161</sup>



When the Klan exerted its force in the early 1950s in Whiteville and Tabor City, the editors and publishers of the *Tabor City Tribune* and *The Whiteville News-Reporter* were willing to express disapproval and resistance. In the face of seeming community support or acceptance or apathy, the three journalists risked public opprobrium and isolation.

All three were religious – one Baptist and two Methodist – and belonged to the southern wings of those Protestant denominations, sundered in the decades before the Civil War and scarcely reconciled in the century following. There was nothing in the New Testament to support racism and much evidence to suggest Jesus would have

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Sims, *The Klan*, xi

<sup>160</sup> Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York: Random House, 1964), 7.

<sup>161</sup> Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 43.



opposed it, despite conflicting Old Testament evidence. More than that, the three may have been aware of a growing liberal voice rising in the regional and national press, though they did not allude to it in their coverage. Ralph McGill, Hodding Carter, Jr., and Jonathan Daniels were three of the southern echoes of that voice.

Even deeper, all three had grown up when blacks and whites lived a symbiotic relationship in an agrarian economy. In slave times, black wet nurses cared for the children of the masters and until much older, black and white children played together (sometimes, unwittingly, as half-brothers and half-sisters). The principal strands of this dissertation – race, religion, and liberalism – were visible in these three editors as reflectors of at least part of the eastern North Carolina rural culture and, by extension, of the greater South.

While hundreds of Klan murders, lynchings, and beatings went unreported for decades after the Civil War, by the late 1950s the group's violence was on the front pages of the press of the South and the nation. At least some newspapers, editors, and publishers had confronted the Klan, stalling or at least slowing down the group while the rest of the country caught up and caught on. It took courage.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE DISSERTATION**

The “dynamics of race” are “integral to American society.”<sup>162</sup> In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois predicted, “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.”<sup>163</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr. defined the color-line as “a geological fault” along which

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<sup>162</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968); quoted in Whittemore, ed., *Voices in Black & White: Writings on Race in America from Harper's Magazine* (New York: Franklin Square Press, 1993), vii.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

both “tensions build and find at times violent release” and where “the larger contradictions and conflicts of” society are “played out.”<sup>164</sup> Race, in Gunnar Myrdal’s evaluation, is not just at the center of America but “is a problem in the heart of the American.”<sup>165</sup> It is the purpose of this dissertation to examine the coverage of *The Whiteville News-Reporter* and the *Tabor City Tribune* during the roughly three-year period during which those newspapers sounded a clarion call to their communities about the rise of the Klan and to make some suggestions about the motivations of the editors and publishers of those newspapers; Horace Carter, Willard Cole, and Leslie Thompson.

In the South in these years, race, religion, and liberalism were central to the southern system. And it is, really, a southern liberalism distinct from northern liberalism and modern liberalism. Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century North Carolina liberalism produced Frank Porter Graham and Terry Sanford. Both were pieces of a new, emerging perspective in southern public life. The Klan rose as perhaps a last, dying ember of a system that would be shaken to its core in just two years by the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, stripping the ideological, or at least legal, underpinnings of southern segregation.

“In a democracy,” Shelby Steele has written, “the legitimacy of institutions and of government itself is earned and sustained through *fidelity* to a discipline of democratic principles,” and these principles are “ennobling conditions that free societies aspire

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, with the assistance of Richard Sterner and Arnold Rose, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, Evanston, Illinois, and London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), lxxi. Myrdal shared the 1974 Nobel Prize in Economics.

to.”<sup>166</sup> They include free expression, free exercise of religion, and equal opportunities, access, and rights for all citizens, among others. In a nutshell, it is what is meant by the word freedom. Segregation was “an institutionalized infidelity to democratic principles,” according to Steele.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, segregation was not just a fact of southern life, it was the premise on which the South was built, and one that was wobbling by the early 1950s. Steele argued that democratic political systems resemble and act more like totalitarian or feudal societies when they allow certain social purposes to intrude and limit the rights of certain classes of citizens. Historically, Jews have been oppressed, whether in France, Germany, or Russia. In the United States, that scapegoat role has been filled by African-Americans.

Steele believed that the great power of the initial phases of the civil rights movement came “because nonviolent passive resistance was the best way to highlight white racism as an immorality.”<sup>168</sup> As black men and women were beaten by police and as small children were led into schools past screaming mobs of whites, a stark and powerful image was created, in Steele’s analysis.<sup>169</sup> Even more profoundly, Steele observed, this demonstrated “the extraordinary power of moral witness.”<sup>170</sup> And it was this “moral witness [that] transformed America forever, and its very success meant that it

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<sup>166</sup> Shelby Steele, *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 10. Emphasis in original.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

had, in fact, *persuaded* America.”<sup>171</sup> That also was the strength and the power and the value of the editorials and the front-page coverage of the Klan by the *Tabor City Tribune* and *The Whiteville News-Reporter*. The sense of outrage and injustice – their moral witness – came through, consistently and intensely. It was the image of opinion leaders standing up to the evils of the Klan, and by extension the entire system, that was the most powerful. Whether by design or serendipity, opposition to the Klan assumed an opposition to the system it was supporting, that of segregation. Carter, Thompson, and Cole never questioned the underlying system of segregation, merely some of its practices, and the most obvious and violent ones. They were not radical reformers. To deny the validity, rightness, and morality of the Klan’s attitudes and methods was to contradict the underlying system. Thus, the moral witness of Carter, Thompson, and Cole was ardently subversive and helped undermine and hasten the demise of Jim Crow. At some point, moral witness crossed the moral Rubicon and became moral authority. Emphasizing the importance of voices raised from within the white community does not diminish the essential role of outside federal intervention, through the federal courts and law enforcement (the Justice Department and the FBI).

What all those white journalists had that others lacked was a larger voice by virtue of their platform – the newspapers. They were able to amplify and spread their opposition to the Klan and that is what maddened Klansmen so. Hamilton was desperately worried by the power of the press (whether this was real or only perceived, the effect on Hamilton was the same). For generations, the Klan was able to do its work largely in secret. Then,

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in original.

in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, an emboldened press began to “shine a light into dark places,” as one noted journalist and educator quipped.<sup>172</sup>

Woodward saw a moral debt owed to the former slaves. He believed the “Union fought the Civil War on borrowed moral capital” and with a “noble belief in their purpose and their extravagant faith in the future.”<sup>173</sup> However, a “staggering . . . moral debt” was run up by the radicals that was “soon found beyond the country’s capacity to pay, given the undeveloped state of its moral resources,” in Woodward’s opinion.<sup>174</sup> Reconstruction provided “a few token payments” but the country then “defaulted on the debt and unilaterally declared a moratorium that lasted more than eight decades,” he added.<sup>175</sup>

The United States “was only nominally spared the formality of [moral] bankruptcy by the injunctions of the Supreme Court,” Woodward continued.<sup>176</sup> “Then in the middle of the twentieth century conscience finally began to catch up with commitment,” Woodward wrote in his magisterial *The Burden of Southern History*.<sup>177</sup> “Very suddenly, relatively speaking, it became clear that the almost forgotten Civil War debt had to be paid, paid in full, and without any more stalling . . .”<sup>178</sup> As with emancipation, Woodward stated, “the voices of conscience, of national creed, and of religious conviction played their parts . . . Equality was at last an idea whose time, long

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<sup>172</sup> Professor William Zima, in conversation with the author, May 1975, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa. Zima was a former editorial page editor of the *Des Moines Register*.

<sup>173</sup> Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, 84.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, 85.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

deferred, had finally come.”<sup>179</sup> Equality demanded freedom from fear, from the knock on the door in the middle of the night, from beatings administered to maintain racial control, no matter whether the reasons were cloaked in other terms. “Conscience, national creed, and religious conviction” are the triad that guided Carter, Thompson, and Cole. And it was their voices of conscience raised at great personal risk and sacrifice that were needed.

**Research questions.** This dissertation looks at the following research questions: How did Horace Carter, Willard Cole, and Leslie Thompson go about challenging the Klan through their newspapers, the *Tabor City Tribune* and *The Whiteville News-Reporter*? What techniques were employed by Horace Carter, Willard Cole, and Leslie Thompson through their newspapers, the *Tabor City Tribune* and *The Whiteville News-Reporter*? What motivations impelled Horace Carter, Willard Cole, and Leslie Thompson to challenge the Klan?

Thompson, Cole, and Carter grew up among blacks in a society where blacks may have been officially regarded as invisible, but in an environment in which their presence was ubiquitous. They also grew up during the gestation of an emerging southern liberalism. This dissertation is interested in a triangle of factors – race, religion, and liberalism – that informed the moral sensibilities and professional judgment of these three men. And how powerful were they and was one more dominant than another?

Certainly, there are other ways to look at this time period and the Klan and the editorial stances of Carter and Cole, but it is a triangular framework of race, religion and liberalism that is the intent of this dissertation. This tripartite relationship will be explored

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

in the context of the nation, the region, and the state and between Cole, Thompson, and Carter and their newspapers' coverage. Those three journalists and their little corner of the South and the budding Civil Rights era, this dissertation will contend, were the South in microcosm.

The triangles in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 are more than that; they can be looked upon like pyramids, constructed stone by stone until an impressive and seemingly immovable edifice is created. So, too, stood the pyramids for millennia, until a 13<sup>th</sup> Century earthquake shook them so violently that the outer stones slid and crumbled off, exposing the interior. The Civil Rights movement – of which the campaign against the Klan was a part – shattered the segregated Jim Crow South, exposing its internal machinery for opposition and improvement within the context of race, religion, and liberalism.

Fig. 1 graphically portrays the way the South was framed for seven decades. Jim Crow was the master frame, boxing the South and its internals. Within the frames is the South, which then encompasses the dynamics that reformed it. Carter, Cole and Thompson (and their newspapers), and Hamilton are corners of a triangle or pyramid as well, with the Klan at the core or the center of their interrelationships (Fig. 2). A seesaw can balance atop both the pyramid of race, religion, and liberalism and the triangle of Carter, Cole/Thompson, and Hamilton – balanced there, teetering until something upsets the equilibrium. The South was in stasis for decades, perhaps centuries, with race and the person of the black man/woman and control of him/her at the center of the system, driving it, defining it, corroding it.<sup>180</sup> Then, a tipping point was reached and the seesaw

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<sup>180</sup> During the period studied, Negro or negro was typically used by the various newspapers, including black newspapers. In fact, it is a fascinating progress to watch the reference advance from Negro to negro, Black to black, and then black to African-American (with or without a hyphen), as the internal tensions in

swung out of balance, gently at first and then violently, rebounding this way and then that. This dissertation utilizes the early 1950s to explore this equilibrium, the calm before the legal battles and the demonstrations of the 1950s and early 1960s and the warfare in the streets of the 1960s. This dissertation is somewhat like a computer: race, religion, and liberalism are the input, while the coverage and editorials by the newspapers and the men who guided them are the output. Bernard Cohen observed scarcely a dozen years after the newspapers were awarded the Pulitzer that “the world looks different to different people,” not just because of their own predilections, but due to the “map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read.”<sup>181</sup> It is that map and the route – along race, religion, and liberalism – drawn by Carter, Thompson, and Cole – that is the journey of this dissertation.

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American society were played out linguistically. This dissertation will use black and African-American interchangeably.

<sup>181</sup> Cohen, Bernard C. *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 13.



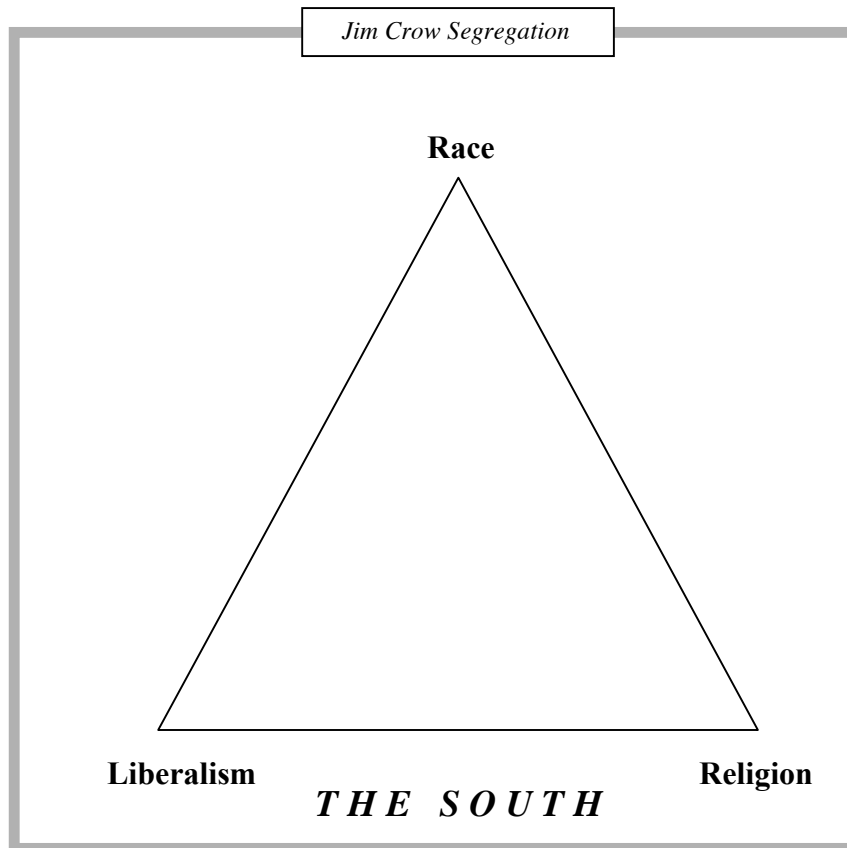


Fig. 1 Dynamics of southern philosophy

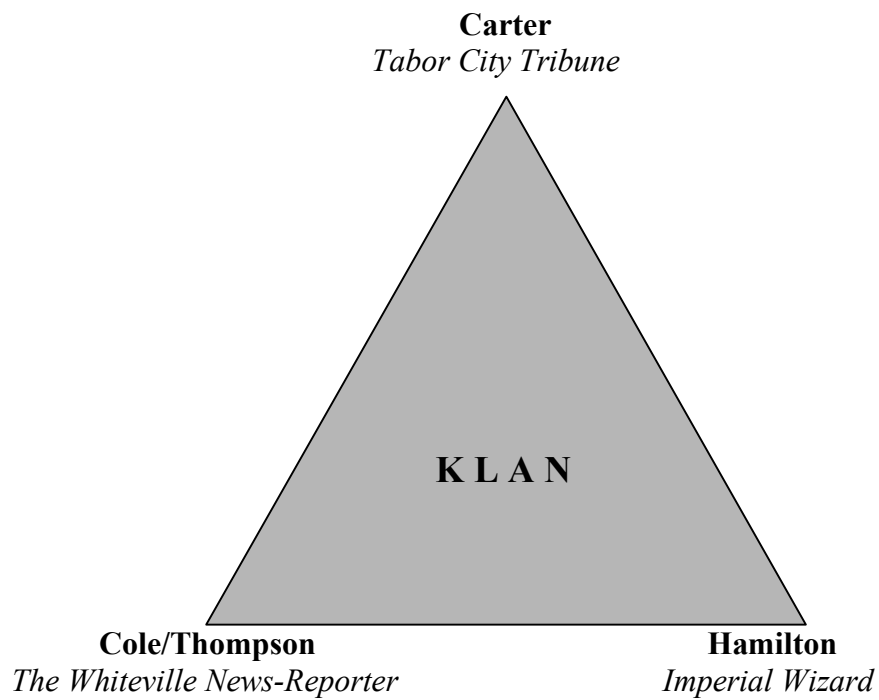


Fig. 2 Dynamics of newspapers and the Klan

**Larger issues.** The influence of race, religion, and liberalism is hard to trace definitively, because it exists in the hearts and minds of those influenced. Even in the editorials and news stories and story placement these influences – other than religion – are ambiguous. They can be surmised or inferred, but the coverage itself is like tea leaves – open to different interpretations.

In reality, beneath the triangle of race, religion, and liberalism, are deeper issues of class. In many communities, it was evident in family trees. Some families would have deep traditions of slave-owning. That history probably shaped contemporary views, even a century after the Civil War; it certainly left residues of mistrust and anger that helped ignite the tinder of the modern civil rights movement. Carter claimed that fealty to the Klan was hereditary.

None of the principal actors in the drama this dissertation chronicles – Hamilton, Carter, Cole, and Thompson – descended from the wealthy elites of the antebellum period, though some may have been in that class in genteel poverty. In all likelihood, class informed the worldview and the experiences and the history of these men, leaving some perhaps unknowable remnants. In the editorial coverage examined in this dissertation, there were no overt references to class, with two exceptions. Carter in his opinion column in the January 16, 1952 *Tribune* claimed Klansmen were “largely a bunch of disgruntled person and low type individuals,” an opinion confirmed by a number of those recently arrested.<sup>182</sup> This brought an immediate response from Hamilton, who called this “a GROSS mis-statement,”

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<sup>182</sup> W. Horace Carter, “Carter’s Column,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 16, 1952, 1.

because he found Klansmen to be “the CREAM of the CROP.”<sup>183</sup> On several other occasions, Carter had referred to Klansmen as drunkards and people who did not attend church. This was a tack *The News-Reporter* did not take, however.

**Method.** This study employs historical research methods to explicate the actions and coverage of Horace Carter, Cole, and Thompson during the period they challenged the Ku Klux Klan. The *Tabor City Tribune* and *Whiteville News-Reporter*’s coverage during the Klan reorganization will be detailed in a mainly chronological fashion.

The aim of this dissertation is to sketch the frames of events. Historian and social scientist Donald Shaw contended a quarter century ago, “The content of the newspapers reflect the day-to-day judgments of the press at one level and the intrinsic values of a social system and culture at other levels.”<sup>184</sup> Each small decision accumulates, demonstrating and creating with considerable precision a picture of the opinions of a newspaper. This aggregation of coverage, Shaw further postulated, allows various observations to be made in a general way “about newspaper content [and] the social systems or cultures which they represent.”<sup>185</sup> There will be, inevitably, some repetition and seeming redundancies, because the method chosen covers the same territory and the same events from two different newspapers’ perspectives.



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<sup>183</sup> “Klan Dragon Scorns Tribune Editor; Questions County Law Enforcement; Rebuttal to Hamilton’s Charges Given,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 23, 1952, 1.

<sup>184</sup> Donald L. Shaw, “At the Crossroads: Change and Continuity in American Press News 1820-1860” (*Journalism History*, 8:2, 1981): 53.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

In January 1950, *The Whiteville News Reporter*, railed against the Klan, claiming it was unwelcome in Columbus County.<sup>186</sup> They came anyway. In July 1950, the *Tabor City Tribune* described Klansmen's first foray into Columbus County, North Carolina – a parade – and told them to leave. They stayed anyway. The ensuing over two-year period would be characterized by violence, in actions and in words, in print and on back roads. Willard Cole and Leslie Thompson of *The Whiteville News-Reporter* and Horace Carter of the *Tabor City Tribune* were repeatedly threatened and compelled, at times, to carry guns. Their campaign earned them the 1952 Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious Public Service and resulted in the arrest and conviction of over 300 presumed Klansmen, the imprisonment of 62, and the complete dismantling of the organization in Columbus County, North Carolina and Horry County, South Carolina.

In many press systems, newspapers are more pointedly partisan than in the U.S. Readers select newspapers that reinforce their pre-existing beliefs. Though this, typically, has not been the American experience since the early decades of the republic, the press in the South into the 1950s and before could be seen as functionally and structurally akin to the partisan press in France, Germany, or Britain. It undergirded the system of Jim Crow because it assumed it; it did not question it. Whether this was for financial gain and concern over the cost of a contrarian view on race or whether it was for philosophical reasons (that the editors themselves believed in Jim Crow) is somewhat irrelevant: readers received a very one-sided view of segregation. Carter did not look about and see widespread agitation for a change in the racial status quo, even noting in his first editorial

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<sup>186</sup> The newspaper called itself the *Whiteville News Reporter* on its front page and *the News Reporter of Columbus County* on its editorial page. In its columns, it was often just the *News Reporter*. For consistence, it will be either *The Whiteville News-Reporter* or *The News-Reporter*.

opposing the Klan that there was no evidence of a struggle or a demand for change.”<sup>187</sup> Elihu Katz considered a “dark side” to the media. “Even in the democracies,” he wrote, “Media – like interpersonal communication – can impose acquiescence and silence in defiance of the free flow of information.”<sup>188</sup> Katz added that – and this certainly applied in the South during the majority of the Jim Crow era – “the media tend to speak in one voice, almost monopolistically.”<sup>189</sup> The media in the South, from before the Civil War and until after World War II, largely and almost without exception, supported the status quo. And this status quo was an acceptance of the separation of the races as the natural order. When confronted with sharp words to the contrary in the *Tabor City Tribune* and *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, as well as in a very few other southern daily and weekly newspapers, residents could be excused for not knowing what was afoot. Had not the press for generations buttressed the system of segregation? Now, some of the tenets of that system were being called into question by a vehicle long-supportive of the system.

A comment attributed to acerbic social critic and journalist Alexander Cockburn captures the journalistic environment of the southern press in the 1950s: “The First Law of Journalism [is] to confirm existing prejudice, rather than contradict it.” “It is, indeed, one of the great ironies of American history,” historian Joel Williamson has written, “that when the nation freed the slaves, it also freed racism.”<sup>190</sup> George Fredrickson noted similarly, “The slaveholding mentality . . . remained the wellspring of white supremacist

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<sup>187</sup> “No Excuse For The Ku Klux Klan,” *Tabor City Tribune*, July 26, 1950, 1.

<sup>188</sup> Elihu Katz, “Publicity and Pluralistic Ignorance: Notes on ‘The Spiral of Silence,’” E. Wartell and D. C. Whitney, eds., *Mass Communication Review Yearbook 4* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983), 91.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>190</sup> Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 107.

thought and action long after the institution that originally sustained it had been relegated to the dustbin of history.”<sup>191</sup> In the South, just after World War II, the dustbin was not yet half empty, if it is even now. But balanced on the triangle of their faith, own experiences with changing views of race, and perhaps awareness of some southern liberal voices, Cole, Thompson, and Carter helped speak out into the vortex that was the South’s Jim Crow silence.

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<sup>191</sup> George Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 93.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RACE, RELIGION, AND LIBERALISM

*“Out of intense complexities intense simplicities emerge.”*  
– Winston Churchill

Certainly, race is central to understanding the history of the South and the southerner, both black and white. Race touched everything, tainted everything, distorted much, and affected everything. The problems that race created or exacerbated and their resolution were represented in microcosm in Whiteville and Tabor City. They grew ever larger as they expanded to include the surrounding counties, the state, the South, and then the nation, like ever-widening rings in a pond disturbed by a stone thrown into its depths.

Violence was a periodic outlet for white control and punishment; rarely, blacks responded in kind. The Klan represented an organized attempt, through violence and intimidation, to dominate blacks. Whites, either because of habit or deeply ingrained prejudice, felt that blacks were abandoning their “place” and were a threat to the status quo, especially economically. The Klan’s efforts were aided by either the acquiescence of other whites or by the failure of those to act who were opposed to the Klan’s tactics and views.

This dissertation explores the similarities and differences between Carter and the *Tabor City Tribune*; and Thompson and Cole and *The Whiteville News-Reporter*. It examines their opinions, politics, coverage, writing, and careers. The dissertation concludes that despite the efforts of Cole, Thompson, Carter, and others, the solution to the issues of segregation could not – and would not – be decided locally or regionally.

Rather, it was federal action, most notably in the courts and through the FBI, that change was brought to the South, while creating a legacy with which the region and the entire country still struggles. Finally, and most importantly, it was religion and an almost religious attachment to due process of law, not race or liberalism, that motivated them to speak up and to bring in federal authority.

**A violent tradition.** Violence was very much a part of the Southern racial experience. It erupted in 1898 when a mob overturned the duly elected city government in Wilmington, North Carolina, and in riots in New Orleans in 1900 and Atlanta in 1906.<sup>1</sup> In 1919, some twenty-five race riots occurred. Riots occurred in Greenville and Spartanburg, South Carolina, in 1939, because of black voting.<sup>2</sup> Lynchings, of course, were a stark reality of the South, caused, after 1889, by the “tremendously” magnified perception that black men were raping white women.<sup>3</sup> Lynchings peaked in 1892 at 156 a year, and declined afterwards due, perhaps, to caution on the part of black men and white women. In all, about 4,000 blacks were lynched between 1889 and 1946.<sup>4</sup>

After 1915, “Southern life recrystallized,” and religion took center stage.<sup>5</sup> Faith, and the motivations and convictions it can inspire, is essential to an understanding of Carter, Thompson, and Cole. “Politics and race had been, at once, satisfying enough and

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 195-206, 215-218.

<sup>2</sup> Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 486.

<sup>3</sup> Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 117.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.



frustrating enough to open the way for the primacy of religion,” Williamson maintained.<sup>6</sup> Further, “just as the South had previously sought relief from dissonance in extremes of politics and racism, it now sought – and found – relief in an extreme of religion.”<sup>7</sup> This rebirth of religious fervor “profoundly” changed Southern behavior and thought.<sup>8</sup> Religion allowed a “retreat” and “a capacity to see neither” the issues of race and politics manifest.<sup>9</sup>

When the Klan organized in the early 1950s in the Carolinas, it found itself initially opposed publicly only by a trio of weekly newspaper journalists: Willard Cole, Leslie Thompson, and Horace Carter.<sup>10</sup> The South, really, has no tradition of passive resistance, at least among whites. From dueling to floggings, from riots to lynching, white southerners often resorted to violence individually and in groups to resolve their problems. In fact, there is a long history of southerners solving their problems by organized, extralegal means. Thompson, Carter, and Cole were also not passive resisters, though their violence was verbal. Thompson in an early editorial against the Klan in September 1950 noted, “Sometimes there are extenuating circumstances when a man or men comit [sic] crimes of passion.”<sup>11</sup> It took courage.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Even though *The Whiteville News-Reporter* was bi-weekly, most newspaper professional organizations categorize it as a weekly.

<sup>11</sup> “Time For Action,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, September 21, 1950, 4.

## RACE IS CENTRAL

Why did it take courage? The “central theme of Southern history” was that the region, in the view of those in political and economic power, “shall be and remain a white man’s country,” in Ulrich Bonnell Phillips’ estimation.<sup>12</sup> Williamson in *The Crucible of Race* divides the history of the South after the Civil War into three parts, what he calls “mentalities.”<sup>13</sup> These mentalities are: liberal, conservative, and radical.<sup>14</sup> As he defines them, these mentalities are “less perfectly formed than a philosophy,” but are “derived from the broad society” and touch “a large number of individual minds . . . influencing behavior and being influenced by behavior and by the physical world.”<sup>15</sup> Liberalism “did not yet know the potential of the Negro,” but it was “deeply impressed with the progress that black people had made under Northern leadership during Reconstruction.”<sup>16</sup> “Liberals rued the desertion” of blacks by Northerners after Reconstruction and lamented the “failure of Southern whites (liberal ones) to pick up again the cross of missionary labor to blacks that they had, in their own eyes, carried before the war,” in Williamson’s view.<sup>17</sup> Conservatives “always began, proceeded, and ended upon the assumption of Negro inferiority,” and the “Negro problem” was a question of “accommodating society” to whatever that level was.<sup>18</sup> Everyone, whites as well as blacks, had their “place” and

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<sup>12</sup> Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, “The Central Theme of Southern History,” *American Historical Review* 34 (Oct. 1928): 30-43; quoted in Williamson, 317.

<sup>13</sup> Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 6.

this “long-running and mass mode of thought” in the white South “persists strong and essentially unchanged even today.”<sup>19</sup>

When blacks were “first enslaved, their subjugation was not justified in terms of . . . biological inferiority,” but as a “much more unquestioned element in the existing order of economic classes and social estates.”<sup>20</sup> Blacks, captured native Americans, and white indentured servants were “originally . . . kept in much the same status,” until chattel slavery was instituted.<sup>21</sup> Once slavery was implemented, “the need was felt, *in this Christian country*,” for moral justification “above mere economic expediency and the might of the strong.”<sup>22</sup>

Race, however, is “always an atavistic source of power,” in Steele’s view, “going back to a primordial source, back to the natural order.”<sup>23</sup> Steele compared the underpinnings of a race-based system to a divine or natural right and one that flows from God. “The white racist believes that God made whites superior, so that even a democracy grounded in principle and reason is not obligated to include blacks and other races.”<sup>24</sup> White racism flaunts and frustrates the guiding principles of America, in Steele’s opinion, and “made America illegitimate by its own terms” and like so many European nations, just another oppressor and exploiter, “a pretender to reason and civilization.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 84.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> Shelby Steele, *A Dream Deferred: The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 123.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Radicalism – radical racism – is the mentality “most significant for race relations” in the South of the twentieth century, and it is the one the three journalists confronted in the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>26</sup> Williamson’s radicalism, at its “core,” contended that blacks, especially those born after the “enforced moral behavior of slavery,” were “‘retrogressing’ toward their natural state . . . [of] native savagery” and that, eventually, by some mechanism (race war or relocation), they would disappear from the South, because they had no place there.<sup>27</sup> The “seeds of Radicalism lay deep in Southern race relations.”<sup>28</sup> Disenfranchisement and segregation were part of “depoliticalization,” a process to convince blacks that “significant political power would never be theirs again.”<sup>29</sup> The bi-racial alliance between blacks and white Populists in the 1890s evaporated due to black realization and subsequent bitterness and apathy that “their opponents would stop at nothing to divide them” and would “steal [their] votes anyway.”<sup>30</sup> To ensure that blacks would never ally themselves with other white elements again, the “total disenfranchisement of the Negro” was necessary.<sup>31</sup> And this white elites proceeded with apace, playing the race card, the sex card, and the economic competition card. Legal separation of the races – segregation – was of course part of this process as well.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 111, 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

Radicalism “dissolved” rapidly after World War I, leaving behind, unlike conservatism and liberalism, a “real legacy.”<sup>33</sup> Blacks “lost visibility in white eyes unless they behaved in some acceptable Sambo-like manner.”<sup>34</sup> Southern whites were convinced “there was no race problem, no black history, and no history of [bad] race relations if the Yankees and Communists, Catholics and Jews, outsiders and aliens would simply leave black people alone” and allow them to remain in their “place.”<sup>35</sup> This is the world the Ku Klux Klan tried to preserve, and its “introduction” of anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic rhetoric in the 1920s, and again in the late 1940s and 1950s, can be clearly seen as an outgrowth of radicalism. Those who allied themselves too closely with blacks were derided as “white niggers.”<sup>36</sup> What was even more worrisome to many whites was “the enemy hidden within,” blackness secreted in whiteness.<sup>37</sup> This paranoia also explained the virulence of the Klan against people, such as Carter, Thompson, and Cole, who allied themselves with those the Klan saw as undermining the racial status quo in the South.

“Many white southerners have long assumed that they have an inborn understanding” of African-Americans, observed Thomas Clark.<sup>38</sup> Conversely, it is “rare” for an African-American to “boast that he understands the white man,” according to Clark.<sup>39</sup> “Oftentimes this constant protestation of understanding closely resembles

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Clark, *The Emerging South*. 2d Edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 220.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

whistling past a darkened social graveyard,” in his view.<sup>40</sup> “The plain truth is that few or no white southerners truly understand” African-Americans,” Clark concluded.<sup>41</sup>

Obviously, Carter, for instance, had no great insight and actually totally misread the racial situation. In his first editorial lambasting the Klan, Carter noted that there was “little tangible evidence of any struggle between races.”<sup>42</sup>

**White guilt.** Did Thompson, Carter, and Cole feel guilty about their part in the southern system of segregation and the South’s history of racial control and bigotry? Steele puts white guilt at the core of the modern problem with racism, but he finds evidence of it far back, and it explains, at least in part, some of the persistence of segregation among people who probably would have opposed it. He wrote,

I have a white friend who has told me many times that he feels no racial guilt despite the fact that he was raised in the Deep South before the end of segregation. Though he grew up amid the inequality and moral duplicity of segregation, and inevitably benefited from it as a white, he says simply that he did not invent the institution. He experienced it as a fate he was born into. And when segregation was finally challenged in the civil rights era, any solidarity that he felt with other southern whites was grounded more in a sense of pathos than in any resistance to change.<sup>43</sup>

This was probably how Cole, Thompson, and Carter saw things. “[W]hen white America finally accepted a legal equality . . . it also accepted an idea that shamed it,” Steele stated. “For three centuries white America had used race to defeat equality. It had indulged in self-serving notions of white supremacy, had transgressed the highest

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> “No Excuse For The KKK,” *Tabor City Tribune*, July 26, 1950, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Steele, *A Dream Deferred*, 117.

principles of the democracy, and had enforced inequality on others while possessing the ideas to know better. [It was an] evil strung out over the centuries and conducted in a full knowledge of itself.”<sup>44</sup> Up until the civil rights era, and even up to the present, Steele felt, “[b]eing white in America has always meant being free from racial stigma . . . and this *absence* of stigma was always the blessing of being white in the United States . . . ”<sup>45</sup> The introduction of stigma and the equality between races this involved “showed white Americans *as a group* to have betrayed the nation’s best democratic principles,” Steele added. “Even though it was the white embrace of these principles that brought the civil rights victories, it was the *need* to embrace them in the middle of the twentieth century that proved the white betrayal of them.”<sup>46</sup>

Carter, Cole, and Thompson were part of the system and just as certainly benefited from it. They were a member of the dominant race and the one with power, wealth, and the freedom to use them as they chose. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that during the modern civil rights era, roughly 1945-1970, few if any native white southerners were intentionally killed, even if whites were demonstrating aggressively in favor of equal rights. The Klan and others may have murdered northern freedom riders and lynched African-Americans, but they shrank from killing their own. From the perspective of white southerners, all white southerners were privileged – and protected – members of the ruling class.

This “invulnerability” – if it was there – enabled Thompson, Carter, and Cole to operate with a certain impunity, though they did not know that at the time.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 118-19. Emphasis in original.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 120. Emphasis in original.

Subconsciously, they may have sensed that aura of invulnerability and attributed it to their position as journalists, not as whites. Carter even said, “It might have made a better story if I had been killed” and believed that massive press coverage would have resulted if he were murdered.<sup>47</sup>

**Is it worth the risk?** Violence – or rather the threat of it – was a constant in Cole, Thompson, and Carter’s lives during their campaign against the Klan. Pettigrew explained, “Those who dare to break consistently [the racial] conformity taboo must do so in many parts of the South under the intimidation of slanderous letters and phone calls, burned crosses, and even bomb threats.”<sup>48</sup> This was certainly the experience of the three journalists in this study. The threats and harassments built, one upon the other, to a crescendo that never seemed to resolve itself. There were, in all, over 1,000 threats against Carter, he remembered, taking the form of anonymous letters, phone calls, and even physical confrontations.<sup>49</sup> Twice, on the street, Carter was approached by different men, much larger and stronger than him.<sup>50</sup> They berated him and his newspapers, and made rude remarks about him and his family, trying to pick a fight.<sup>51</sup>

### THAT OLD-TIME RELIGION

To understand the South and the southerner requires an understanding of organized religion and the presence of the church in the life of the South. If even the most

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<sup>47</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas F. Pettigrew, “Social Psychology and Desegregation Research,” *American Psychologist* 16, no. 10 (October, 1961), 105.

<sup>49</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



disinterested observer looked around the country in 2007, the Christian right and the evangelical movement are clearly of southern origin; the entire evangelical movement seems to have a southern accent. The great ministers (famous or infamous) from Billy and Franklin Graham to Jerry Falwell to Pat Robertson to Jim Baker and Jimmy Swaggart are southern. All the main protagonists in the Klan uprising – Hamilton, Carter, Thompson, and Cole – enlisted Christianity on their side and both accused the other of unchristian behavior. The Klan burned crosses, certainly the central icon of Christianity.

The roots of the problem of civil rights for the South were not only imbedded in history, they were grounded in religion. Baptist ministers during the Civil War considered “theirs was a holy cause . . . and remained confident of ultimate victory.”<sup>52</sup> If victory had a religious motivation, then defeat demanded a religious justification as well. According to historian Mark Newman, “southerners found [one] in the Lost Cause.”<sup>53</sup> And many southern preachers promulgated this view and “interpreted the Civil War as demonstrating the height of Southern virtue, as a moral-religious crusade against the atheistic North.”<sup>54</sup> Defeat of the Confederacy did not mean God had deserted the South, but that “a form of discipline” had been enforced as preparation for the future.<sup>55</sup> Newman pointed out that southern whites “were a peculiarly virtuous people chosen by God, and their religion was the most pure form of Christianity.”<sup>56</sup> Southern Baptist ministers told

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<sup>52</sup> Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 7-8.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>56</sup> Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 3.

their parishioners there would be “a more glorious future,” built amidst the rubble of the Confederacy, “if they maintained Christian-Confederate values.”<sup>57</sup> Newman further observed,

Southern whites had fought the war, their ministers contended, not to preserve slavery but to defend a godly, southern society and the principles of the American Revolution. Throughout the century, southern white clergymen nevertheless continued to defend slavery as part of God’s plan to evangelize African Americans. But the Almighty, they maintained, had also decreed emancipation in 1865. Many Baptists argued that God had ended slavery because it had achieved His purpose by converting and civilizing blacks, a prerequisite for their return to Africa to evangelize the continent. Some Baptists claimed, more pessimistically, that emancipation represented God’s judgement for their failure to fulfill adequately their evangelistic duties to the slaves.<sup>58</sup>

Harvey added that the meaning of the war and the South’s loss “abounded with the theology of chastisement.”<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, “God sent the war to test the faithfulness of the chosen people and rebuke the shortcomings of piety in the region,” Harvey wrote.<sup>60</sup>

“Slavery and [then] the loss of the Civil War split the church in the South widely from the world,” James McBride Dabbs has written.<sup>61</sup> And the church, meaning all denominations, has always played a central and important role in southern society and thought. The church was seen as a defender and a haven for southern values after the collapse of the old order.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Harvey, *Freedom’s Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 19.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> James McBride Dabbs, *Who Speaks for the South?* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1964), 337.

According to Clark, “Old South influences have retained a hold upon the modern southern church. In politics and society, the rugged domination of Protestantism has helped to color regional history.”<sup>62</sup> The Depression and the two world wars that bracketed it “had little influence on the fundamental structure of the southern church,” and there were only just “discernible departures from the past” by the 1950s, in Clark’s analysis.<sup>63</sup> First, “In the 1920s bigots lashed out at science and liberalism in blind fury,” attacking evolution.”<sup>64</sup> Not only evolution, but modernism and the mad rush of technology has troubled many in the South and left its mark on backwoods whites. Anything smacking of change is resisted and, of course, a powerful pull on this is race, that issue as central to the southerner as religion. The schism split the nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and split the churches into northern and southern wings. And that schism has persisted into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A Baptist will invariably modify whether he or she is a “Southern Baptist,” adding a tinge of regional pride to doctrinal differentiation. In the Carolina poll at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s School of Journalism, Lutheran and Catholic are sufficient to cover a wide range of people, but Baptists are carefully and in detail segmented. Another identifier of Baptist identity is the belief in “local option,” the right to ban alcohol by local vote in counties.<sup>65</sup> Columbus County in North Carolina was “dry” throughout the period studied, and stories about drunken behavior and moonshine were sprinkled throughout the pages of the *Tribune* and *The News-Reporter*. The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment had strong support in the South, and its effects lingered. In the mid-1950s,

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<sup>62</sup> Clark, *The Emerging South*, 248-49.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 258.

the Southern Baptist denomination was a majority in nine of the eleven southern states, save only Virginia and Louisiana.<sup>66</sup>

**Protagonists.** Religion linked the four men key to this discussion, two Baptists and two Methodists: Cole was the son of a Methodist minister, Klan Imperial Wizard Thomas Hamilton would become an ordained Baptist preacher, Carter was a Baptist and dreamed of being a missionary in China, and Thompson was devoutly Methodist. All four men from two different denominations were united by their beliefs and practices were grounded in a conservative, southern Christian tradition that supported racial separation and institutionalized conformity, tradition, and history. It was a unique confluence of different religious traditions – and approaches – and one almost guaranteed to encourage fireworks.

Carter was ostracized for his racial attitudes and removed from responsible church positions, including Sunday school teacher, after he supported integration of his church's choir nearly fifteen years after his campaign against the Klan. Cole, a Methodist, it appears at least, was not equally shunned, though he was an observant Christian. Thompson was a Methodist and took his religion with a deep and abiding seriousness. Hamilton was ordained as a Baptist minister and served several small parishes in the area of North Augusta, Georgia after the Klan uprising.<sup>67</sup> The tensions in southern rural society were played out in the political arena and also in the churches. Several attempts at

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 267. At the time there were almost no black Southern Baptist churches. They largely belonged to the American Baptist Association or the National Baptist Convention of the U.S.A. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., for instance, initially was a member of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., but then joined the Progressive National Baptist Convention when it split off in 1961 from the other organization, which was not as supportive of the civil rights movement in the wake of *Brown v. Board*.

<sup>67</sup> "Timeline," Carter-Klan Documentary Project, Center for the Study of the American South at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, at <http://www.bluehorseink.com/hcarter/Timeline.html>, accessed 10 January 2007.

integration by white preachers in the area of Whiteville and Tabor City were quickly squelched. A softball game between black and white teams was suddenly cancelled. The same result came about for a proposed concert by a black choir at a white church; the minister was forced to abruptly leave town. In Columbus County, the ministerial association was silent for nearly two years during the Klan uprising, until just days before the major FBI arrests in 1952. Some ministers were even Klansmen themselves.<sup>68</sup> According to Simeon Enser, a Klansman at the time, one Baptist preacher “didn’t take part in no floggings or nothing, but he . . . was glad we was tearing up some them . . . that weren’t good Baptists.”<sup>69</sup>

**State church?** To many, the Southern Baptist church is the southern church. Its members run the gamut from the proudest moguls to the most modest workingman. Other denominations have significant membership, notably the Catholic Church, and prominent members, but the Southern Baptist Church has been for decades the most important church, virtually a state church.

It was not always so. As late as 1904, Southern Methodists had 1.9 million members to Southern Baptists’ 1.6 million. So, why did Southern Baptists become predominant? E. Luther Copeland has several ideas. He believed that where Presbyterians had John Calvin and Methodists John Wesley, Southern Baptists had “no great visionary founder.”<sup>70</sup> “Southern Baptists found their heroic figures in the great military leaders of the Confederacy, such as Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee,” he observed. “One can

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<sup>68</sup> Enser interview, October 27, 2003.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> E. Luther Copeland, *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgment of History: The Taint of An Original Sin*, revised edition (Lanham, Maryland and Oxford: University Press of America, 2002), 14.

see why the concept of southern uniqueness might more easily pervade a denomination without definite rootage in a historic founder outside Southern history.”<sup>71</sup> Southern Baptists also came to be more closely identified with the Old South, having defended slavery, advocated secession, and approved Civil War. “[T]hey became united with the Confederacy in origin and support, and also in defeat,” according to Copeland.<sup>72</sup> That defeat “left a deeper and more indelible scar upon the Southern Baptist psyche” than on other denominations.<sup>73</sup> Southern Baptists, then, more easily adapted to and embraced the developing myth of the Lost Cause and the special place the South held in God’s favor. “Certainly, the [Southern] Baptists internalized the prominent myths of the South, myths of a chosen people, defeated and always seeking vindication,” according to Copeland.<sup>74</sup> Not inconsequentially, after the 1845 schism, Southern Baptists remained highly identified with the South even after the denomination stretched out across the nation and the globe.<sup>75</sup> Other denominations carried certain disadvantages. Presbyterians had higher educational requirements for clergy, Episcopalians were regarded as too elitist, and Methodists were too undemocratic in structure. “Baptists, on the other hand, had a democratic church government and were deterred neither by educational requirements for ministers nor by rigidity of church polity,” in Copeland’s opinion.<sup>76</sup> Each congregation

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

was essentially autonomous, and there was no superior authority above it, such as a bishop.

In his doctoral dissertation, Foy Valentine examined the Southern Baptist denominational press from three decades, 1917-47, in North Carolina, Texas, Mississippi, and Kentucky. His goal was to ascertain shifts, if any, in Southern Baptist attitudes towards African-Americans. Instead of consensus, Valentine uncovered a certain amount of diversity. Reactionary Southern Baptists were united in their belief in the Curse of Ham (a rationalization drawn from Genesis to justify racism and enslavement of Africans), support of the Ku Klux Klan, a quasi-justification for lynching, white superiority and black inferiority, “the fear that the Negroes would lower the level of civilization which the whites had established.”<sup>77</sup> Progressives were opposed to lynching and the Klan, desired to solve and overcome racial issues, and evinced “a genuine interest in aiding the Negro in the securement of all his rights . . . ”<sup>78</sup> Overall, Valentine found that the reactionary view’s “intensity abate[d]” as progressive views “gradually intensified, becoming more genuinely progressive all the time.”<sup>79</sup> There were a few favorable references to the Klan in the 1920s, but they did not persist beyond that decade.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Foy Dan Valentine, “A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917-1947” (ThD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1949), 226. The Curse of Ham is also called the Curse of Canaan and is drawn from Genesis 9:20-27. It is based on the curse Noah put on Ham’s son after Ham saw his father Noah’s nakedness.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. Valentine served as executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Christian Life Commission from 1960-87.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

**Slavery as sin.** The Southern Baptists were created in the controversy over slavery, no matter how much current members and some church historians wish to employ euphemisms such as “political passion and sectional bitterness” or even “divergent secular theories and material interests.”<sup>81</sup> It is reminiscent of a similar argument over the root causes of the Civil War: was it slavery or was it economic competition between two systems? According to Southern Baptist historian Leon McBeth, “Slavery was the main issue that led to the 1845 schism; that is a blunt historical fact.”<sup>82</sup> The flashpoint came in 1844 when the national Baptist church’s Triennial Convention acting board, in reply to a specific query, indicated it would not appoint a slaveowner as a foreign missionary, because such an action could be seen as approval of slavery.<sup>83</sup> This led directly to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention the next year as white southerners felt abandoned and insulted.

Slavery was not the original sin, but an original sin, according to Copeland,<sup>84</sup> while Marshall Frady termed it the “aboriginal crime” of American history.<sup>85</sup> Its “effects have proliferated down through succeeding generations . . . to such an extent that these effects no longer seem to have any direct connection to the primal crime that began them.”<sup>86</sup> They linger, perhaps, just below the surface, but are there nonetheless. Those effects were segregation and racism and the Ku Klux Klan. Furthermore, Frady added,

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<sup>81</sup> W. O. Carver, “Historical Background of Geographical Problems of American Baptists,” *Western Recorder* 122, no. 47 (1948): 4.

<sup>82</sup> Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 382.

<sup>83</sup> Copeland, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 8.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>85</sup> Frady, Marshall. “Can Journalism Really Tell the Truth?” *Furman Magazine* 37, no. 1 (1993): 21.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



“So we, and particularly those of us who are white, have no sense of how we continue to be implicated in its legacy.”<sup>87</sup> Whether by acquiescence, avoidance, or participation, white southerners continued to be involved – and Klan violence was the most starkly visible reminder of this.

By the early 1950s, the Baptist Church had not come to grips with segregation, and in fact the battles it chose to fight were “defined almost solely by culture” and were not over issues of “religious liberty or purity of doctrine,” a characteristic of the Baptist Church from antebellum and Reconstruction times through to the present.<sup>88</sup> In addition, Baptist congregations have always bridled at the imposition of external ecclesiastical or political control, often to such a degree that individual churches have withdrawn from Baptist organizations.<sup>89</sup> “[C]hurches often affirm their autonomy above all else” and have done so for centuries with a “stubbornness about . . . self-governance” and in a “spirit of individual religious liberty.”<sup>90</sup> “Understood . . . against their unique history,” Brackney commented, “Baptists as a whole continue to divide and conquer, sometimes even each other.”<sup>91</sup>

Once the Supreme Court pushed the issue onto the nation’s agenda with its various Civil Rights decisions of the 1950s, Southern Baptists were compelled to address

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 25.

<sup>89</sup> Brackney, *The Baptists*, 21. The first Baptist congregation was formed in the South near Charleston, South Carolina in 1681 by William Screven, a preacher, and his family.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

the issue of segregation.<sup>92</sup> Only then did Baptist leaders and the denomination's seminaries "began to formulate a passionate commitment to change the way Southern society treated blacks."<sup>93</sup> This reflected, again, the requirement that change to the South had to originate at a national level.

**Preachers do not preach.** The behavior of Baptist preachers in Tabor City and the surrounding area was very much in the Baptist tradition of mid-century, in the view of radical minister Walt Johnson of North Carolina.<sup>94</sup> Johnson "saw the involvement of churches in the segregationist system as an impediment to justice for African-Americans . . . and as a moral poison."<sup>95</sup> He did not limit his critique solely to Baptist congregations, but thought it an affliction of all white churches in the South.<sup>96</sup> Starting in the 1920s, Johnson held a series of short revivals throughout the state, focusing on spiritual and moral growth while trying to alter the culture of prejudice at the grassroots level.<sup>97</sup> He believed that "local churches would be revitalized by a new kind of devotion that focused attention on the ethical demands of Jesus and away from the corrupting demands of the culture, including those that prompted people to engage in racist behavior."<sup>98</sup> His was very much a social gospel, and he spread it beyond North Carolina

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<sup>92</sup> Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 38.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>94</sup> David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century*, Religion in the South series, John B. Boles, editor (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 33.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 33.

as well.<sup>99</sup> While Johnson might have converted parishioners, he did not realize church leadership had to come from the pulpit and if preachers were either Klansmen themselves or sympathizers or cowed by the virulence of members of the congregation that leadership was never going to surface.

Johnson also advocated interracial alliances to spread the gospel and stem the tide of racism.<sup>100</sup> Several of those inspired by him, Martin England and Clarence Jordan, created an interracial community in southwest Georgia called Koinonia Farm, based on the view that “southern society could be changed . . . particularly in the area of race relations.”<sup>101</sup> They, in turn, influenced others, notably Foy D. Valentine of Texas, who worked for a time at Koinonia Farm, took its example to heart, and “became a mentor for several generations of Southern Baptist progressives, especially regarding civil rights . . .”<sup>102</sup> Valentine was known as the conscience of Southern Baptists and was admired by many, including President Jimmy Carter. England also influenced Rev. Carlyle Marney, “one of the most powerful, and one of the most liberal, preachers in Southern Baptist history,” according to Stricklin. He was pastor of the First Baptist Church in Austin during the 1950s before moving on to the Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. North Carolina ministers such as Bob McClernon, also at Myers Park Baptist Church and then at the Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, took their inspiration from Marney.

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<sup>99</sup> Later in his career, Johnson embraced the eugenics movement and advocated creating a new breed of Christians. He also desperately opposed the relocation of Wake Forest, considering it the ultimate arrogance and debauchery of capitalism and an interference with religion and higher education.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

Baptist preachers did have independence, if they chose to exercise it. Marney's view, according to Stricklin, was that "a pastor who wants to change the power structure, which may include people in the pastor's own church who have many kinds of interests in maintaining the status quo" must deploy power against power.<sup>103</sup> And just as importantly, pastors must avoid being "hand-tamed by the gentry" and sliding, even unintentionally, into the power structure, which is where, in Tabor City at least, most ministers landed, though it was with the Klan, not the gentry.<sup>104</sup> Rev. W. C. Laney of Brookford Baptist Church in Hickory, North Carolina, demonstrated, beginning in the early 1940s, that it was possible to have an integrated congregation and flourish.<sup>105</sup> In 1937, Edwin McNeill Poteat, Jr. in a speech at Ridgecrest, North Carolina, urged racial desegregation in worship.<sup>106</sup> It is not that there were no Baptist and other ministers preaching against segregation, but rather that their voices are so notable because of their rarity. The Columbus County Ministerial Association saw where the wind was blowing, ducked its collective head, and gave its devotion, not to God and moral principles, but to the status quo.

**Methodists and Presbyterians and others.** While Southern Baptists were the dominant (in terms of numbers) denomination in North Carolina, others had great impact. Despite national debate and a commitment to civil rights by mainline denominations such as the Catholic, Methodist, Episcopal, Disciples of Christ, and Presbyterian, "[I]n the Deep South, where whites proved most opposed to desegregation, Baptist state

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Copeland, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 26.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

conventions defended segregation *no more than many other* major denominations in the region,” according to Newman.<sup>107</sup> Southern Baptists were more systemically protected from desegregation. Blacks were only ordained at one seminary, and there was little black presence in Southern Baptist churches. Most blacks who belonged to white denominations attended, typically, all-black rather than integrated churches, a feature of post-war America that was as much a northern as a southern phenomenon. The Methodist Church had over 330,000 blacks out of about eight million members in 1945, while the Episcopal Church had 60,000 out of 2.3 million members.<sup>108</sup> The Disciples of Christ also had about 60,000 black members out of 1.6 million members.<sup>109</sup> The two Presbyterian groups had 45,000 among 1.5 million members. Northern Baptists also had 45,000 African-American members in a convention of 1.6 million.<sup>110</sup> Southern Baptists comprised virtually half of all southern churchgoers at 5.9 million, with scarcely 6,000 black members.<sup>111</sup> There were 500,000 black Catholics.<sup>112</sup> If they had wished, bishops of hierarchical churches, such as the Catholic, Episcopal and Methodist churches, could have, theoretically, ordained desegregation in the South. That they did not says as much about the power of parishioners and the lure of conformity and the status quo as about the impotence of bishopric fiat. They made political, not religious calculations. Cole, Carter, and Thompson, conversely, made religious rather than political – or politic – decisions

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<sup>107</sup> Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 167. Emphasis added.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 168-69.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

and essentially assumed the mantle of a clergy that had abrogated its moral authority. Nonetheless, “denominational organizations at the national, regional and state levels often staked out more progressive positions on racial issues than those shared by most of their coreligionists,” according to Newman.<sup>113</sup> At a national office, church leaders were insulated and protected from the realities that faced local ministers every day. Church leaders, however, “took into account the strength of local segregationist sentiment,” rather than making moral evaluations, when deciding on the “desirability and speed at which desegregation should occur.”<sup>114</sup>

At a Birmingham, Alabama conference in 1957, southern Presbyterians issued a principled and ringing call on civil rights, decrying decades of prejudice and announcing: “[I]t is unthinkable that a Christian should join himself to Klan or [Citizen] Council whose purpose is to gain its point by intimidation, reprisal, and violence, or that he should lift no voice of protest against those who appeal to prejudice to spread fear.”<sup>115</sup> Despite the misgivings of many of his members and leaders, the Southern Baptist Convention was the first large southern religious group to accept and endorse the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board* decision, when it met in June 1954, just a few months after the high court decision.<sup>116</sup> A five-part resolution put southern Baptists foursquare behind the position that race relations were a religious and moral issue, not just a political one.<sup>117</sup> Later that year, the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi called equal education

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Clark, *The Emerging South*, 259, citing “Freedom – The Christian Concept.”

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

opportunities “a basic premise of Christian democracy.”<sup>118</sup> The Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church held similar views, and its general conference in 1956 denounced racial segregation forcefully.<sup>119</sup> These were the intellectual leaders of the church speaking, however, a group often divorced from parish and parishioner life and views.

Methodists borrowed gerrymandering from the secular world and combined virtually all of its African-American churches in the South into an all-black Central Jurisdiction. This was “the price paid to reunify Methodism’s northern and southern branches” in 1939, nearly a century after it split in 1844 over slavery.<sup>120</sup> As a by-product, this did provide representation for blacks in the denomination’s general conference, something other southern churches did not allow.

Denominations with predominant or significant northern memberships and which had avoided schism before the Civil War, “took the strongest stand in support of direct action,” according to Newman.<sup>121</sup> The House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church demanded in 1963 that Congress pass civil rights legislation and at its triennial convention a year later, Episcopalians gave “unwavering material and moral support” to coreligionists involved in the civil rights struggle.<sup>122</sup> Catholics and Presbyterians were also supportive in the middle stage of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Not all Baptists were ambivalent; the American Baptist Convention called on members to lobby Congress for a civil rights bill. The convention presented an award to one of its members

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 261-62.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. The convention also gave its blessing to interracial marriages.

– the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – and pressed its members to participate in his nonviolent demonstrations.<sup>123</sup> In 1965, the Southern Baptist Convention finally endorsed civil rights legislation, while at the same time taking some of the air out of such support by opposing civil disobedience.<sup>124</sup> This all occurred, however, well over a decade after the events occupying this study.

Religion is indeed paramount to the southerner and has been for centuries, according to W. J. Cash.<sup>125</sup> Cash observed,

What our Southerner required . . . was a faith as simple and emotional as himself. A faith to draw men together in hordes, to terrify them with apocalyptic rhetoric, to cast them into the pit, rescue them, and at last bring them shouting into the fold of Grace. A faith, not of liturgy and prayer book, but of primitive frenzy and blood sacrifice . . . What was demanded, here, in other words, was the God and the faith of the Methodist and the Baptists and the Presbyterians . . . A personal God [and] a God for the individualist.<sup>126</sup>

Of course, that is what happened in Columbus County. It is surely not coincidental that Carter, Thompson, and Cole represented two of these denominations and took their personal faith and considered themselves to be wielding the journalistic sword as part of God’s Army.

“Fundamentalist ministers were among the most dedicated advocates of segregation.”<sup>127</sup> To many fundamentalist ministers and church members, “integration was

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>125</sup> W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), 56.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 56.



one of many assaults on their faith,” such as questioning the deity of Jesus, the Virgin birth, and the literalism of the Bible and part of a wider modernism that “polluted Christianity” and the wider American society.<sup>128</sup> When some ministers attempted to speak out, their congregations reared up against them. Reverend George Jackson Stafford’s experience as pastor of the Batesburg Baptist Church in South Carolina in the early 1950s was perhaps typical. Despite adding more than 160 new members and doubling the church budget, he was hounded from his pulpit by powerful members of his church because he highlighted scriptural evidence opposing segregation and supporting integration.<sup>129</sup> “I cannot refuse my Christian fellowship to a person solely because of his race,” Stafford said.<sup>130</sup> According to Daniel, “Denying Stafford the right to his own interpretation of the scriptures . . . violated a fundamental Baptist belief.”<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, “the Batesburg congregation put segregation ahead of theology” and “expunged” Stafford before he could “infect the congregation.”<sup>132</sup> Reverend John Morris, pastor of the St. Barnabus Episcopal Church in Dillon, South Carolina, remarked about the 1950s, “[All churches] have been so weak in this matter that history will read back and say that the

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<sup>127</sup> Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press for Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., 2000), 267.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-37.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

armed forces, the effect of TV, etcetera, and the power of the dollar did more to solve the problem than we have had the courage to do in the church.”<sup>133</sup>

While liberals were at one end of the racial continuum and segregationists at the other, there was a large middle group, some of whom were moderates on the racial issue. According to Daniel, “Because the agenda was no longer simply better race relations but an end to segregation, many moderate whites were at best uncomfortable.”<sup>134</sup>

### ECHOES OF LIBERALISM

The South has had a long tradition of iconoclastic and maverick journalists, some mere gadflies, but others having profound effects on the southern mind. Liberal is such a malleable word when it comes to the South: the term means one thing in 1890, something else in 1950, and again something more in 2007, so much so that different words would seem to be necessary. The Inuits of Alaska have nearly three-dozen words for snow; the South could, possibly, use as many for liberal.

William Faulkner, a Nobel Prize-winning author, in a 1956 treatise, remarked that liberals and progressives in the South over the issue of race “accept insult and contumely and the risk of violence, because we will not sit quietly by and see our native land, the South, . . . wreck and ruin itself twice in less than a hundred years.”<sup>135</sup> Along with Hodding Carter, Jr., Frank Porter Graham, Ralph McGill, and Jonathan Daniels, he was

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>135</sup> William Faulkner, “American Segregation and the World Crisis,” *Three Views of the Segregation Decisions* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1956), 10-12; quoted in Sellers, *The South and Christian Ethics*, 20.

one of a very few southern liberals.<sup>136</sup> Faulkner termed the race question a false and distracting one, that the real question is a choice “not between color nor race nor religion, but between being slaves and being free.”<sup>137</sup>

Nearly all the southern liberal journalists had roots in the Old South and were proud of it, according to scholar John Kneebone.<sup>138</sup> The specter of the Klan after the First World War “challenged [the] comforting disconnection between obvious southern evils in the present and the grandeur of a heroic past.”<sup>139</sup> Many Southern liberals had to “sidestep the problem of reconciling a sacred, yet often indefensible, past with contemporary liberal attitudes.”<sup>140</sup> One of the defining characteristics of the southern liberal, especially just after World War I, was an “angry, scornful opposition to the Klan.”<sup>141</sup>

Myrdal called southern liberals a “unique species,” found nowhere else in the U.S. or in the rest of the world.<sup>142</sup> According to scholar Morton Sosna, liberals between the two world wars desired “to contradict by their statements and deeds, the universally

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<sup>136</sup> Hodding Carter Jr. and Ralph McGill won Pulitzer Prizes, while Faulkner won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Hodding Carter won his Pulitzer at the *Delta Democrat-Times*, Greenville, Mississippi, for editorial writing in 1946 “on the subject of racial, religious, and economic intolerance.” In 1959, McGill won a Pulitzer in the editorial writing category, while editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*. He was cited for “distinguished editorial writing . . . and for his long, courageous, and effective editorial leadership.” *Pulitzer Prize* archives at <http://www.pulitzer.org/>, accessed October 18, 2002.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>138</sup> John T. Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>142</sup> *An American Dilemma*, 456, 466.

accepted benighted image of the South.”<sup>143</sup> Southern liberals judged themselves, in the estimation of Hodding Carter, Jr., through a northern prism. “Unless the Southerner measures up to the qualifications which the Northern liberals set for liberalism, he is considered no liberal,” the Mississippi editor remarked. Only in the South, Carter continued, could someone “become a liberal simply by urging obedience to the law.”<sup>144</sup> Carter even took to putting “southern liberal” in quote marks to draw attention to its paradoxes.<sup>145</sup>

In the spring before the Klan began recruiting in the Tabor City area, Frank Porter Graham, a New Deal liberal, and Carter’s mentor (and long-time friend) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, was in the midst of an ideological, and ultimately unsuccessful Democratic primary battle to retain his U.S. Senate seat.<sup>146</sup> Carter idolized Graham for “his wisdom and principles.”<sup>147</sup> Carter attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was editor of the student newspaper there, *The Tar Heel*.<sup>148</sup> In that capacity, Graham, as university president, took Carter under his tutelage.

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<sup>143</sup> Morton Sosna, “In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue” (PhD diss, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1972), 9. This dissertation was later adapted and published as a book: *In Search of the Silent South* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). The citations are to the dissertation.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>145</sup> Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists*, 215.

<sup>146</sup> Horace Carter, *Only in America: An Autobiography of a Weekly Newspaperman and Business Success* (Tabor City, North Carolina: Atlantic Publishing, 2001), 127.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> It became a daily after Carter’s tenure.

“Long ago I associated ‘liberal’ with anti-race [and certain] people,” Carter observed.<sup>149</sup> In college, Carter “thought of a liberal . . . that you were on the right side, that you [were] trying to get a little equality for everybody.”<sup>150</sup> Many of the honors he was given at the time of Klan uprising and later “call me an activist,” he said.<sup>151</sup>

[M]aybe I was at that time. I didn’t look at it like that. I looked at a local problem I had and I was going to try to solve it . . . I don’t know whether it’s a three-corner kind of thing or not, and it changes. I think liberalism during Frank Porter Graham’s time and liberalism today are totally opposites; there’s no similarity to it. He believed in uniform law for all races and opportunities in schools and opportunities in jobs.<sup>152</sup>

In this period, the legacy of Franklin Roosevelt was settling in. Politically, the South was conflicted and the careers and lives of Carter, Thompson, and Cole reflected this. Both Carter and Thompson were Democrats and Cole was a Republican in a state and region that was heavily Democratic, albeit southern Democratic. While the national Democratic Party may have been more liberal, the southern wing of the party was very conservative. Within two decades in fact and in the wake of the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act of the mid-1960s, many southern Democrats would switch parties. However, in the early 1950s, Republicans were a distinct minority. The three journalists were pulled together by traditional southern backgrounds and who, despite the centripetal

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<sup>149</sup> Horace Carter, interview by author, tape recording, Tabor City, North Carolina, March 28, 2007. The “three-corner thing” comment was made in response to a question about the triangle of race, religion, and liberalism.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

force of segregation, resisted it and stepped outside the proscribed and expected Jim Crow bounds. Where did they come from; Carter, Thompson, and Cole?

**Towering figures, historical traces?** There was a relatively long, though slender, history of liberal journalists in the South. Unquestionably the most towering figure in southern journalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century was Henry Watterson, editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* for over half a century. His views on race would be considered liberal now; in 1868, he would have been considered radical. Despite being a former aide-de-camp to General Bedford Forrest (erstwhile founder of the Klan) and a chief scout for General Joe Johnston, he was a champion of freedmen's rights.<sup>153</sup> According to Virginius Dabney, Watterson was "instrumental in having the black laws removed from the Kentucky statute books" and sent "forty leaders of a bogus branch of the Ku Klux Klan to the penitentiary for their murders of inoffensive freedmen."<sup>154</sup> He prevailed in admitting the testimony of blacks in courts in cases involving whites and did all this "when it was physically dangerous for him to do so."<sup>155</sup> He also spoke and wrote admiringly of Abraham Lincoln. Other leading newspapermen were Major W. W. Screws of the *Montgomery Advertiser*, Joseph Bryan of the *Richmond Times*, and the *Chattanooga Times* under Adolph S. Ochs, who would later buy *The New York Times*. Englishman Francis W. Dawson of the *Charleston News and Courier* "exercised an influence upon Southern thought which was sane, intelligent, and liberal," even endorsing

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<sup>153</sup> Virginius Dabney, *Liberalism in the South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1932), 228.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

the election of blacks to city offices on the Democratic ticket.<sup>156</sup> He was murdered in 1889.

Brothers Ambrose and N. G. Gonzales founded the *Columbia State* in 1891 and editorialized against lynching, child labor, and the James Tillman political machine.<sup>157</sup> Gonzales was murdered in 1903 on the streets of Columbia, South Carolina by then-Lieutenant Governor Tillman, who blamed the newspaper for his gubernatorial defeat.<sup>158</sup>

Henry W. Grady began his newspaper career as a reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution*, and then purchased part of it in 1880, becoming managing editor.<sup>159</sup> Although he was most interested in industrial development and economic expansion, he did advocate for better schools for blacks and had a “zeal for improved intersectional and interracial relations.”<sup>160</sup> He also pleaded with the North to let the South solve its racial problems without interference.<sup>161</sup> Grady had a liberal cohort at the *Constitution*, Joel Chandler Harris, who was a powerful advocate for racial tolerance and the rights of the former slaves. “If education of the Negro is not the chief solution of the problem that confronts the white people of the South,” Harris wrote, “then there is no other conceivable solution and there is nothing ahead but political chaos and

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 231. Dawson was challenged to a duel as a result of some of his writings, but refused to participate. He wrote a series of articles that resulted in the outlawing of dueling in South Carolina and had great influence nationwide.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 232-33.

<sup>159</sup> Jean Folkerts and Dwight L. Teeter, *Voices of a Nation: A History of Mass Media in the United States*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston and London: Allyn and Bacon, 2002), 236.

<sup>160</sup> Dabney, *Liberalism in the South*, 234.

<sup>161</sup> Folkerts and Teeter, *Voices of a Nation*, 236.

demoralization.”<sup>162</sup> He was further ill disposed toward “rose-tinted eulogies of the region and its people,” which he thought was a barrier to progress.<sup>163</sup>

*Century Magazine* provided the battleground in 1885 for a skirmish in words between George W. Cable and Grady.<sup>164</sup> Grady saw civil and political rights as coextensive with social standing and privileged, while Cable countered that intermingling of the races would result. “Cable,” scholar Paul Gaston believed, along with a few liberal writers, “strove energetically to disentangle the confused concepts of social privileges and civil rights and to dismantle the racist assumptions that underlay Grady’s case for segregation.”<sup>165</sup> Several writers, according to Gaston, were dismissive of the social status position, arguing that poor whites did not hold equal status with white elites any more than African-Americans.<sup>166</sup> Cable agreed and also contended that even in areas where blacks were treated equally, they did not mix with whites.<sup>167</sup> The failure of Cable and others to blunt the force of amalgamation and to deflect the perceived threat to white women opened the door wide for Jim Crow segregation. The road from slavery to emancipation and Reconstruction did not inevitably lead to segregation. The failure of liberals to persuasively convince their audiences and the refusal of many to listen and the vested interests of white elites, more interested in power than accommodation, brought

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<sup>162</sup> Dabney, *Liberalism in the South*, 234.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> See: George W. Cable, “The Freedman’s Case in Equity,” *Century Magazine* (January 1885): 409-18; George W. Cable, “The Silent South,” *Century Magazine* (September 1885): 674-91; and Henry W. Grady, “In Plain Black and White: A Reply to Mr. Cable,” *Century Magazine* (April 1885): 909-17.

<sup>165</sup> Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 141.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.



segregation onto the South. Grady contended wrongly (as Carter would seventy years later), “The truth is, the negro does not want social equality. He prefers his own schools, his own churches, his own hotels, his own societies . . . his own place in the theatre.”<sup>168</sup> Scarcely two years later, Grady coined a phrase that has resounded ever since, “[T]he Constitution holds that there should be equal accommodation for the two races, but separate . . . ”<sup>169</sup> Eleven years after that in the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, separate but equal was given formal constitutional endorsement.<sup>170</sup>

If Josephus Daniels, who helped launch Jim Crow segregation through his coverage of the 1898 election, is on one side of the racial divide in North Carolina, Walter Hines Page, editor of the *Raleigh State Chronicle*, was on the other. He took over the weekly *Chronicle* in 1883 and “lost little time in attacking many of the most cherished prejudices and shibboleths of his fellow North Carolinians.”<sup>171</sup> According to Page, the state was “mummified” and in thrall to “the Ghost of the Confederate dead, the Ghost of religious orthodoxy, the Ghost of Negro domination.”<sup>172</sup>

Page returned to his native North Carolina (he was born in Cary) in the wake of an *Atlantic Monthly* article that excoriated both the South and the town of Hillsborough, where “the new elements in society were powerless to effect change, so entrenched were

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<sup>168</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, October 21, 1883, quoted in *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>169</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, January 1, 1885, quoted in *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>170</sup> *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 US 537 (1896). It was overturned by *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>171</sup> Dabney, *Liberalism in the South*, 235.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

the powers of the old regime,” according to Gaston.<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, the “typical Southern community, [Page] wrote, was all but completely out of touch with modern science, art, and thought – and yet the local inhabitants felt it was God’s chosen place on earth.”<sup>174</sup>

For two years, Page tried to browbeat, cajole, and wheedle the state into something approaching a progressive, if not enlightened, state. The ironies and a suffocating inertia eventually defeated him. Only the status quo and traditional ideas were tolerated.

“[S]ociety’s chief concern,” he wrote, “was to tolerate no change.”<sup>175</sup> After two years of butting his head hopelessly against the odds, he resigned and abandoned his native region. Josephus Daniels was his replacement and published a parting shot by Page.<sup>176</sup>

Looking at the sclerotic views of many in the South, Page called those who held those opinions Mummies, because their views had been mummified and unchanged and unchangeable. “You go up to [Mummy] and say . . . you are a fish out of water. You have by accident or the providence of God got a long way out of your time,” Page wrote. “The old thing grins that grin . . . and your task is so pitiful that even the humour of it is done. We all think when we are young that we can do something with the Mummies. But the Mummy is a solemn fact . . . [and] it lasts forever.”<sup>177</sup> While the terms antebellum and, to a lesser extent, postbellum (before and after the flood) had currency, Page added another image, that of burial. In his autobiographical novel, he evoked burial as a

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<sup>173</sup> Gaston, *The New South Creed*, 60. See: William H. Page, “Study of an Old Southern Borough,” *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1881), 648-58. Page thinly disguised Hillsborough’s identity.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Walter H. Page, *The Southerner: A Novel, Being the Autobiography of Nicholas Worth*, (New York, Doubleday, Page, 1909), 316.

<sup>176</sup> Burton J. Hendrick, *The Training of an American: The Earlier Life and Letters of Walter H. Page, 1855-1913* (Boston and New York, Houghton, Mifflin, 1928), 176-181.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 177.

metaphor for the South, using his grandfather's death as a demarcation between the Old South and the hoped-for-promise of the New South.<sup>178</sup> "We seemed to be burying a standard of judgment, a social order, an epoch," Page said.<sup>179</sup> The key problem, with the growing mystical draw of the Lost Cause and the myths of an idealized cavalier culture, was how to inter the past without angering its adherents, while building a new Jerusalem, totally different, on new foundations, rather than old, in Page's estimation.

The abandonment of the South by Page and the failure of others, like Grady and Watterson and Harris, to make headway, left the field open for the naked racism of Daniels and the politicians he succored and whose opinions he trumpeted.<sup>180</sup> And of course that was based on the primacy and inherent superiority of whites. This view, too, had its supporters in the press. Daniel Tompkins and Richard H. Edmonds of the *Manufacturers' Record* of Baltimore, Maryland were typical. Tompkins contended that wherever there was "any question as to race supremacy, our duty lies first in saving for each State Anglo-Saxon control."<sup>181</sup> Edmonds added that Anglo-Saxonism was "a tremendous factor in the development of . . . [the South's] interests and in safe guarding its political affairs."<sup>182</sup> It was a short step to the virulent bigotry and demonizing of the black man that characterized the *News and Observer's* coverage of the 1898 election.

**North Carolina's liberal bastion.** The long-standing tradition of excellence and liberalism at the Charlotte *Daily Observer* began when D. A. Tompkins bought the

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<sup>178</sup> Page, *The Southerner*, 86.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Harris wrote the famous Uncle Remus stories.

<sup>181</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, March 9, 1889, quoted in Gaston, *The New South Creed*, 138.

<sup>182</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, February 11, 1888, Ibid., 138-39,

newspaper in 1892 and hired Joseph P. Caldwell as editor. According to Dabney, the combination of the two men was “well-nigh as notable as that of Harris and Grady” at the *Atlanta Constitution*, giving North Carolina “one of the great newspapers of the post-bellum South.”<sup>183</sup> While “the press of North Carolina at the period exhibited scarcely a trace of liberalism and was venomously partisan,” Caldwell crafted a newspaper that was “independent in politics” and “courageously liberal.”<sup>184</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Virginius Dabney would lead the list of liberal southern newspaper editors. He was editor of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* from 1939-1969. He came to prominence in 1926, while a reporter for the competing *Richmond News Leader*, when his coverage of a trial in which a black woman was given a 30-year prison sentence for stealing less than \$200.<sup>185</sup> In 1933, Dabney denounced the conviction of a young black communist, who was saddled with a 20-year sentence for organizing a nonviolent rally of white and black unemployed workers.<sup>186</sup> Only W. T. Anderson of the *Macon Telegraph* joined in lambasting the conviction and sentence.<sup>187</sup> While he was willing to chastise the South’s racial positions, he did cling to an almost unshakable belief in the separate but equal system, though not in Jim Crow segregation. The convoluted logic behind this was emblematic of many southern leaders’ position on such a complex issue.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 236. When Tompkins bought the paper it was known as the *Charlotte Chronicle*, but he changed its name to the *Daily Observer*.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 123. Dabney would join the staff of the *Times-Dispatch* in 1928. He was also descended from very old southern aristocracy and a collateral descendant of Thomas Jefferson.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 125. The conviction could have brought the death penalty under a Georgia law against insurrection.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 126.

In Dabney's mind, "There was 'a growing awareness on the part of the dominant race that the Negro is not a serf or a helot, but a human being with legitimate aspirations.'"<sup>188</sup>

Carter reflected on the conundrum of southern journalists, and saw the dilemma in his own organization. While the Klan campaign was going on, Carter also purchased or launched several newspapers. The Klan was as active in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, according to Carter, where he and his partner, Mark Garner, owned the sole newspaper, the weekly *Myrtle Beach Sun*. Both men had agreed before the Klan began recruiting to be editorially separate. "He and I discussed [the Klan] many times," Carter recollected, "[B]ut he just plainly said, 'We can't exist if I crusade against the Ku Klux Klan. They'll put [us] out of business.'"<sup>189</sup> He agreed to a few brief news items in coverage of public meetings, but nothing else. Carter looked at the Klan and saw an evil that had to be combated, regardless of financial repercussions. Garner faced the same challenge, and decided that finances trumped values. "I don't mean to appear heroic at all in . . . that crusade," Carter observed half a century later. "I just believe . . . that I did what any weekly newspaper would do if he was . . . a Christian and he was trying to do the right thing."<sup>190</sup> Garner, however, remained silent. He represented within Carter's own household, metaphorically speaking, the conduct of virtually all southern journalists during Jim Crow. Increasingly, liberal journalists could no longer enjoy the political cover of being a "liberal segregationist." They had to choose between being liberal and being a segregationist; that former, comfortable middle ground had eroded to a knife's

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

edge by the early 1930s.<sup>191</sup> A few – Hodding Carter and McGill – hoped, perhaps against hope, that some compromise might still be possible. But others – Horace Carter, Leslie Thompson, and Willard Cole are in this camp – knew that the choice did not include compromise or accommodation. Carter emphasized that he thought he was on a “mission” when he opposed the Klan.<sup>192</sup> But was the mission by Carter, Thompson, and Cole to oppose the Klan driven because they were southern liberals, deeply religious Christians who believed in brotherhood or were they reflecting developing strains of racial liberalism?

**University transformative.** Some scholars have seen in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill a thread connecting much of the liberal South. Carter pointed to his transformative experiences at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under President Graham. Howard Odum was an influential figure at the University of North Carolina, pioneering sociological research about African-Americans.<sup>193</sup> The capstone of Odum’s career was the publication in 1936 of *Southern Regions in the United States*. He established the Odum Institute in Social Science Research at the University and founded *Social Forces* journal.<sup>194</sup> Professor E. C. Branson at Chapel Hill “was second only to Odum’s influence” for his work in rural socio-economics, according to Cash in *The Mind of the South*.<sup>195</sup> J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton was a historian at the University of North

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 322. Odum began his work at Columbia and at Emory University.

<sup>194</sup> Odum earned two doctorates, one in psychology from Clark University and the other in sociology from Columbia University. He was a founding member of the Southern Regional Council.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 326.

Carolina, who among others “had been stretching and rending . . . the traditional feeling that their proper role was to propagate the old sentimental-romantic legend” of the South.<sup>196</sup> “Numbers of young men and women were going out through the schools of the South” from “Chapel Hill and all the lesser centers which followed Odum’s lead” to “hand on and expand the new attitude [in racial matters] in every widening circles,” according to Cash.<sup>197</sup> Cash emphasized the majority of southern colleges and universities “made only desultory headway” in correcting racial attitudes.<sup>198</sup>

Since the 1940s, when he was in college, and the 1950s, when he opposed the Klan, Carter discerned a shift in liberalism.

And then [liberals] changed . . . If you are a liberal on the issue of race in 1950 does not mean you have to be a liberal in 2007, which involves giving preference to someone as opposed to equality . . . It’s almost like you go from one to an equilibrium and then you go the other direction. Where in the 40’s and 30’s and 20’s African-Americans had no rights. They couldn’t have jobs; they couldn’t work in the government, they couldn’t vote.<sup>199</sup>

“I hope then and I hope now that I to some degree patterned my life and my various stands on crusades as just exactly what Dr. Frank would have done if he would have been in my shoes,” Carter stressed. “[H]e made me much more aware of the need for racial equality, and he made me aware that the courts weren’t always fair to people of all races.”<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 321-22.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>199</sup> Horace Carter, interview by Martin Clark and Walter Campbell, tape recording, Tabor City, North Carolina, May 18, 2006.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

Among his fellow Tar Heel students, Carter failed to detect any activist spirit or opposition to Jim Crow segregation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [O]nce a week or every two weeks . . . we had some speakers [in the Old Memorial Auditorium or chapel] . . . [W]e had some speakers during that time that brought up the race issue,” though mainly limited to integrating public schools in the state.<sup>201</sup>

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So, these three editors and publishers, all journalists – Thompson, Cole, and Carter – were not, strictly speaking, acting entirely alone. They were the pointmen in an ongoing, developing southern culture. Long before these men were born and took up their pens as a cudgel versus the Ku Klux Klan, the South had a long history of race and an embracing God (mainly Christianity) in all His forms. And, considerably more recently, a hesitating, small but powerful, liberal voice emanated from the bigger southern cities. Perhaps those voices created echoes across the land. Certainly in North Carolina one publisher and two editors courageously added their thin but courageous voices to the message of opposition to racial violence represented by the Klan. But was it because of religion, rather than racial justice or liberalism? Was it because they felt an American basic fairness in race? Or was it wanting to do the right thing and arguing for a balanced political system for all races simultaneously? There is, again, that triangle of race, religion, and liberalism, and it seems not to be an equilateral triangle.

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<sup>201</sup> Carter interview, October 27, 2003.



## CHAPTER THREE

### CARTER OPPOSES THE KLAN

*“If you have an important point to make, don’t try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time a tremendous whack.”*

*– Winston Churchill*

Horace Carter of the *Tabor City Tribune* stood up to the Klan when it first rolled through Tabor City on a humid summer evening in July 1950. True, Willard Cole and Leslie Thompson also opposed the clandestine organization. But Whiteville was over a dozen miles away and at night if a group of night riders dragged him out of his bed, the support of *The Whiteville News-Reporter* would mean little, precious little. He was able to bounce ideas and commiserate with fellow journalists in a similar position, and that must have been cathartic and comforting.<sup>1</sup> To a degree. What it really took was solitary courage.

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<sup>1</sup> “At the height of [the] campaign” against the Klan, “Carter and Cole used to ask each other with rather wan humor which one would be the first to be hauled out and flogged by the irate Klansmen,” John Hohenberg pointed out in his book on the Pulitzer Prize-winners. “It was no joking matter,” he added. John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prize Story: News Stories, Editorials, Cartoons, and Pictures from the Pulitzer Prize Collection at Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 87.

Carter also exchanged morbid comments with Hodding Carter, Jr. who was opposing the Klan at the same time in Greenville, Mississippi. Evidently, as Horace Carter recalled, Klansmen from around the country could not keep the Carters separate . . . or tell them apart. They would swap hate and threats that were addressed to the “wrong” Carter. Carter shared similar gallows humor with Cole. Both men had threats against themselves and their families. “He put a note and wrote it in the *News-Reporter* [about something I told him], saying if the Klan choose to come and drag me out of my house [they had] better come with enough people to carry off the dead, because I’m going to leave them in the yard.” Carter continued, “I often talked with Willard about the Klan,” Carter recalled many years later, “what they were going to do next, and what we were going to say next. He never tried to tell me what to say, and neither did I tell him what to say. But we both felt the very same way about it.” Carter interview, October 27, 2003.

The next two chapters focus on the Klan coverage of the *Tribune*, while the two after that deal with the coverage in *The News-Reporter*. The years covered were roughly mid-1950 through very early 1953. But for Carter, Cole, and Thompson, the years were not all equal. The nation, though it did not know it at the time, was on the edge of a watershed – the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision desegregating the nation’s public schools. That did not make it less dangerous for the three journalists studied, but there was a tension and an expectancy. Near the end of the period, the nation did know *something* was coming: the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments – twice – on the case. Something was stirring. The Klan in North Carolina stirred first. The Klan did not face a federal court or law enforcement; it faced three journalists and dangerous ones. They were idealistic and had a platform to publicize their displeasure with the Klan: their newspapers.

After his discharge from naval service in World War II, Carter returned to finish his degree work at Chapel Hill, registering for the spring semester of 1946.<sup>2</sup> One day by chance he picked up that day’s edition of the *News and Observer* from the School of Journalism dean’s desk.<sup>3</sup> “I knew the time had come for serious action. I had to start making a living,” he told himself.<sup>4</sup> Thumbing through the classified ads, “two got my attention,” and “both had been placed by the Tabor City, North Carolina Merchants Association.”<sup>5</sup> The newly organized group was “clamoring for community action,” Carter

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<sup>2</sup> Carter, *Only in America*, 106. He did not receive his degree until later.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

noted.<sup>6</sup> The association “wanted their Tobacco Road village of fewer than two thousand to grow, and they felt they needed a newspaper to help them prosper.”<sup>7</sup> They were also looking for an executive secretary for the association; Carter decided to apply for both positions, interviewed for them, and received both.<sup>8</sup> In July 1946, almost four years to the day before the Klan would drive through Tabor City, Carter launched the *Tabor City Tribune*; he selected the name himself.<sup>9</sup>

**Snaking through Tabor City.** A line of twenty-nine cars snaked down Highway 701 East to Railroad Street of Tabor City, North Carolina, through the business district, and along the “dusty, unpaved streets” to “the bottom” where the black citizens lived, surrounding it like a lariat. The lead car bore a two-foot high “brightly-glowing red cross” above its radiator, the letters “KKK” scrawled on its windshield. The dome lights of the cars, mostly bearing South Carolina plates, burned luridly in the dark and warm on the evening of July 22, 1950, illuminating the occupants, 100 armed men all cloaked in the white robes and hoods of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>10</sup>

There was no violence that first night, no cross burnings, no voices raised in anger or protest. Stunned residents and barefoot farmers lined the streets in silence and disbelief, boiled peanut hulls scattered an inch deep on the streets and sidewalks.<sup>11</sup> The twenty-nine-

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 107. Town leaders also wanted to dispel the violent image of the city, one that gained it the nickname Razor City, because of all the knife fights.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 106-07, 109. Quickly he would realize holding both jobs was too demanding for one person. He advertised for a replacement as executive secretary and hired one – Willard Cole.

<sup>10</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> Carter interview, March 25, 2003.

year-old Carter stared dumbfounded. He had been tipped off by his barber earlier in the day that “something” was going to happen that evening.<sup>12</sup> If a twist of fate had not sent him to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and journalism, he would have been in China as a Christian missionary on that July 22, 1950, night.<sup>13</sup> And yet, another crusade, another mission of a different kind, was driving down the unpaved streets of Tabor City. Gradually the caravan of cars unwound and disappeared toward South Carolina, red taillights gradually swallowed by the night.<sup>14</sup>

Carter picked up one of the flyers scattered by the Klansmen.<sup>15</sup> “Beware of association with the niggers, Jews and Catholics in this community. God didn’t mean for all men to be equal . . . We are organizing all over your state and particularly in this community.” It was signed by Grand Dragon Thomas L. Hamilton of the Association of Carolina Klans.<sup>16</sup>

Carter recalled his thoughts as he walked home,

My duty as the only newspaperman in Tabor City stared me squarely in the face. I could not compromise my conscience. I must fight the Klansmen with all the power that my tiny press could muster. That meant that I too would be the victim of their wrath. I was no hero, but the die was cast and I would have to respond. I must fight this KKK resurrection . . . The blueprint of what the future might hold for me . . . flicked through my busy mind as I slowly walked home.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>13</sup> Or he might have been dead in China. “Mao killed all the missionaries after he came to power,” Carter recalled half a century later. Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 13.

Carter's moral and racial convictions came from the first "liberal" he ever met, Dr. Frank Porter Graham, president of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "He had a lot to do with it," Carter remembered.<sup>18</sup> "He believed in equality of the religions and equality of the races." Carter added, "And I think that's what I was thinking of when I saw those 29 cars go down the street."<sup>19</sup>

Carter had a very real sense that he was attempting to make the system work as it was designed and intended, but had been corrupted by venal individuals. However, he was still very much a man of his time, and in his first editorial opposing the Klan even claimed there was little conflict between the races in the South and that race relations were a southern and not a national issue.<sup>20</sup> Carter is now a Republican, but was a Democrat throughout the entire period studied. Neither political party, though, wanted to be involved. "I didn't want to associate with either party, because I can fight along with either one," Carter observed, noting he would take editorial potshots at both sides of the political divide.<sup>21</sup> Carter was not pressured by either party's organization. "As individuals I might," he said, "but I don't think the political hierarchy ever got involved with it."<sup>22</sup>

Despite his strong commitment to the campaign, there were times when Carter even took questioned his choice.

I wondered a lot of times what would be the end of it . . . I  
was there three years fighting folks and many times during

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<sup>18</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> "No Excuse For KKK," *Tabor City Tribune*, July 26, 1950, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Carter interview, March 28, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

that three years I wondered what would happen if I just stop.  
And my thought always was if it was wrong for those people  
to take over the government and run everybody's lives . . .  
[and that] was wrong [and] I'm just going to stick with it  
regardless.<sup>23</sup>

Carter was editor of *The Tar Heel* at UNC-CH, an elective position. Dr. Graham had an open door policy for students, invited them to his office and home, and was seen frequently around campus talking to students.<sup>24</sup> On Sunday nights, Carter recalled, Dr. Graham would often have members of the newspaper staff to his home for dinner, giving the two men the time to get to know each other.<sup>25</sup> Carter's racial tolerance may also have been rooted in the conflicts within his own family. "As far as racial prejudice," he observed, "I don't guess I've known anybody who was more prejudiced than my father."<sup>26</sup> His mother, however, was "not that way at all."<sup>27</sup>

In a book discussing Pulitzer Prize winners, John Hohenberg wrote that Carter "persisted" in the campaign against the KKK "with fearlessness and admirable professional journalistic skill that eventually aroused the entire state, brought about the strictest law enforcement, and crushed the Klan in North Carolina."<sup>28</sup> In an article lauding Carter, Dennis Rogers praised Carter's bravery in the face of the Klan's "campaign of terror," terming his

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> John Hohenberg, ed., *The Pulitzer Prizes: A History of the Awards in Books, Drama, Music, and Journalism, Based on the Private Files over Six Decades* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1974), 85-86.

“mettle the stuff of journalism legend.”<sup>29</sup> Further, Rogers wrote that “the young editor stuck to his presses” despite “numerous threats of violence” against his family and he received.<sup>30</sup> Carter wrote every story, every editorial on the Klan during his campaign against the clandestine organization.<sup>31</sup>

Six days separated the Klan procession through Tabor City from the next edition of the *Tabor City Tribune* while “an ominous silence crept over the community,” Carter recalled years later. “The virus of fear was spreading.”<sup>32</sup> Carter sat down at his old Royal typewriter on Monday, July 24, 1950, and composed the first fusillade in his crusade against the Klan.<sup>33</sup> The editorial appeared on the front page, as would all but one Klan editorial over the next two years. It was a conscious decision, Carter explained: “I knew it would be read on the front page . . . and I made the decision to publish all future KKK editorials on the front page regardless of the length of the campaign. I had a feeling then that there was no quick fix. This would be a long, hard-fought struggle. Neither the Klan nor the newspaper would just roll over and play dead.”<sup>34</sup>

North Carolinians and other Southerners had been taught in “high schools for generations in history” that the historic Klan was heroic, according to Carter.<sup>35</sup> In the wake of the Civil War, Northerners descended to prey on the defeated South, “took over

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Carter, *Only in America*, 198-199.

<sup>33</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002. The typewriter has pride of place in the museum dedicated to Carter’s career located at the *Tribune* office.

<sup>34</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

the governments and taxed (Southerners) beyond reasonable limits.”<sup>36</sup> Carter found it “hard to counteract” that ingrained mindset and erroneous reading of history.<sup>37</sup> Except for a handful of stories on an inside page, dozens of stories relating to Klan activities, cross-burnings, floggings, and indictments were also on the front page.<sup>38</sup>

In Tabor City in the early Fifties, there were “no racial problems to speak of,” Carter explained.<sup>39</sup> “The Negroes were poorer than most whites and there had always been some injustices,” it being the rural South, he believed.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, “the little town remained peaceful and quiet. There was no clamor for change, no animosity, no confrontations,” Carter recollected many years later, still misreading the tone and the opinions of African-Americans at the time.<sup>41</sup> “The man on the street” sided with the Klan, Carter thought, though that is not what he said in his first editorial.<sup>42</sup> The Klan soon spread its net of violence. A pregnant black woman was severely beaten.<sup>43</sup> A mechanic was hauled out of his bed in the middle of the night and flogged, presumably because he had a drinking problem, Carter recollected in his memoirs.<sup>44</sup> Others received threatening

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Flogging was the contemporary term used at the time to describe a beating or whipping. Carter interview, March 25, 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



letters warning them to change their behavior, “or else.”<sup>45</sup> A Jewish businessman, distraught by threats, closed his department store and left town with his family.<sup>46</sup> Another Jewish businessman, and close friend of Carter, remained in Tabor City despite the intimidations. Others were enticed from their homes in the middle of the night on pretexts: a favorite Klan ploy was to knock at the door and ask for assistance with a car breakdown.<sup>47</sup> The litany of outrages continued like an artillery barrage. Carter is convinced many more attacks went unreported, especially by blacks, and those that were, would be delayed by days, sometimes weeks, while victims anguished over possible reprisals, and potential police sympathies with the Klan.<sup>48</sup>

Despite threats of an advertising boycott, Carter retained the bulk of his advertising base; advertisers undoubtedly felt pressure from the KKK to stop advertising, but they mainly refused to be cowed.<sup>49</sup> One of the *Tribune*’s largest accounts, C. C. Sells, did abandon the newspaper for a considerable time, staying away even after the Klan controversy was over.<sup>50</sup> None of the advertisers actually came out and admitted they were cutting back on their advertising because of intimidation, but Carter knew it was happening.<sup>51</sup> Some would tell him they did not want an ad a particular week, one that

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Carter had been expecting.<sup>52</sup> Grand Dragon Hamilton told Carter plainly in one of their two face-to-face meetings at the *Tribune* office that he would put him out of business by organizing a boycott.<sup>53</sup> Carter's wife Lucille told him, as she had before and would later: "Well, we came with nothing. Let's leave with nothing. Let's beat them."<sup>54</sup>

In addition to its traditional racial and religious hatreds, the Klan cloaked itself in a false morality, Carter believed.<sup>55</sup> This veneer of morality won the Klan converts and sympathizers among whites.<sup>56</sup> Stripped of its violence, the organization seemed to represent many American virtues.<sup>57</sup> Threatening letters were sent to those the Klan believed fell short of its standards of morality and decency, all without proof, although with some evidence, Carter avowed.<sup>58</sup> Men who cheated on their wives, unmarried couples who lived together, a man who would not allow his wife to attend the church of her choice, families who did not seem to be providing for their children properly, several individuals who spoke against the Church of Christ, a man who, habitually, found himself arrested for public drunkenness and who did not seem to be supporting his family properly; all received warnings, threats, or visits from the Klan.<sup>59</sup> Many respectable citizens, according to Carter, thought some of these goals, far from being deplorable,

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002. Remarkably, after the *Tribune* won the Pulitzer, Carter said some businesses advertised to be associated with a newspaper that had "maybe done something (and) gotten national notoriety."

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

were in fact admirable.<sup>60</sup> With his editorials, Carter tried to draw attention to the hypocrisy of their stands, and the vigilante nature of the justice being meted out.<sup>61</sup> And he couched all his comments in moral and religious terms.

**Week one.** “At exactly 9:22 last Saturday night,” the *Tabor City Tribune* reported on the front page of its Wednesday, July 26, 1950, issue, “the much-discussed Southern Society of the Ku Klux Klan made an infamous tour through Tabor City with some 30-odd cars and with three or four occupants in each vehicle.”<sup>62</sup> It was the first article in the *Tribune*’s crusade against the Ku Klux Klan. “The trek wound around through the colored sections as well as down the main streets of town, sirens blew and some blank shots were fired,” the news story continued.<sup>63</sup> The Klan was “putting on some sort of recruiting drive,” in the *Tribune*’s estimation.<sup>64</sup>

The Klan’s parade also “monopolized the streets, created a general confusion,” “considerably disturbed” some residents, and “caused many persons to believe there was a fire, including some firemen.”<sup>65</sup> Eventually, the Klan motorcade drove out of town toward nearby Loris, just across the state line in South Carolina, where it was “said that

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> “Ku Klux Klan Here On Saturday Night,” *Tabor City Tribune*, July 26, 1950, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

the police department in that town escorted the parade through the city.”<sup>66</sup> In Tabor City, “no effort was made to stop them,” or in Carter’s opinion, “encourage them.”<sup>67</sup>

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was apprised of the Klan’s appearance, and “asked to intercede should any incident occur of a lawless nature,” beyond the capabilities of the local authorities to deal with, Carter wrote.<sup>68</sup> To avoid prosecution under North Carolina’s anti-mask law, the Klansmen “wore their traditional robes” with the “hoods pushed back off their face[s].”<sup>69</sup> Most of the vehicles bore South Carolina license plates, according to the *Tribune* news story.<sup>70</sup>

The only photograph on the front page of the July 26 *Tribune* was of two firemen standing in the midst of a badly burned tobacco barn.<sup>71</sup> One of the pair, Troy Bennett, was a Tabor City town councilman, managed the bus terminal and snack shop; he was also, ironically and unknown to Carter, secretly an active member of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>72</sup>

Grand Dragon Hamilton visited Tabor City two months earlier to recruit members in an area he had determined fertile ground for his expanding Association of Carolina Klans.<sup>73</sup> Carter’s barber acted as an intermediary between Hamilton and Tabor City Police Chief L.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., and Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>71</sup> “The Tobacco Was Smoked Before It Was A Cigarette,” caption, *Tabor City Tribune*, July 26, 1950, 1.

<sup>72</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 96-97.

<sup>73</sup> Campbell and Clark, “Thomas Lemuel Hamilton and the Ku Klux Klan.”

R. Watson. Hamilton tried to cajole Watson into leading a Klan motorcade through town.<sup>74</sup>

According to documents captured by the FBI, the chief replied on police department stationery, “He had received a message concerning leading a parade through the town of Tabor City and would be glad to have the opportunity to lead the parade through as he had several places in mind he would like the parade to pass, all of which were in the city limits and would not take much time.”<sup>75</sup> Chief Watson, in the letter addressed “To whom it may concern,” asked that, “[If it] was agreeable he would like the same representative to contact him.”<sup>76</sup> This was all unknown to Carter at the time.

**Initial editorial salvo.** Carter was unequivocal in the *Tribune*’s first front-page editorial headlined, “No Excuse for KKK.” It was imbued with religious references and set the frames for the entire multi-year campaign.

In this democratic country, there’s no place for an organization of the caliber of the Ku Klux Klan . . . Any organization that has to work outside the law is unfit for recognition in a country of free men. Saturday’s episode, although without violence, is deplorable, a black eye to our area and an admission that our law enforcement is inadequate.

Sanctioning of their methods of operation is practically as bad as if you rode in their midst. It takes a united front to combat lawlessness. It takes all the law-abiding people as a unit to discourage and combat a Ku Klux Klan that is totally without law. The Klan, despite its Americanism plea, is the personification of Fascism and Nazism. It is just such outside-the-law operations that lead to dictatorships through fear and insecurity.

The Klan bases its power on fear and hate of one’s fellow man and not through love, understanding and the principles upon which God would have us live together. We have some racial problems in this country. That cannot be denied. However, we do not have open

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

warfare which we will have if the primitive methods of the KKK are applied . . . They are endeavoring to force their domination upon those whom they consider worthy of punishment. It is not for a band of hoodlums to decide whether you or I need chastising.<sup>77</sup>

Carter further editorialized that regular channels sometimes did not provide justice, and though he lamented this, he stated plainly that it is “not up to a hooded gang to do the punishing.”<sup>78</sup> He added, “Punishment must be kept within the law; if that is not adequate then we . . . have the power to enlarge upon (those laws) should we deem the present ones inadequate.”<sup>79</sup> This reliance and support for the American legal system would prove to be a powerful one in the coverage by both *The News-Reporter* and the *Tribune*.

Carter also blamed the recent Democratic primaries in North and South Carolina, “the most ungodly campaigns ever waged in the Carolinas,” for creating, “through mudslinging,” the conditions that allowed the Klan to grow.<sup>80</sup> The primaries were “abominable campaigns based on racial hate,” he charged.<sup>81</sup> Carter, inaccurately, continued, “The racial issue in the South has been overstressed. There is little tangible evidence of any struggle between races. There’s no basis to a federal government forcing us to mingle together. A law of this nature would get no further than the record, and you know it would not and could not be enforced.”<sup>82</sup> Drawing on the intensity of his religious

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<sup>77</sup> “No Excuse For KKK,” editorial, *Tabor City Tribune*, July 26, 1950, 1.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

faith, Carter predicted that “any non-segregation that ever comes about in the South will have to be a natural movement, through many generations of people, through education and *the practice of God’s teaching*.”<sup>83</sup> Carter was plainly speaking to his “back country” readers, mostly white, who were troubled by the rumblings over civil rights. In this sense, Carter’s campaign against the Klan can be seen as part of the first threads in the intricate tapestry of the Civil Rights movement that would soon engulf the South.

Carter was carefully, if perhaps unintentionally, balancing God and ungodly. segregation and non-segregation, hate and love, and natural movement and federal intervention. This editorial defined the fight to come, and put Carter and the *Tribune* forthrightly against the Klan. It skillfully delineated the newspaper’s viewpoint, but in words and phrases attuned to its rural, mainly uneducated audience. It compared the Klan to wicked enemies so recently defeated, the fascist Axis powers in World War II. Carter clearly regarded this as a “crusade” – his word – and a religious imperative.<sup>84</sup>

In at least half a dozen instances Carter knew of – and he believed there were many others unreported – Klansmen entered churches in the midst of worship services and walked up and down the aisles threatening parishioners and pastor alike.<sup>85</sup> This deeply offended Carter’s religious sensibilities. The Klan’s tactic worked: with only one notable exception, until just before the floodgate of arrests began in early 1952, no minister preached against the Klan.<sup>86</sup> So, the preaching the ministers failed to do had to be conducted in Carter’s secular pulpit, the *Tribune*. *The News-Reporter* and the *Tribune*

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

were the only public voices raised against the Klan for nearly two years. Politicians, prosecutors, and preachers kept quiet. That initial editorial also broadly sketched the themes that Carter would pursue, and his underlying motivation – though he did not specifically state it nor admit it half a century later – was that the actions by the Klan were ungodly, unchristian, and extralegal. Concluding his first editorial, Carter wrote,

With the Klan's frequent reference to Jesus, God and religion, they are being highly sacrilegious because their very being is in contrast to God and the Bible. If you had the names of those persons appearing here Saturday night and if you had church attendance slips for those persons, it's our opinion that not five percent of them entered any church of any denomination on Sunday morning.<sup>87</sup>

“This was not a time for fence-straddling neutrality,” Carter stressed later.<sup>88</sup>

The *Tribune's* editorials did attract the attention of the FBI, the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation, sheriff's departments, and local police forces, both because of the editorials and news coverage themselves, but also because of the subsequent threats against Carter. “Intimidating phone calls poured in at home and in the office. The mail was heavy and threatening.”<sup>89</sup> He turned the letters over to the FBI. Carter credited the FBI and its director, J. Edgar Hoover, as vital to the defeat of the Klan.<sup>90</sup>

The morning after that first editorial appeared, the Klan stuck a note under his car's windshield wiper.<sup>91</sup> That “audacious” and “brazen” action, done while his family slept a few feet away, chilled the young editor: he could have had his “house set afire or

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 32.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>91</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 23.



blown . . . up” like one in Horry County a few weeks earlier that killed three people, a possible “Klan reprisal.”<sup>92</sup> The scrawled note was written with a blue pencil. “You are a nigger-loving son of a bitch,” the letter further stated.” “Stop writing those lies about us right now or you’ll not wake up one morning. We know how to deal with trouble-makers like you.”<sup>93</sup> Two more hand-written notes awaited him at the *Tribune* office, slid under the front door.<sup>94</sup>

The threats and harassments continued, week after week. Letters were slipped under his door and through the mail. Telephones rang, but there was no one at the other end. “Cars drove up before his house at night and parked, silently waiting.”<sup>95</sup> There were many threats that did not materialize, “threats that they’re going to burn my building, kidnap my children, and get me one way or the other.”<sup>96</sup>

From the instant the first issue with the anti-Klan editorial hit the street, Carter felt the pressure in Tabor City rising against him.<sup>97</sup> Business leaders, worried about the effect on their bottom line, objected. His three closest friends and fishing buddies opposed his stance.<sup>98</sup> “It’s hard when your best friends don’t want to back you up,” Carter observed.<sup>99</sup> His friend Arthur Prince told him he was “in sympathy with what

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Jay Jenkins, “Cole, Carter Get Pulitzer Prizes,” *News and Observer*, May 5, 1953, 3.

<sup>96</sup> Carter interview, March 25, 2003.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

you're writing about," but was sure Carter was making a "huge mistake" and "cutting [his] own throat."<sup>100</sup> He was convinced Carter would turn everyone in town against him and "help business dry up" in Tabor City.<sup>101</sup> Carter was not about to mind his own business, he wrote later. "Isn't the welfare of the people in this community my business?" he reflected in his memoirs. "Isn't that the business of every newspaper, large or small, that's worth its salt?"<sup>102</sup>

Carter reported the beatings "vividly," hoping to convince the "so-called good people" of the true essence of the Klan. "Not even the pastor in the Tabor City Baptist Church, where I taught a Sunday school class, would publicly criticize the Klan floggings," Carter wrote.<sup>103</sup> "A lot more of [those beaten] were Anglo-Saxon whites than any other race," Carter pointed out.<sup>104</sup> "There were a lot more [whites] that were flogged than there were blacks. They did flog a good number of blacks."<sup>105</sup> Carter considered that many outrages against blacks also might have gone unreported, because blacks felt they could not trust the police and local government officials – and with reason. Police departments in the area were riddled with Klan members.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Carter interview, March 25, 2003. "When I did make it, and then got all these awards and my whole life turned around, [Prince] was the first one to say, 'Well, I'm glad you didn't take my advice.'"

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 23.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

On Sunday, July 30, 1950, the Rev. G. W. Crutchfield, pastor of the St. Paul Methodist Church in Tabor City, excerpted Carter's editorial in his Sunday bulletin.<sup>107</sup> To Carter's comments about the sacrilegious nature of the Klan, Rev. Crutchfield said, "to which we add Amens and Amens."<sup>108</sup> Crutchfield was the only minister in the Tabor City area to preach from the pulpit against the Klan – and he did so only once, according to Carter.<sup>109</sup>

**The second week.** The August 2, 1950 issue was the second to appear after the Klan motorcade. Most of the bottom fourth of the front page was given over to an "open letter" from Carter to his readers about the week's Ku Klux Klan activities.<sup>110</sup> "There has been a great deal of discussion during the past week since our editorial appeared condemning the Ku Klux Klan," Carter's opening sentence read.<sup>111</sup> "Many Christian people have welcomed the opportunity of congratulating us for saying what every righteous [sic] individual felt," following the Klan's parade through Tabor City.<sup>112</sup>

Carter denied one rumor, started by a local boy, "a liar first class . . . (with a) chance of still becoming . . . a mediocre citizen," claiming that Carter was in fact the

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<sup>107</sup> "An Eye For The Truth," *Tabor City Tribune*, August 2, 1950, 1. Carter also ran a weekly opinion column, titled "Carter's Column." It ran down much of the first column, and was usually given over to folksy reminiscences of his, the wit and wisdom of his father, and mundane (and sometimes funny) anecdotes about area residents. Throughout Carter's campaign against the Klan, he kept virtually all mention of the Klan out of his front-page column by design. There were only a very few exceptions.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 130.

<sup>110</sup> "An Open Letter From Me To You On This Week's Ku Klux Klan Development," *Tabor City Tribune*, August 2, 1950, 1.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

“headman” of the Klan.<sup>113</sup> Another reader, Carter observed, “ask[ed] specifically if your editor was [a] Klansman” and received the graphic answer that he would “rather be in jail with our back broke than to be associated in any way with such a gang.”<sup>114</sup> Carter called the Klan “needless” and “wretched.”<sup>115</sup>

Another rumor Carter countered was that “many” blacks were talking of abandoning Tabor City in the wake of the Klan’s appearance.<sup>116</sup> Carter pleaded not to “let this band of hoodlums scare” them away.<sup>117</sup> Carter told his readers – incorrectly it would turn out – that those “living within the law” had nothing to fear from “law enforcement officers” and anyone else.<sup>118</sup> “Should [the Klan] come to Tabor City again and if it is anything other than a ‘sneak attack,’ they will be openly opposed,” Carter promised.<sup>119</sup> “It’s our belief that they have too many enemies here to attempt any action against anyone,” Carter concluded, believing that “there are enough prominent local persons” who would “push the prosecution of any klansmen apprehended” while engaged in unlawful behavior.<sup>120</sup> He added:

We cannot and do not wish to encourage rioting. However, the klan in any form is so obnoxious enough to turn the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. The *Tribune* was inconsistent in capitalizing Klan and Klansmen throughout Carter’s campaign against the Klan, and that inconsistency is reflected throughout this study.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

stomach of law abiding people and should be dealt with as if they were an outlaw band which they are.

In actual number, there are probably something like 50 policemen, sheriff's deputies, highway patrolman, constables in Columbus County, all pledged to fight lawlessness. All would be available to protect the rights of individuals in this county. But add to that number 99 percent of the population of the county who hate the very guts of the klan and you have about the right percentage of people who would go all the way in opposing Klan activities in Tabor City.<sup>121</sup>

**Reacting to readers.** Carter believed freedom of the press extended to his readers and believed they had a right of reply. In the issue of August 9, 1950, John Hardee challenged Carter "to put this [letter] on the front page of your paper [where] your editorials appeared," which Carter did.<sup>122</sup> Carter noted in an editor's preface that "we in no way agree with Mr. Hardee's opinions, but would defend always his right to express them."<sup>123</sup> Hardee took the *Tribune* to task for misrepresenting the Klan, an organization he claimed he did not belong to, but sympathized with.<sup>124</sup> He wrote that the only fault of the Klan was in "getting too far behind with their work."<sup>125</sup> Hardee contested Carter's figure of a week before that only a fraction of a percent agreed with the Klan.<sup>126</sup> "Your figure . . . is an over estimated and incorrect figure," he wrote, but if correct, he "thanked[ed] the good Lord I'm part of the 56 one hundreds percent" agreeing with the

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid. Some farmers were fearful of bringing their tobacco to Tabor City to sell; Carter tried to alleviate their concerns.

<sup>122</sup> "John W. Hardee Writes Editor Open Letter On KKK," *Tabor City Tribune*, August 9, 1950, 1.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

“Three K’s.”<sup>127</sup> It was the only coverage on the Klan in that week’s *Tribune*, the third issue since the August motorcade.<sup>128</sup> Reflecting on the crusade in later years, Carter “concluded that [printing letters to the editor] might have been one reason why I wasn’t killed, burned out or flogged during that uprising. The thugs always had a chance to be heard.”<sup>129</sup>

A week later, however, something had changed. Perhaps a threat struck close to home; perhaps pressure from prominent citizens or advertisers prompted Carter to rethink his stance. Half a century later, he did not recall why, though.<sup>130</sup> Whatever the reason, a front-page article *cum* editor’s note, was headlined, “This is Final Installment on Ku Klux Klan Activities,” Carter wrote.<sup>131</sup> “The *Tribune* with this short article expects to ring down the curtain on further publicity regarding the Ku Klux Klan.”<sup>132</sup> Carter referred to the previous issue’s letter to the editor from Hardee: “Every point that Mr. Hardee brought out in his letter could be shattered by the *Tribune* staff if we saw fit to pursue this subject longer,” Carter wrote.<sup>133</sup> “[O]ur argument with Mr. Hardee through the columns of this newspaper might tend to discourage letters to the editor,” something Carter did “not wish to do.”<sup>134</sup> Carter continued, “[W]e openly solicit your opinions on any subject

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Carter interview, March 28, 2007.

<sup>131</sup> “This Is Final Installment On Ku Klux Klan Activities,” *Tabor City Tribune*, August 16, 1950, 1.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

at any time and will carry them word for word provided you sign them, as Mr. Hardee did, and provided there is no obscene language or libelous statements therein.”<sup>135</sup> In conclusion, Carter expressed “the sincere hope . . . that the Ku Klux Klan will see fit to forget that Tabor City is on the face of the earth and that they will carry on their activities elsewhere.”<sup>136</sup>

If that last statement was intended as prediction, it came horribly true over the next week and Carter’s intention to cease coverage was short-lived. A front-page banner article in the *Tribune*’s August 23 issue recounted a gun battle in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina that left a Klansman dead.<sup>137</sup> The Klansman, a Conway, South Carolina, policeman, was wearing his uniform under his Klan robe when he was shot and killed, possibly by a fellow Klansmen and probably inadvertently.<sup>138</sup> An italicized editor’s note preceding the article explained that the “escapade at Myrtle Beach” was “not within the Tabor City community,” and thus “comment” was appropriate and (somehow) consistent with the newspaper’s earlier decision to suspend Klan coverage.<sup>139</sup> Sheriff Ernest Sasser said that ““300 shots were fired by about 60 robed Klansmen and an unknown number of negroes in front of a dance hall and tourist court”” in the black section of Myrtle Beach about midnight.<sup>140</sup> The owner of the business, Charlie Fitzgerald, was ““being held ‘for

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> “Klansman Killed In Horry Gun Fight,” *Tabor City Tribune*, August 23, 1950, 1.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> “Editor’s Note,” *Tabor City Tribune*, August 23, 1950, 1.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. Other sources referred to the dance hall as a brothel.

safe keeping,” according to the story.<sup>141</sup> Several blacks were injured, some requiring medical attention.<sup>142</sup> The policeman killed, James Daniel Johnson, was shot with a .38 pistol; no suspect in his murder was ever arrested.<sup>143</sup>

**The Grand Dragon appears.** In that August 23 article, Thomas Hamilton, grand dragon and principal leader of the Carolina Klans, appeared in the *Tribune* for the first time.<sup>144</sup> He would become the public face of the KKK throughout Carter’s campaign; the only Klan member who always appeared in public unmasked. Hamilton would become Carter’s personal nemesis.<sup>145</sup> In the article, Hamilton “announced that he will say nothing until the investigation had been cleared up.”<sup>146</sup> A week later, Hamilton was the focus of the *Tribune*’s banner story, which reported that he was free on \$5,000 bond after being arrested for “conspiracy to incite mob violence,” in connection with the gun battle in Myrtle Beach.<sup>147</sup> A grand jury later set them free, failing “to return a true bill of indictment.”<sup>148</sup> On that “sultry night” in Myrtle Beach when the Conway police officer was killed, Hamilton had led two Klan motorcades past Fitzgerald’s dance hall, the first nonviolently.<sup>149</sup> Later, 27 cars, containing 60 Klansmen, circled Fitzgerald’s dance hall

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 50.

<sup>146</sup> “Klansman Killed In Horry Gun Fight,” *Tabor City Tribune*, August 23, 1950, 1.

<sup>147</sup> “Arrests Made In Klan Killing; Investigation By Sheriff Continues,” *Tabor City Tribune*, September 6, 1950, 1.

<sup>148</sup> “Seven Men Under Arrest In Horry,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 24, 1951, 1.

<sup>149</sup> Carter, *Only in America*, 169. Charlie Fitzgerald was targeted because he was “relatively successful and affluent, something the Klan detested in all Negroes,” according to Carter.



and tourist cabins, until someone became “trigger-happy” and “more than three hundred rifle and pistol shots ripped through the dance hall.”<sup>150</sup> Those inside, mainly African-Americans, returned fire.<sup>151</sup> Klansmen then assaulted the building, “knocked down the door and charged onto the dance floor, overpowering” those inside, as a few fled.<sup>152</sup> Hamilton’s “mordant smile while making the statement,” Carter related, “made it obvious the shootout had his approval.”<sup>153</sup>

Fitzgerald was “severely whipped,” while more than thirty other blacks required medical attention.<sup>154</sup> Some time at the “height of the gunfire,” Johnson was killed.<sup>155</sup> After his beating, Fitzgerald was kidnapped and “stuffed into the trunk” of a car.<sup>156</sup> He was driven to a swamp, and beaten again mercilessly; he had both his ears cut off as a lesson that “no one else can get away with daring the Ku Klux Klan to do its job.”<sup>157</sup> Five

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. Fitzgerald was taken to the state penitentiary at Columbia for his own safety. While he was never charged in the police officer’s death, he was convicted of “distributing lewd literature” (pornography), and sent to jail. South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond came out strongly against mob violence, and relieved one policeman of his duties after it was learned he was a Klansman. Thurmond also “promised that the state would do all in its power to discourage the Klan reorganization.” Carter observed, in an interview, that until the FBI made its arrests, neither state police organizations in North and South Carolina made any arrests. Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

days after the gun battle, Hamilton, and eleven others, all South Carolinians, were arrested and charged with conspiracy to incite mob violence.<sup>158</sup>

**A Halloween circular threat.** Despite some official hopes that the Klan had abandoned its recruitment drive in the wake of the Myrtle Beach attack, on Halloween, a circular was “attached” to the door of the *Tribune*, and “scattered” throughout Tabor City, announcing a public meeting of the Klan in rural Horry County for November 11.<sup>159</sup> The public was “cordially invited to attend” to hear the Klan’s side of the “recent Myrtle Beach affair” and to “hear what the Klan is and what it stands for.”<sup>160</sup> The grand dragons of Florida and South Carolina (Hamilton) were scheduled to speak. Carter explained that this was the “first semi-open invitation for public participation in a demonstration and cross burning.”<sup>161</sup>

Without elaboration or explanation (had he regained his nerve?), Carter abandoned completely his self-imposed ban on editorial comment news stories on the Klan with massive coverage of a November 11 rally, held in a specially leased Horry County tobacco field.<sup>162</sup> Carter put his byline on the November 15 story that carried the headline, “K.K.K. Threatens To Expose Horry Officials.” It was the only bylined article

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 177 and 179, and “Arrests Made In Klan Killing; Investigation By Sheriff Continues,” *Tabor City Tribune*, September 6, 1950, 1. Interestingly, the Klan was agitating in larger towns in the Carolinas, but with notably less official sanction. Eight Klansmen were fined \$1,000 each for burning a cross on a Charlotte lawn. “There was simply more and better justice in upstate Carolina than in the rural coastal counties,” Carter admitted.

<sup>159</sup> “Ku Klux Klan Slates Public Meeting, Cross Burning In Horry November 11,” *Tabor City Tribune*, November 1, 1950, 1.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> W. Horace, Carter, “K.K.K. Threatens To Expose Horry Officials,” *Tabor City Tribune*, November 15, 1950, 1

of the entire crusade and was the front-page banner story of the November 15, 1950 *Tribune*. Perhaps Carter was challenging those critics who had maneuvered him into slackening or suspending his coverage so there would be no mistake who wrote the story. Perhaps, too, it was a personal gesture, and an admission that there would be no turning back, no more equivocation or half-measures.

The one and a half-hour Horry County rally attracted “an estimated crowd of 8,000.”<sup>163</sup> Hamilton ranted against local law enforcement, accusing police officers of accepting bribes, and denied that the Klan provoked the Myrtle Beach gun battle.<sup>164</sup> He claimed that “shots [first] came from the building,” and “insinuated” that since the Klansmen were “white Southern Americans,” they were “compelled to return the gunfire.”<sup>165</sup> He told the crowd that Officer Johnson ““died in defense of his integrity,”” and that the Klan was sending his children monthly checks.<sup>166</sup> “Wearing a brilliant silkish green cloak and hood that left his face exposed,” Hamilton was the only “live” speaker, talking in a “miserably cold rain,” and “in a nutshell” criticized the “churches, schools, United Nations, U.S. Government, President of the United States, the U.S. Supreme Court, Governor of South Carolina, law enforcement officers of Horry county, newspapers, radios, the movie industry, the CIO’s political Action Committee, Jewish race, Negro race, Communism, preachers, NAACP, YWCA, Federal Aid to Education, Welfare Departments, the World Federalists, and ‘brotherhood’ organizations, among

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 1, 4. The FBI tried to trace license plates several times, and frequently found that the Klansmen had “traded plates” with the innocent owners of other cars.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

others.”<sup>167</sup> His words “held the audience’s attention from beginning to end,” according to the *Tribune* account.<sup>168</sup>

At least 100 white robed Klansmen roamed around the speakers’ stand. “An American flag draped [sic] the Bible on the stand and a 20-foot, burning cross was in back of the speaker. The cross burned throughout the address” that started at 8:30 p.m.<sup>169</sup> Prior to the speech, Carter noted without irony and without editorial elaboration, that “musical records were played . . . and the music included . . . Negro spirituals.”<sup>170</sup>

Hamilton denied Klan complicity in the “whipping of 52-year-old Rufus Lee” a week earlier.<sup>171</sup> He implied that “the Lee fracas was not done by the Klan but that it was perpetrated by the Sheriff [Sasser] in order to damage the KKK’s reputation.”<sup>172</sup> Hamilton claimed masked men had beaten Mr. Lee, and that “Klansmen do not wear hoods over their faces.”<sup>173</sup> He related his recent arrest in connection with the occurrences at Myrtle Beach.<sup>174</sup> “When I was arrested this time, they sent fifteen men to arrest me and I was jailed with two men holding machine guns on me. I must really be a

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 1, 4.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 1. Lee was roused out of bed at 1 a.m. on November 7 by men breaking into his house. His “two [very young] sons, all innocent, were frightened nearly to death” and one was “choked down by the Klansmen.” Lee was taken several miles away, whipped, and lectured about his drinking. *Tabor City Tribune*, November 22, 1950, 4.

<sup>172</sup> “Threatens To Expose Horry Officials,” *Tabor City Tribune*, November 15, 1950, 1.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

dangerous man,’” he said, to laughter from the crowd.<sup>175</sup> A tape-recorded message from the Florida Grand Dragon, Bill Hendricks, was played, and he principally attacked Jews.<sup>176</sup>

As counterpoint, Carter ran his front-page editorial next to the banner story on the KKK meeting, drawing a sharp contrast between opinion and reportage. In the editorial, headlined “True Or False?,” he ticked off the areas where the *Tribune* and the Klan agreed: that Communism in the U.S. should be “nipped in the bud,” that police in Horry County needed to be investigated, that he believed in the Constitution and the Bible, that Alger Hiss, a prominent state department official and New Dealer, accused of being a Communist in the 1930s, was a traitor, and that the U.N. charter was “not all that it should be.”<sup>177</sup>

Then, he enumerated where they parted ways. He denied that Klansmen, “on the whole,” were God-fearing and Christian – and this was something his readers were not hearing from the pulpits.<sup>178</sup> He wrote that “no race should be condemned” as a group, but that individuals might be good or bad.<sup>179</sup> The Klan had singled out Jews as Communists. “To say that a Jewish sect, composing 9,000,000 people in the United States, is communistic and evil, is condemning a block (sic) without regard to individuals. Perhaps

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>177</sup> “True or False?,” editorial, *Tabor City Tribune*, November 15, 1950, 1.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

there are a great number of these persons who are Communists. But the ratio of Communist Jews to the ratio of Communists of any other race is no greater.”<sup>180</sup>

He disputed Hamilton’s contention that American newspapers were controlled.<sup>181</sup> He denied that churches and schools were being led toward communism.<sup>182</sup> In fact, he drew the parallel that the only other secret organization he knew about, other than the Communist Party, was the Klan.<sup>183</sup> “If the Ku Klux Klan is good and pure, if it is made up of good people, and if they do not work outside the law as stated at the meeting, then why doesn’t it charter its organization like all other groups and not hide its membership and carry on its activities in the dead of night in this mystic fashion?”<sup>184</sup> He concluded the editorial by urging any Klansman to write a letter to the editor, even offering to withhold the writer’s name if he or she so requested, a significant shift in his stated position.<sup>185</sup>

Carter attended most of the cross-burning mass meetings, not furtively, but certainly inconspicuously.<sup>186</sup> He was always accompanied by “bodyguards:” his brother-

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

in-law and press foreman, J. A. Herlocker, and Linotype operator Bill Oakley.<sup>187</sup> To the best of his knowledge, he was never recognized in the dark.<sup>188</sup>

In a small item on page six of its November 8, 1950 edition, the *Tribune* reported that the FBI had been ordered by James McInerney, assistant U.S. attorney general in charge of the criminal division, to probe the Klan “demonstration” in Myrtle Beach that resulted in the death of police officer Johnson.<sup>189</sup> The special agent in charge at the Savannah, Georgia FBI office had no comment, the *Tribune* reported.<sup>190</sup> This was the first inkling in the *Tribune* of specific FBI involvement in the Klan campaign.<sup>191</sup>

Carter continued his coverage of the Klan rally in the November 22 edition, publishing a pair of photographs, one on the front page.<sup>192</sup> Most of the photographs of the Klan that appeared in the *Tribune* were taken either by Herlocker or Oakley.<sup>193</sup> Since many others in the crowd were also taking photographs, the flashes did not draw undue attention.<sup>194</sup> In the front-page photo, five Klansmen’s faces were clearly identifiable, but the caption noted, “[A]lthough efforts were made to identify these Klansmen [no] local people acknowledged their acquaintance.”<sup>195</sup> On page six, a bespectacled Hamilton was

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<sup>187</sup> Carter, *Only in America*, 186.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> “F.B.I. Probe Is Ordered,” *Tabor City Tribune*, November 8, 1950, 6.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Photo, no caption, *Tabor City Tribune*, November 22, 1950, 1.

<sup>193</sup> Carter interview, March 25, 2003.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Photo, no caption, *Tabor City Tribune*, November 22, 1950, 1.

photographed, flanked by a flag, delivering “his speech to a gathering of Klansmen and curiosity seekers.”<sup>196</sup> Klansmen were proud to have photos taken and often posed for them. Hamilton liked the publicity generated.<sup>197</sup>

The main Klan story that week dealt with Sheriff Sasser’s reply to Hamilton’s comments about him. In a rambling statement, Sasser claimed the “present Klan is nothing like what the original Ku Klux Klan was,” commenting admiringly about the Reconstruction era organization that operated in a time of “very little law and legislation.”<sup>198</sup> He accused Klansmen of soliciting signatures to remove him from office by giving money or other inducements.<sup>199</sup> He contradicted Hamilton’s charges of graft, and asked him to “deliver” the evidence to the county solicitor “for prosecution.”<sup>200</sup> He stated he had enjoined his deputies from discussing the Klan, and pledged that home invasions would not be allowed “as long as I am Sheriff.”<sup>201</sup>

**A two-month lapse.** Carter hammered away in editorials and news stories. He was relentless. Then it just stopped. It was nearly two months before the Klan appeared again in the columns of the *Tribune*, again an unexplained lapse and one Carter had no recollection of.<sup>202</sup> The January 17, 1951, issue had a brief notice of another KKK rally in

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<sup>196</sup> “South Carolina’s K.K.K. Grand Dragon,” *Tabor City Tribune*, November 22, 1950, 6.

<sup>197</sup> Carter interview, March 25, 2003.

<sup>198</sup> “Sasser Replies to Klan Charges,” *Tabor City Tribune*, November 22, 1950, 1.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 4.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Carter interview, March 28, 2007.



Aiken, South Carolina.<sup>203</sup> A week later, an incident prompted Carter to pen an unusual page two editorial, titled, “Right is Right and Vice Versa.”<sup>204</sup>

Recently we had an instance in Tabor City in which a Negro girl who teaches school in our community was slapped by a white man, one of our local residents. This assault took place following advances made toward her that would seem rather uncalled for and without provocation.

Now you think about it a moment. Suppose the situation had been reversed. Suppose the Negro man had slapped a white woman after making the same advances. What would have been the possible legal consequences? There’s little doubt that it would have been made into a big thing fast and the assaulting party might well have served a long road or prison sentence, possibly even something more radical.

Yet, not much is said or done about it legally or otherwise when the situation did occur in reverse. Is it right? Is it Christian? Is it democratic the way we see things in the light in which we want to see them? Is it so much worse one way [than] it is the other? In the eyes of God there is no difference in the offense, and as we see it, there’s still right and there’s still wrong. Some say alcohol caused it all. That, too, may be true but drunkenness is no excuse for crime, and the law should deal with drunken lawbreakers exactly as they do sober ones except make the penalty worse.<sup>205</sup>

On the front page of the same issue, the *Tribune* detailed “two cases of mob violence” in separate stories under an overall headline that proclaimed: “Night-Riding Terrorists Beat Disabled Vet, Crippled Farmer And Elderly Negro Woman.”<sup>206</sup> According to the stories, “a mob without robes or hoods but believed to be a band of Ku Klux Klansmen and operating in typical KKK fashion” invaded the home of Willie and

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<sup>203</sup> “KKK Cards Meeting At Aiken,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 17, 1951, 1.

<sup>204</sup> “Right Is Right And Vice Versa,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 24, 1951, 2.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> “Columbus Ku Kluxers Not Known,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 24, 1951, 1.

Evergreen Flowers, in a rural area of Columbus County.<sup>207</sup> Forty to fifty men were involved, according to Sheriff H. Hugh Nance. Shortly before midnight, the Klansmen invaded the house.<sup>208</sup> In response, Mr. Flowers looked for his shotgun and shells, but could not find them, and ran to his brother's nearby house for assistance, while Klansmen fired at him.<sup>209</sup> His wife was "administered a severe beating" with "sticks and the butt of a gun," while the couple's 10-year-old daughter looked on.<sup>210</sup> Neighbors who had seen the cars drive by, headed east, were unable – or unwilling – to identify any of the vehicles or their occupants.<sup>211</sup> A month later, the tenant house the Flowers family abandoned after the attack was "mysteriously" destroyed by fire.<sup>212</sup>

In another incident, "a robed band of night riders . . . beat and rather seriously injured J. C. Gore and his uncle Sam Gore," both white men, in rural Horry County.<sup>213</sup> "The younger Gore, 25, was a disabled "purple heart veteran" of World War II, with a silver plate in his head from combat injuries.<sup>214</sup> The older Gore had been "crippled" in an automobile accident nearly nine years earlier.<sup>215</sup> In the wake of the attack on the Gores, Sheriff Sasser announced "he was deputizing reliable men in every Horry county precinct

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> "House Once Occupied By Mob Victims Burns," *Tabor City Tribune*, February 28, 1951, 1.

<sup>213</sup> "Seven Men Under Arrest In Horry," *Tabor City Tribune*, January 24, 1951, 1.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

to prevent Klan disorders.”<sup>216</sup> Pressed by the *Tribune*, “he refused to name any of them nor would he say [exactly] how many had been deputized,” indicating only it would be “as many as it takes . . .”<sup>217</sup> Eventually, Sasser arrested seven men in connection with the attack; some of whom had been earlier charged in the Myrtle Beach attack.<sup>218</sup>

**Personal danger.** In late January 1951, the constant stream of threats took an even more dangerous turn. Carter received a telephone call from an anonymous doctor in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, just as he sat down to dinner, two days after his stories on the Gores.<sup>219</sup> The doctor claimed to have overheard a telephone conversation between a Klansman in South Carolina and a gunman in Tampa, Florida, making arrangements for a mob-style hit against the *Tribune* editor.<sup>220</sup> The Klansman told the hit man that Carter was “home most nights fairly early and the job ought to be easy.”<sup>221</sup> One specifically asked if the price previously agreed upon was still valid and was assured it was.<sup>222</sup> The doctor told Carter he had been mentioned specifically by name, along with Tabor City.<sup>223</sup> The doctor did not want “to get tangled up with the mess,” because there were “plenty of Klansmen right here in my neighborhood” and refused to divulge his name.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 1, 10.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>219</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 71.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 72.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

Moments after he hung up, the night policeman in Tabor City, Ted Watts, called on Carter, relating a similar telephone call.<sup>225</sup> Lucile's eyes were "misty and frightened."<sup>226</sup> Carter "held her in my arms a moment," before returning to the dining room "where the two children were rubbing food all over their faces."<sup>227</sup> He suggested to his wife and the police officer that the "doctor may have been a Klansman just trying to scare us out of the crusade."<sup>228</sup> The next day, Shay Smith told Carter he had seen someone in a car with out-of-state plates taking numerous photographs of the house.<sup>229</sup> "Suddenly it didn't seem like a bad idea if the police looked in on me for a few days," Carter recollected.<sup>230</sup>

**Klan keeps coming.** Carter's coverage see-sawed across the North Carolina/South Carolina state line. An anonymous mimeographed Klan broadside against Horry County Sheriff Sasser, intimating charges of embezzlement and graft, prompted a February 7, 1951 *Tribune* editorial.<sup>231</sup> Admitting he had "no complimentary remarks to make in regard" to the sheriff, Carter asked for proof of the charges against Sasser.<sup>232</sup> The *Tribune*, Carter explained, "made extensive efforts to track down some of the charges,"

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> "Bring The Charges To Court," editorial, *Tabor City Tribune*, February 7, 1951, 1.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

and had been unable to do so.<sup>233</sup> Carter stated that the *Tribune* did not “wish to create the impression that these rumors are all false . . . nor insinuate they are true.”<sup>234</sup> He called the Klan a “band of hoodlums,” and urged them to make their evidence public, or present it to South Carolina’s governor in a private capacity.<sup>235</sup>

The *Tribune*’s February 14 issue detailed another Klan attempt to discredit Sasser and stymie any enforcement activities he had in mind.<sup>236</sup> Four “mimeographed articles” were distributed throughout Horry County, three of them carrying “rough sketches” of a rat, “aimed at attacking any person accepting a deputy sheriff’s position” and calling them Gestapo.<sup>237</sup>

**The Grand Dragon visits.** Hamilton visited Carter at the *Tribune*’s office on Friday afternoon, February 23, prompting a three-paragraph recap in the February 28 edition.<sup>238</sup> Carter wrote that Hamilton “discussed the Klan’s activities in Horry County, and throughout the Carolinas.”<sup>239</sup> Hamilton made the visit “at the written request of the editor who has opposed the Klan in every way possible.”<sup>240</sup> Carter did not comment

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> “Klan Attacks Sasser With Literature,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 14, 1951, 1.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. The Klan began publishing the *KKK News* sometime in February; it appeared very sporadically throughout the next 18 months. The second issue, “printed on four by seven manila card[s],” was discussed in the *Tribune* of February 14. The Klan publication “took swipes at Sasser by pointing out a series of unsolved crimes that have happened during his term of office,” along with further charges of graft. The *News* also offered a reward for 20 Klan robes that were missing and presumed stolen in Horry County.

<sup>238</sup> “Klan Dragon Makes Call On Tribune,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 28, 1951, 1.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

editorially on the visit.<sup>241</sup> In *Virus of Fear*, though, he recalled the encounter.<sup>242</sup>

Evidently, the Grand Dragon “was upset that my little newspaper would challenge his fast-growing organization.”<sup>243</sup>

He hit me with a threat that was unexpected. He didn’t warn that the KKK would get me and my family one of these nights – as many warnings I received had said. Instead he struck where he knew it would hurt the most.

“If you keep on writing this junk about our organization, we will put you out of business,” he threatened. “I can get most of your subscribers to cancel the paper any time I ask them . . . And all I have to do to put you out of business for good is to get my Klan members to boycott the businesses here that are advertising with you. The businesses won’t dare to advertise if the farmers who are members around here go somewhere else to trade.” Hamilton made his point.<sup>244</sup>

Carter agreed that Hamilton could probably do that, and that he “couldn’t last long without advertisers . . . [and without] every two-dollar subscriber that I can find.”<sup>245</sup> However, he refused to be dissuaded. “No amount of pressure you put on them will stop me from writing how I feel about the Klan as long as I have money to print another paper . . . The Klan fight is a matter of principle with me . . . I’ll fight you every step of the way,” he told Hamilton.<sup>246</sup> The two adversaries shook hands and parted, with Carter

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 85.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. Carter recalled two meetings with Hamilton, although a careful search of *Tribune* back issues found mention of only one. Carter may well have decided not to mention Hamilton’s second visit in his newspaper; he is insistent that he had two meetings with the Klan leader. Carter interview, October 27, 2003.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 86.

acknowledging at the safety of a half-century's distance that "my hands were shaking. I couldn't believe I had stood up to the Grand Dragon as well as I had. Make no mistake, I was scared. And when I think of it now, I'm scared again."<sup>247</sup>

**Three months of silence.** As has been seen, there was an earlier silence by Carter's *Tribune*. Now, equally inexplicably, the Klan fell silent for several months – or their victims so quailed before them that *they* were silent in the face of continuing outrages. For nearly three months, the Klan was silent, and its silence was reflected in virtually nonexistent coverage in the *Tribune*. In the April 18 issue, though, Carter took the opportunity to once again express his opinions on racial tolerance and equal opportunity in his opinion column.<sup>248</sup> "Since the courts recently handed down the decision that Negroes must be admitted to the University of North Carolina Law School," Carter began, "a good many people" had asked him for his view.<sup>249</sup> He stated he did not judge a person by the color of his or her skin and would not "feel insulted to sit down by the side of a Negro who as a man could put himself up with any other race and compare favorably except for the color of his skin . . ."<sup>250</sup> He bemoaned segregation generally and the unequal treatment of blacks in education and the workplace.<sup>251</sup> He concluded, "[L]et a man be black, white, yellow or green and if he as an individual is

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> W. Horace Carter, "Carter's Column," *Tabor City Tribune*, April 18, 1951, 2.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

honest, kind, religious, charitable and peaceable that's the basis upon which he should be judged."<sup>252</sup> Pointedly, he did not call for fundamental change in the South.

This column prompted one of the most colorful letters to the editor of the entire Klan campaign, and appeared in the April 25, 1951 issue of the *Tribune*.<sup>253</sup> It was written by G. B. Benton, of rural Nakina, who specifically denied being a Klansman.<sup>254</sup> Many residents of his "section disagree with you on the Negro's," Benton wrote.<sup>255</sup> "God made the white race superior to all people. The Mundolans were second, the Indians were third, and the Negro's were fourth, witch [sic] was as wild and dumb as a jack rabbit . . . "<sup>256</sup> He asked how Carter "or anyone else could dream up the idea that God created all races equal."<sup>257</sup> Without citing specific scriptural passages, he told Carter to "read your bible and history a lot closer."<sup>258</sup> He also did not feel that Carter's opinions should be "teached" to area children.<sup>259</sup> Carter ran the letter without editorial comment, but left all the misspellings and grammatical mistakes intact, a policy he followed throughout the entire campaign.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> "Letter To The Editor," *Tabor City Tribune*, April 25, 1951, 2.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.



A week later, “stickers bearing the words, ‘Yesterday, Today and Forever,’ along with ‘KKK’” were placed on vehicles and shop windows in Whiteville, where the *News-Reporter* was opposing the Klan.<sup>261</sup> In a three-paragraph front-page article, the *Tribune* reported that “these stickers, long familiar decorations on conspicuous windows in Tabor City” had been unknown in Whiteville previously.<sup>262</sup> Whiteville’s city manager urged the police department “to keep a sharp lookout” for Klansmen.<sup>263</sup>

**Another Klan motorcade.** In the May 23 issue of the *Tribune*, Carter wrote of another Klan motorcade through Tabor City, “contrary to a similar visit by the infamous secret order last fall, no shots were fired” as the estimated 35 cars “roamed up and down several streets.”<sup>264</sup> The state highway patrol had been “notified” of the parade, “but had no representatives present,” the *Tribune* reported.<sup>265</sup> The *Tribune* article related that “so far as is known, no sirens were blown,” announcing the motorcade

Carter took on the Klan editorially again on May 23. “Graft and subversion has crept stealthily into almost every phase of American public life,” Carter wrote, opening his front page editorial headlined: “The KKK, Another Step . . . Breakdown in Government.”<sup>266</sup>

Taking advantage of this weakness, the obviously  
un-American and subversive Ku Klux Klan has rapidly

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<sup>261</sup> “KKK Stickers On Whiteville Windows,” *Tabor City Tribune*, May 2, 1951, 1.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> “Klan Makes Second Trek Down Tabor City Streets,” *Tabor City Tribune*, May 23, 1951, 1.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> “The KKK, Another Step . . . Breakdown In Government,” *Tabor City Tribune*, May 23, 1951, 1.

grown among the disgruntled, the dissatisfied, the trouble makers and the prejudiced.

Choosing not to voice their sentiments in open and truly American ways, this organization instead chooses to hide in the blackness of night [carrying] on its cowardly deeds in a backhanded, illegal crafty manner indicative of big city mobsters in the days of prohibition.

If this group of mystics have [sic] wholesome [reforms] which they advocate, why, oh why, can't they shed their cloaks of secretness, and as private citizens carry those sentiments to the [polls] and vote the changes they deem necessary. That has long been the American way.

Only the Communists in this country are ashamed of their membership cards. They and the Ku Klux are the two groups who don't want people to know [who] they are. If their motives are honorable, why, may we ask, are they opposed to the public knowing their identities.

We never knew a church member who purposely kept his membership a secret. We never knew a Mason who was ashamed to admit his membership. Nor a member of the Grange, the Farm Bureau, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, The Civitans, the Rotary, The Lions or any of the other countless hundreds of other organizations whose members had anything to hide.

The truth of the matter lies in the fact that the disgruntled take a fanatical pride in doing something fringing on the illegal. It is among just such groups the eventual internal growth of antagonism toward our government and our way of life is springing up. It is through just such groups that freedom of every kind may perish and Americans could find themselves being ruled through fear.<sup>267</sup>

In the midst of the Klan uprising, a reminder from the dim Southern past that spawned that organization appeared in the pages of the *Tribune*. On June 20, Carter wrote

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

an editorial titled “Last Confederate Reunion.”<sup>268</sup> A “battered bugle that sounded the charge at the Second Battle of Manassas” played “Taps” at the close of the last reunion of Confederate soldiers on Memorial Day, 1951, in Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>269</sup> According to Carter’s editorial, only a trio of Confederate veterans “answered the call to arms at this sixty-first and last, reunion.”<sup>270</sup> Only eleven other “brothers at arms” were thought to be alive, eighty-six years after Appomattox.<sup>271</sup>

During the period of the Klan campaign, Carter hired his first reporter, Al Harrison, from Spencer, North Carolina, right out of journalism school.<sup>272</sup> With four newspapers, Carter was having a difficult time balancing the requirements of news writing and the business side of newspapering.<sup>273</sup> “I couldn’t do it all myself,” he acknowledged.<sup>274</sup> “[Harrison] took the pressure off of me.”<sup>275</sup> Harrison handled a lot of the routine news and some of the editorials, but none of the Klan coverage.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> “Last Confederate Reunion,” *Tabor City Tribune*, June 20, 1951, 2.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. They were John Salling of Slant, Virginia, W.J. Bush of Fitzgerald, Georgia, and W. D. Townsend of Olla, Louisiana.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Carter interview, March 25, 2003.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid. Evelyn Leonard was listed on the masthead as society editor of the *Tribune*; according to Carter she was more of a secretary, though she did write some of the wedding and engagement stories.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

**Back public again – Hamilton responds.** Perhaps maddened by Carter’s relentless opposition, Grand Dragon Hamilton decided to use the columns of the *Tribune* for his own purposes.<sup>277</sup> He wrote a lengthy letter to the editor, reprinted in full by Carter, that with Carter’s rebuttal took up nearly half of page two on June 27, 1951.<sup>278</sup> “You carried quite an editorial stating your opinions and your warped ideas with reference to the Klan,” Hamilton began.<sup>279</sup> “You state in this editorial that the Ku Klux Klan was obviously un-American and subversive. Now sir, this statement . . . was an untruth because nowhere can you find in the recent list – released in Washington D.C. – where the Ku Klux Klan is [either] . . . I dare you Sir, to check the records . . . and you will find that the Klan is listed as an ANTI-CIVIL RIGHTS Organization; and I thank God that I can belong to an organization that believes in keeping the race of men PURE and SPOTLESS.”<sup>280</sup>

Hamilton continued, accusing Carter of believing in “mongrelizing America.”<sup>281</sup> On the basis of their recent discussion at the *Tribune* office, Hamilton concluded that Carter was “biased and leaning towards the group of people in America . . . advocating the downfall of this great land of ours.”<sup>282</sup> Hamilton claimed that the “Masonic Lodge is a secret organization and its membership is held secret together with all its workings.”<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> “Hamilton Writes Editor; Tribune Rebuttal Given,” *Tabor City Tribune*, June 27, 1951, 2.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

He did not contradict Carter's contention that Masons did not keep their own membership rolls secret.<sup>284</sup> In addition, Hamilton maintained that the Klan and the Masons were "two distinct Organizations carrying out their separate missions."<sup>285</sup> He stated that "no Klansman is ashamed to be a Klansman nor to claim membership" in the Klan, though he provided no specifics and no names of those who were unashamed and willing to publicize their membership.<sup>286</sup>

The Klan [is a] group of REAL HONEST-TO-GOODNESS LOYAL AMERICANS who have awakened to the fact that a minority group in America is trying to overthrow their government. The Klan does not advocate or preach a doctrine of fear but instead we had people outside of the Klan who fear the Klan because they are doing a number of un-moral and illegal, nasty, unchristian things and they are afraid that someone will get after them. I do not advocate taking the Law into my own hands nor will I be a part of an organization that advocates taking the Law into its own hands . . .

The greatest medium in America to keep America American is controlled and is being suppressed by a minority group which has been able to remove from the American people that part of the Constitution that is so vitally needed at the present time. You could use your Newspaper, acting under the authority of the Freedom of the Press, to a great advantage.<sup>287</sup>

Concluding, Hamilton called upon "the Lowly Nazarene our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . . . for guidance" and to forgive sins. "I would recommend Him to you," Hamilton wrote Carter.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid. Hamilton was also a Mason.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

The religious imagery and references extended to Carter's rebuttal, which was several paragraphs longer than Hamilton's letter.<sup>289</sup> Also looking to "the sacred freedom of the press," Carter emphasized that "the columns of this newspaper are open to . . . everyone alike."<sup>290</sup> Although Hamilton's letter was "racked with errors, you, like I, are entitled to your opinion and entitled to make them known through" the *Tribune's* letters to the editor section.<sup>291</sup> Hamilton's prickly responses were only a "natural" reaction, Carter told his readers, "because practically all newspapers, everywhere, North and South, East and West, oppose your organization openly. We have yet to read one item in any newspaper that complimented your KKK's," Carter wrote.<sup>292</sup> "Do you honestly feel that all the newspapers are wrong and that you stand on an exalted [sic] pedestal as an example of the right?"<sup>293</sup>

Countering Hamilton's objection to being called un-American, Carter observed, "[I]f such incidents as the Myrtle Beach episode is American, we have drifted a long way. Only Al Capone and some other big time gangsters practiced 'Americanism' in this way."<sup>294</sup> In a stinging rebuke, Carter compared Hamilton's belief in a pure and spotless "race of men" to Hitler, who "also believed that theory and took drastic steps to eradicate thousands of Jews."<sup>295</sup> Carter admitted that he made a mistake when he did not refer to

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<sup>289</sup> "Our Rebuttal," *Tabor City Tribune*, June 27, 1951, 2.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

the Masons as a secret organization, but noted that “we haven’t heard of any shooting escapades attributed to them” through “concerted action by the organization.”<sup>296</sup>

Carter did “not deny I need more of [Jesus],” but it “stymies me to understand how you and your organization can profess to be followers of the Bible.”<sup>297</sup> Carter termed Hamilton’s view that the *Tribune* “advocate[d] the downfall of this great land,” as “mighty false” and a “clumsy charge.”<sup>298</sup> He challenged Hamilton to find “three people in Tabor City who are acquainted with this newspaper . . . who will bear out your belief.”<sup>299</sup>

**A mass meeting.** A Klan mass meeting was scheduled on unnamed “leased property” in rural Columbus County, between Tabor City and Whiteville, homes to the two newspapers opposing the Klan resurgence, the *Tribune* reported in its August 15, 1951 issue.<sup>300</sup> “Chanting the same old familiar story of racial hatred,” that Klan rally “came off without incident,” Carter reported in the next week’s paper.<sup>301</sup> Five thousand people “stood in three inches of powdery dust in an erstwhile cornfield” to hear Grand Dragon Bill Hendrix of the Florida KKK and Hamilton “lambast [sic] everything that came to mind.”<sup>302</sup> The Jaycees, Eleanor Roosevelt, the N.A.A.C.P., Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, and former University of North Carolina President Dr. Frank P. Graham drew especial criticism.

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> “Klan Slates First Meet In Columbus,” *Tabor City Tribune*, August 15, 1951, 1.

<sup>301</sup> “Ku Klux Rally Similar To Those Held In Horry,” *Tabor City Tribune*, August 22, 1951, 1.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

A huge cross burned “behind the improvised speakers platform,” while “at least three” Klansmen had “difficulty keeping their steeds quiet while photographers were shooting pictures.”<sup>303</sup> Ninety-seven robed Klansmen were in evidence, according to the *Tribune* article, watched over by seventy-two police officers.<sup>304</sup> “Klansmen made an effort to march around in a horseshoe figure,” Carter explained.<sup>305</sup> “[T]hey were a little rusty on their marching and never exactly got in the swing of the thing,” Carter observed.<sup>306</sup> The “nearest thing to excitement came when one of the Klansmen on the speakers’ stand fainted and was carried off,” the *Tribune* reported.<sup>307</sup>

A month later, on September 29, the Klan planned another rally, again between Tabor City and Whiteville, the *Tribune* reported in its September 26 edition.<sup>308</sup> In the same brief article, the *Tribune* reported that Hamilton had “invited” the president of the North Carolina Jaycees to “debate with him at the meeting,” because the organization had recently “condemned the KKK as being un-American.”<sup>309</sup> The *Tribune* did not carry a story on the rally. It did, though, carry an article on page two, reporting that for the “first time in probably 60 years” a black had been called to serve on a jury in General Session Court in Horry County.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 1, 7.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 1, 7.

<sup>308</sup> “Another KKK Meet,” *Tabor City Tribune*, September 26, 1951, 1.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> “Negro Called To Serve On Horry County Jury,” *Tabor City Tribune*, October 24, 1951, 2. “Jessie Vereen was called on a case and accepted by both sides,” according to the *Tribune*. The event was so



**The first conviction.** The first nail in the Klan's "Koffin" received notice in a front-page article of the *Tribune's* October 31 edition.<sup>311</sup> "The noose was tightening," Carter noted in his memoirs, "especially now that the federal government was involved."<sup>312</sup> Hamilton was convicted in federal court in Columbia, South Carolina, of "writing and mailing a postal card containing statements intended to reflect injuriously on the character and conduct of Wilton E. Hall," publisher of the Anderson, South Carolina *Daily Mail* and the *Independent*.<sup>313</sup> Hall was also a former U.S. Senator from South Carolina and his newspapers were "bitter opponents" of the KKK.<sup>314</sup> A federal judge imposed the maximum penalty allowable, \$1,000 or a one-year jail sentence.<sup>315</sup> Carter's news story indicated Hamilton would pay the fine to avoid jail time.<sup>316</sup>

So far, Carter had been alone, except for his allies more than a dozen miles away in Whiteville at *The News-Reporter*. And both the Klan and he had fallen silent at intervals. To some extent, Carter's opposition to the Klan – and that of others who opposed certain actions of the segregationist status quo society – was rooted not only in law and morality, but also in public opinion. Very early in the white-heat of the early controversy Carter hesitated – in mid-August 1950 within a month of the original motorcade – and overwhelmed by reaction to his coverage (read: opposition to it), its vehemence and its

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noteworthy that Horry County officials knew the name of the last black to serve on a jury, June Gardner, six decades earlier.

<sup>311</sup> "Grand Dragon Convicted," *Tabor City Tribune*, October 31, 1951, 1.

<sup>312</sup> Carter, *Only in America*, 254.

<sup>313</sup> "Grand Dragon Convicted," *Tabor City Tribune*, October 31, 1951, 1.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

potential for violence against his newspaper, his family, or him. He even pledged not to discuss the topic again. Another incident in Myrtle Beach prompted subsequent coverage, which he tried to explain away because it was not *technically* in the immediate vicinity of Tabor City. Within a fortnight, he had abandoned even that pretence and returned to aggressively opposing the Klan.

**Deputies and the Klan.** Twenty-four Klansmen were charged for parading down the aisles of the Cane Branch Baptist Church, near Allsbrook, in Horry County on Halloween, Wednesday, October 31 during a revival meeting.<sup>317</sup> The sheriff's department had been "tipped off" and deputies were waiting for the Klansmen.<sup>318</sup> According to Sheriff Sasser, "the arrests were made when the Klansmen stepped back on the public highway," violating a South Carolina law "making it illegal to wear masks on public property."<sup>319</sup> Fourteen of the 24 Klansmen involved were arrested and jailed overnight, until bond was posted.<sup>320</sup> Five days later, warrants were sworn out for the deputies involved in the arrest "on the complaint of A. L. Tyler, a church deacon at the Cane Branch Church," according to the *Tribune*.<sup>321</sup> Six deputies, including the county's chief deputy, were accused of "using obscene language, and breaking up a church service."<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> "Klan Action Arouses Horry," *Tabor City Tribune*, November 7, 1951. According to Sheriff Sasser, the KKK had "paraded through another white church" in the county a week earlier.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

According to the story, three Klansmen said that “the church gave them permission to attend the services in Klan regalia.”<sup>323</sup>

In response to the arrests, the church’s moderator, the Rev. N. W. Tyler, and the clerk, Arthur W. Tyler, “reported that the membership passed resolutions commending and approving the Klansmen’s conduct.”<sup>324</sup> Deacons of six different area Baptist churches, a Methodist Church and a Presbyterian Church, numerous parishioners, and the Conway postmaster posted bond for the deputies, drawing the comment from the *Tribune* that apparently only members of the Cane Branch Baptist Church approved of Klan activities.<sup>325</sup> Charges were eventually dropped against both the Klansmen and the deputies, Carter explained in his memoirs.<sup>326</sup> “But the incident did solidify Protestant opposition to the KKK,” he continued.<sup>327</sup> “No further intrusions into church services were ever reported.”<sup>328</sup>

**Becoming worse.** Things became worse. The *Tribune*’s November 21 banner story detailed the beatings of two area men by “masked, night-riding mobsters.”<sup>329</sup> A Columbus County mechanic, Clayton Sellers, was lured from his home around midnight to assist two men who claimed their car needed fuel, a typical Klan ploy.<sup>330</sup> He was then

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> “Masked Men Beat-Up Two Columbus County Citizens,” *Tabor City Tribune*, November 21, 1951, 1.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

kidnapped and “severely beaten” with either a piece of machine belt or a piece cut from an automobile tire” by two men who hit him alternately, while two other men leaned him over the fender of a car.<sup>331</sup> His mother tried to prevent his kidnapping, but was pushed away, and his wife “fired five shots in the direction of his captors” in an unsuccessful attempt to rescue him.<sup>332</sup> His kidnappers claimed he had “beaten his mother the previous Sunday,” a charge he denied to police.<sup>333</sup> He did admit that he “had had trouble with his wife . . . sometime back,” but that they were “amicably” reconciled.<sup>334</sup>

Another Columbus County man, Robert Lee Gore, was kidnapped under similar circumstances a month earlier, but did not immediately report the incident, because the presumed Klansmen had warned him against doing so.<sup>335</sup> Gore’s kidnappers told him their vehicle had broken down some distance away, asked for his assistance, and had him drive to the location of a parked car, which turned out to contain four Klansmen.<sup>336</sup> The particulars of Gore’s beating were not in the *Tribune* article, but in his memoirs, Carter related that Gore was “blindfolded” and “forced . . . across the front fender of the car” where he was beaten in a similar fashion with a similar weapon to that used on Sellers.<sup>337</sup> The two incidents differed in one material way: Gore was “taken across the state line [into] Horry County, South Carolina, where he was whipped, making the crime a federal

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 113.

<sup>336</sup> “Masked Men Beat-Up Two Columbus County Citizens,” *Tabor City Tribune*, November 21, 1951, 1. The *Tribune* did not report whether Robert Gore was related to the other Gores beaten by the Klan earlier.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

offense involving the FBI.”<sup>338</sup> FBI director J. Edgar Hoover then “sent about 32 FBI agents down [to Columbus County] and said, ‘don’t come back till you’ve got them in jail,’ Carter remembered.”<sup>339</sup> The FBI “soon infiltrated the ranks of the Klan and their expertise in undercover operations began paying off.”<sup>340</sup>

**Summary.** The year 1951 was, to borrow from Churchill, the gathering storm that was breaking upon Columbus County. By the start of 1952, Carter was still alone – even *The News-Reporter* was in the grips of its own lapse in coverage. The language of Carter’s opposition had largely jelled. Carter spoke with a biblical and scriptural voice, not with the words of a great liberal, but with religious indignation. His views on equity and fairness were based on God’s order, not law. Race was, at the same time, so deeply intertwined with southern history and culture and socio-political mores that Carter largely took it both for granted and as a given. The triangle of race, religion, and liberalism on which this dissertation is built, is not equilateral; it is lopsided in favor of religion in Carter’s coverage. There was, perhaps, a fourth leg. Carter [and Thompson and Cole] roundly criticized the extralegal punishment the Klan meted out, stressing those actions were undemocratic and outside the American tradition of justice and due process of law.

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> “Masked Men Beat-Up Two Columbus County Citizens,” *Tabor City Tribune*, November 21, 1951, 1.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE TIPPING POINT FOR CARTER

*“Round, around, around, about, about,  
All ill come running in, all good keep out . . .  
By the pricking of my thumbs, something  
wicked this way comes.”*

*— William Shakespeare, Macbeth, IV,  
1, 59-62*

Up until 1952, the few Klan incidents that had been brought before a grand jury or a judge were dismissed for want of evidence or witnesses willing to testify.<sup>1</sup> Then, in the swampland town of Nakina, a dozen miles from Tabor City, along the Waccamaw River, a farmer named Dan Ward stood up to the Klan.<sup>2</sup> He had very generous sharecropping agreements with several black tenant farmers, the only blacks in the community.<sup>3</sup> On Christmas Day 1951, three neighbors, one armed, all Klansmen, visited Ward and told him to get rid of one particular black tenant, “if you want to live.”<sup>4</sup> They told Ward to make sure his tenant “moved and moved fast or else his property would be burned and he would be ‘Kluxed.’”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Carter, *Only in America*, 270.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> “Three Nakina Men Get Road Terms For Threatening To ‘Klux’ Farmer,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 9, 1952, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

After a week's deliberation, Ward and his wife took the matter to authorities.<sup>6</sup> Two other residents, who had been approached to assist in "running this nigger out of Nakina," testified against the trio.<sup>7</sup> The three were convicted by a jury, and sentenced to two years on a road gang.<sup>8</sup> Carter termed it a 'turning point in the Klan movement,' because finally a "local court" dared to "oppose the vigilantes, something (he) had never expected to happen."<sup>9</sup> Solicitor Robert Schulken told the court the incident was "the most terrible thing that has ever happened in Columbus County." He added, "When things come a place where you can't say who is going to live on your own property, it's time to regard the matter seriously."<sup>10</sup>

On January 16, Carter deviated from his policy against mention of the Klan in his (usually) "down home" opinion column on the front page of the *Tribune*.<sup>11</sup> He devoted his entire column, and almost all the left-hand column of the *Tribune*, to an indictment of the Klan.<sup>12</sup>

Our attitude toward this group has never wavered for a moment.  
We still consider them an unnecessary evil and one that will be  
stamped out completely in the not too distant future.

We have not had them in the news and editorial columns  
much in recent weeks because we felt that we had already

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<sup>6</sup> Carter, *Only in America*, 271.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "Three Nakina Men Get Road Terms For Threatening To 'Klux' Farmer," *Tabor City Tribune*, January 9, 1952, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Carter, *Only in America*, 271.

<sup>10</sup> "Three Nakina Men Get Road Terms For Threatening To 'Klux' Farmer," *Tabor City Tribune*, January 9, 1952, 1.

<sup>11</sup> W. Horace Carter, "Carter's Column," *Tabor City Tribune*, January 16, 1952, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

called them just about everything that we could think of. If someone knows of some new approach, some new statement in this regard that is in keeping with our policy, we will be glad to add that to the record.

Our entire policy in a nutshell is that this hooded group is unfit and unworthy to administer justice on anyone, and we will never approve the actions of such an organization. Its very being, in our way of thinking, is against the Constitutional principles laid down by our forefathers.<sup>13</sup>

Carter then went on to describe the unsettling conditions that had developed in Fair Bluff, a nearby community terrorized by the Klan.<sup>14</sup> Residents felt under siege, according to Carter.<sup>15</sup>

Threats made to a minister there, and allegedly coming from the KKK, has stirred up the citizenry against these night riders to an extent that the little town is practically an armed camp. It is reliably reported that guns and other weapons are available in just about every residence, and that the slightest incident might set off the fireworks that could end only in death and tragedy.<sup>16</sup>

Carter called it “needless fear” sparked by the Klan and its “evil.”<sup>17</sup> The FBI, he explained, was “nearing the day,” when it would make “wholesale arrests” and expose the Klan and its members in open court.<sup>18</sup>

This is our greatest hope. If arrest[s] are not made and if the organization is not exposed . . . it can only end one way – that is mass tragedy with several persons meeting their death[s]. It has been our belief from the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



start that just such a massacre would be the climax and start of the fall of this new fangled Klan. Now there is some hope that Federal officers [note that there is no mention of state or local officers] can bring [the Klan] to justice and perhaps avoid the gunplay that could have only one end – all bad.

From the start . . . we have made it known that we believed they were largely a bunch of disgruntled persons and low type individuals with, of course, some good people in their midst. We now know some of the members with no degree of doubt left and our opinion is unchanged.<sup>19</sup>

Carter turned to a modern parable.

[This] reminds us of a story told some time ago . . . A Christian gentleman had been led to believe the Klan was a noteworthy organization and attended a meeting of the group. When he went into the first meeting, he looked around him at the other people who were present, then reached for his hat and said as he made for the door, “I don’t even associate with such people on the outside.”<sup>20</sup>

It is interesting that in this brickbat Carter pinned considerable hope on the national level, rather than state or local ones. In his earliest editorials, he suggested to his readers that the federal government needed to leave the South to its own devices and the natural progression of history and improved race relations. By January 1952, he was lobbying for assistance from that same federal government he (and fellow Southerners) had urged to keep away.<sup>21</sup> His motivations were multi-layered and complex, but the lodestar was eradication of the Klan for its unholy activities.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> The Klan did take out a measure of revenge on Carter. They kidnapped his quail-hunting pointer, Bess. She escaped and was eventually reunited with him. Bess had, apparently, escaped from her captors and had “walked so much it almost wore her feet off.” She lived for several more years after returning home. While Bess was missing, a close friend gave Carter a Labrador puppy he dubbed Chad. Early one evening, while

Carter seized on the tactic of a very public dialogue on the Klan and its views, deciding to run any letter from Grand Dragon Hamilton – and do so in full – and then respond to it, point-by-point. Carter had a great faith, not only in his God, but also in the value and authority of the press and its potential to benefit the wider polity. Milton's support for the marketplace of ideas self-evidently informed Carter's coverage. He chose to allow Hamilton and any other Klan leader to air their views in the same vehicle he used to excoriate them. Agreeing with Milton (and others), he was certain that the citizens of his community, once acquainted dispassionately, but fully, with the facts would come to the correct decision. His was a visceral confidence in democracy and the press' crucial place in it. Carter's opinions, though, were either too nuanced or too simple for Hamilton; he was simply infuriated.

**Hamilton displeased.** Hamilton did not like Carter's latest attack and wrote another withering letter to the *Tribune*.

I read . . . your opinions in your paper . . . or should I say TRASH SHEET? There is one that the Organization, of which I am leader, stands for – it is Freedom of the Press. Now Freedom of the Press, when used recklessly by some individual, whose mind is warped, and I have every cause to believe that yours is in that condition since the day that I had a conference with you, which was held through your insistance, by some of the statements you made at that time.<sup>22</sup>

I am led to challenge you to prove, without a shadow of doubt, where the Ku Klux Klan had anything to do with the flogging or so-called flogging in your section of North Carolina recently. I further challenge you to

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still at the *Tribune* office, he received a phone call from someone who said they had stolen Chad as well. Chad was returned a few weeks later and then poisoned. Carter, *Only in America*, 240-241 and Carter interview, March 25, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Carter published the letter exactly as written, complete with spelling and grammar errors.

prove where the organization has in any way tried to administer Justice on any one – when that statement is made by you or anyone else it is a contemptable falsehood. You further state . . . that in your way of thinking, the Klan is against the Constitutional Principles laid down by our forefathers – Your leanings and warped ideas seems to me that you could not give a fair interpretation of the Constitution.<sup>23</sup>

Hamilton addressed the situation in Fair Bluff, indicating that he had undertaken “personal investigation,” and found “no connection there with reference to the Klan.”<sup>24</sup>

When an individual and his family takes certain steps, it does not necessarily involve the Klan. If I were a resident of Fair Bluff, I would make you eat the newspapers you printed it in for telling an untruth about the people having so many guns in readiness. It is such untruths that stir up neighborhoods and cause violence. If your column was thoroughly analyzed, the right interpretation would be – that you advocate force and violence.<sup>25</sup>

Hamilton continued, asking “a fair question” about the role of the “elected law officers of Columbus County.”<sup>26</sup>

After the War Between the States, which was fought for the preservation of States Right’s the stalwart men of the South had to fight back oppression. History tells us that the carpetbaggers and scalawags and Federal troops and agents were driven out of the Southland [presumably by the Klan]. The sooner that each individual State [now] awakens and realizes its Constitutional rights, the sooner we will have less Federal interference and less agitation.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “Klan Dragon Scorns Tribune Editor; Questions County Law Enforcement; Rebuttal to Hamilton’s Charges Given,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 23, 1952, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

The Grand Dragon took exception to Carter's condemnation of the character of Klan members.

You profess to be a teacher of a Sunday School class professing and teaching the story of the Good Samaritan, yet when you print your column, you . . . [term] . . . the members of the Klan in your area . . . largely a bunch of disgruntled persons and low type individuals with of course some good people in their midst. Now, Sir, let me say, first I have not had the pleasure of meeting all of the members of the Klan in your area, but those that I have had the pleasure of meeting and those that I know personally, I can truthfully say that you have made a GROSS mis-statement.

I dare you or any individual in North Carolina to find anything of an accusing nature against any man who holds membership in the Klan. Sir, they are the CREAM of the CROP . . .<sup>28</sup>

Carter's parable drew scorn from Hamilton, who called Carter a "so-called Christian."<sup>29</sup> "God's plan and purpose is to LIFT men UP. I have heard people, time and again make this reference to the Church: 'If so and so is connected with the Church. I don't care to belong to it.' Remember-the shoe might fit your foot."<sup>30</sup> Hinting at potential financial repercussions, Hamilton termed Carter's comments "destructive criticism" that does not "make you bigger in the eyesight of your people whom you must depend on to sell your papers and advertisement."<sup>31</sup> Hamilton concluded that his "sole ambition, through the help of Almighty God, is in some small way to help lift a Sinful and Perverted Nation back on its feet and into its rightful place."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

In a reply that was just slightly shorter than Hamilton's remarks, Carter opened with his agreement with Hamilton in Freedom of the Press, "the reason your letter is printed in this 'trash sheet.'"<sup>33</sup> Carter's opening salvo set the tone for his reply.

In your first paragraph you repeat a charge made by you months ago that my "mind is warped." Mr. Hamilton, just to deny this statement is not evidence enough, when you consider the source from which the charge came. But perhaps you will accept my challenge to appear with me before any qualified psychiatrist and let him thoroughly examine us both. It might be interesting to see just whose mind is warped. Matter of fact, I believe it would be a revelation.<sup>34</sup>

Carter decided that the best defense was a good offense, and rather than cower at Hamilton's threat of an advertising and reader boycott, he confronted it head on.

If there are any KKK members advertising with us who would like to cease doing so, we will be happy to cancel [their ads] forthwith. If there are any subscribers, who would like to have their subscription money refunded, we will refund in cash the remainder of their paid up subscription time. We ask for no assistance from the Ku Klux Klan. There are enough other people for us to make a living.<sup>35</sup>

Carter noted, "[T]he coming of your Klan marked the beginning of these floggings."<sup>36</sup> And even if the Klan had not been "doing the job themselves, others are using the organization for a haven."<sup>37</sup> Carter reiterated his earlier view that the fear

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

created in the local communities was ““an outgrowth of the KKK and an evil thereof whether they are the guilty parties in the numerous Columbus county floggings or not.””<sup>38</sup>

By your own admission, you and your robed friends dragged Charlie Fitzgerald from his place of business in Myrtle Beach and made some violent attempts at your form of administering justice. Did you or didn't you?

And then to the constitutional principles to which you refer. Have you ever really read the document? A man who so roundly criticizes the law, the Negro, the Jews, the Catholics in public speeches everywhere and who still professes to believe in the principles of our democratic government is stretching an interpretation much further than I can imagine.<sup>39</sup>

Carter termed, generously, local law enforcement efforts “against such . . . undercover societies [as] perhaps too big a job for them.”<sup>40</sup> He indicated that they were “lending their assistance to a big brother, the FBI, along with [North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation], from whom they have every right to request help.”<sup>41</sup> Carter asked, though, “to have the membership roster held up before God to get His stamp of approval . . . [for] a group of hand-picked righteous people who can hide their identity and their faces and do no wrong.”<sup>42</sup> Hamilton's last two paragraphs, involving God and Country, drew an “amen” from Carter.<sup>43</sup> “But as to missions given by God,” he

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

concluded, “I can’t help but wonder if God gave you your mission, or if he gave me mine. Of if he had rather you cease your operation or me mine.”<sup>44</sup>

**The edge of victory.** In the January 30, 1952, issue of the *Tribune*, Carter reported Hamilton had “disbanded the Fair Bluff klavern for ‘un-Klanish’ activities.”<sup>45</sup> According to the front-page article, “official circles maintained a strange atmosphere of silence on the subject” without speculating what that meant.<sup>46</sup> In a release sent to the Associated Press from Whiteville, Hamilton said that “some men have joined the Klan there (Fair Bluff) who have taken the wrong attitude and want to take the law in their own hands, and the Klan does not approve of that type activity.”<sup>47</sup> A week later, Carter revealed the basis for Hamilton’s disbanding of the klavern in Fair Bluff.<sup>48</sup> The Rev. Eugene Purcell, “popular pastor of the Fair Bluff Methodist church” was told “several times” that it would be “unsafe to allow a Negro quartet to sing at a men’s fellowship supper.”<sup>49</sup> The night of the supper, several cars with South Carolina plates parked across

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. The Klan’s efforts drove one Jewish businessman out of business and out of town, and another, in Carter’s estimation, to an early grave. Arthur Leinwand and his wife owned a small clothing store in Tabor City, and while concerned over Klan activities, never “reported any threats to the press or the sheriff,” Carter recalled, but “kept the threats and his fears to himself.” The week between Christmas 1951, and New Year 1952, the Leinwands made the decision to close their store and move to Virginia, caused, Carter believed, by either specific Klan warnings, or by the atmosphere the Klan created. Carter’s neighbor and good friend, Albert Schilds, during the same period, “seemed obsessed with something” that he would not share. He was “suddenly . . . hospitalized with a bleeding ulcer.” It left him “weak and disturbed” and the “constant blatant criticism” from the Klan preyed on him. “The dangerous bleeding ulcer, a sure symptom of tension and stress eventually killed him,” leaving Carter to wonder whether the Klan had “been a leading cause of his demise.” Carter, *Only in America*, 272-73.

<sup>45</sup> “Hamilton Disbands Fair Bluff Klavern For ‘Un-Klanish’ Acts,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 30, 1952, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “More Mob Action News Is Released,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 6, 1952, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

the street from the Methodist church, filled with presumed Klansmen who “remained in them until the Negroes [who showed up to sing despite the threats] were escorted to their homes without making their scheduled appearance.”<sup>50</sup> Rev. Purcell took a leave of absence immediately after the incident, Carter recalled, and his pregnant wife “was considerably disturbed.”<sup>51</sup>

**Recovering their (pastoral) voices.** After nearly 18 months of quiet from the pulpit Columbus County ministers suddenly recovered their voices, Carter reported on the front page of the January 30 *Tribune*.<sup>52</sup> The Rev. P. F. Newton of Whiteville, president of the Columbus County Ministerial Association, released a resolution by the organization.<sup>53</sup> The resolution stated, “[T]he continued increase in instances of lawless[ness] has made it necessary that we, as ministers, declare ourselves opposed to such acts.”<sup>54</sup> Without mentioning the Klan by name, the ministerial resolution cited “a similarity in the pattern of all outstanding occurrences [sic] of recent violence” that makes it “reasonable to assume that they are the result of an “organization.”<sup>55</sup> The effects of this violence were “destructive of law and order and conducive to individual fear, political corruption, and general anarchy.”<sup>56</sup> The ministers termed this “fear, suspicion, hate and

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Carter, *Only in America*, 274 and “More Mob Action News Is Released,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 6, 1952, 1. Rev. Purcell eventually “tendered his resignation following advice from his physician . . . and he will be inactive in the ministry for some time . . .” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 27, 1952, 5.

<sup>52</sup> “Ministers Oppose Floggings,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 30, 1952, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.



further violence . . . completely contrary to the spirit of Christianity – that is, love, tolerance, and neighborliness.”<sup>57</sup> The ministers called upon fellow “ministers to condemn the evils which are besetting our country and upon all church members to do all in their power to work with worthy law enforcement officers to defeat these forces.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the ministerial association urged “those who loved their God, their church, and the country to realize that these acts of violence and the organization which sponsors them are unchristian, unpatriotic, and destructive of every freedom we hold dear.”<sup>59</sup> The ministers also accused the unnamed Klan of being a “subversive, Fascist-like group” using “methods of Communi[sm]” that would prevail unless “patriotic and Christian citizens stand against” them.<sup>60</sup> Carter refrained from any editorial comment. The ministers’ very public opposition seemed to open a floodgate and flogging victims who had previously kept silent went to authorities.<sup>61</sup>

**Klan counterassaults.** Ten masked Klansmen smashed down the door of Dorothy Martin and Ben Grainger’s rural Columbus, North Carolina, home, at about midnight, in November 1951, trussed the “frightened couple” and “tied towels over their eyes” before they were “whisked across the [nearby] state line into Horry County in South Carolina near Causey Crossroads.”<sup>62</sup> In his memoirs, Carter matter-of-factly noted that “the Klansmen apparently were not aware that this mistake made their kidnapping a

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>62</sup> Carter, *Only in America*, 278.

federal crime.”<sup>63</sup> Martin and Grainger were beaten with a “leather belt mounted on a wooden handle,” the “vicious lashing” continuing for more than twenty minutes.<sup>64</sup> Grainger’s clothes were torn from his body.<sup>65</sup> The Klansmen berated the couple for “not attending church regularly and living immoral lives,” and demanded that they “stop living in sin.”<sup>66</sup> Grainger was beaten into unconsciousness, and, eventually, needed “extensive medical attention.”<sup>67</sup> Martin “screamed for mercy,” and was not beaten as severely as Grainger.<sup>68</sup> At about 2:00 a.m., the couple was left alongside the roadway, 10 miles from Fair Bluff, nearly two hours after their ordeal began.<sup>69</sup>

Despite being warned not to report the attack to authorities, Grainger did exactly that, and their ordeal and evidence proved “crucial” to the FBI’s investigation and eventual case against the Klan.<sup>70</sup> Carter, and other members of the press, were made aware of the assaults, but agreed to keep the information confidential, so nothing appeared contemporaneously in the *Tribune*.<sup>71</sup> Authorities and the press kept the assault against the common law couple secret for four months, until federal agents and the recently elected sheriff of Columbus County, Hugh Nance, arrested ten Klansmen for the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 278-79.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 278-79.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

crime.<sup>72</sup> They were charged under the Lindbergh Law, making their crime a capital offense, although the ultimate penalty was not sought.<sup>73</sup> The arrest of those ten men made national headlines; Hoover himself announced the arrests in the early morning hours.<sup>74</sup>

**Drawing the noose tighter, ever tighter.** An eight column, seventy-two-point banner headline splayed across the front page of the February 20 edition of the *Tribune*, proclaiming, “Public Pleased With Arrest of 10 Alleged Ku Klux Klansmen.”<sup>75</sup> The front page contained a four-column photograph of 10 forlorn Klansmen, grim-faced, head and eyes cast down – with the caption, “The hoods were off when this picture was made.”<sup>76</sup> A composite three-column photograph of Grainger and Martin anchored the lower left portion of the page, next to an editorial by Carter titled, “A Measure of Success.”<sup>77</sup>

“Hardly a city, village or hamlet has failed to hear in detail the events of the Federal Bureau of Investigation last Saturday morning early when they roused ten alleged night flogging members of the Ku Klux Klan,” the banner story began.<sup>78</sup> The FBI “finally” worked with “tremendous speed and clock like precision after weeks of slow and painstaking investigation” and “swooped down on their unsuspected prey.”<sup>79</sup> Carter’s lead article made note of the death penalty attached to the kidnapping charge, but said

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 278-80.

<sup>73</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 128-29.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>75</sup> “Public Pleased With Arrest Of 10 Alleged Ku Klux Klansmen,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 20, 1952, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

“few expected such a punishment although the general public was almost unanimous in voicing its delight at the arrests and expressed almost universal hope that if guilty, the floggers not be excused with light punishment.”<sup>80</sup>

Carter listed those arrested, and the group included Horace Strickland, a former Tabor city policeman, and Early Brooks, “a former police chief at Fair Bluff [and current town constable].”<sup>81</sup> When arraigned, those arrested, the *Tribune* stated, “looked crestfallen and none appeared to recognize any of their acquaintances.”<sup>82</sup> “Apparently, they suspected that something was going to happen but were not prepared for the sudden swoop,” the *Tribune* account stated.<sup>83</sup> They were all members of the Fair Bluff klavern that Hamilton had disbanded; he perhaps suspected arrests were forthcoming and wanted to distance himself from his acolytes.<sup>84</sup> Brooks was a member of Rev. Purcell’s church, and, “according to reliable reports,” Hamilton stated, “Brooks ‘was the main reason’ the organization had been rendered inactive.”<sup>85</sup>

The *Tribune* solicited comments in reaction to the arrests from Tabor City’s prominent citizens. Mayor W. A. Williams remarked, “There is no place for this outlaw action [and] any organization that tries to break up the democratic way of life is riding for

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. and Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 128. Brooks was also the Fair Bluff klavern’s Grand Cyclops. While police chief, Brooks had killed a prisoner.

<sup>82</sup> “Public Pleased With Arrest Of 10 Alleged Ku Klux Klansmen,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 20, 1952, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> “Latest Developments Of Klan Incidents,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 27, 1952, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 5.

a fall.”<sup>86</sup> Police Chief L. R. Watson expressed disappointment that former police officers had been involved with the Klan, but was “not sorry that they were arrested.”<sup>87</sup> Rev. P. C. Gann of the Mt. Tabor Baptist Church was “glad to see this organization being broken up,” and hoped the community could return to normalcy.<sup>88</sup> Rev. G. W. Crutchfield echoed his colleague’s sentiments, while adding that he was “glad to see this lawlessness brought to a head.”<sup>89</sup>

The lead article discussed the attacks on Martin and Grainger in detail, noting that he was beaten so severely his bowels moved.<sup>90</sup> It also mentioned the possibility of immorality as a motivation for the attacks on the common law couple, although the story avoided the issue of their specific relationship, other than that they were “seized at the same hour . . . while in the home of Mrs. Martin’s grandmother.”<sup>91</sup>

Of “much interest locally,” the *Tribune* explained, were the names of those who bailed out the Klansmen.<sup>92</sup> C. L. Tart, a sawmill operator, bailed out seven of them, ostensibly “because of business interests in Columbus county.”<sup>93</sup> Two others were bailed out by another businessman, while the mother of one of the Klansmen bailed out her

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<sup>86</sup> “Public Pleased With Arrest Of 10 Alleged Ku Klux Klansmen,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 20, 1952, 1.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

son.<sup>94</sup> “Many additional arrests would be made before the issue is filed in the ‘completed’ folder,” the *Tribune* predicted.<sup>95</sup>

**The state’s turn.** With the FBI grabbing the first headlines, the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation took center stage in the *Tribune* a week later.<sup>96</sup> In ninety-six-point sans serif boldface type, Carter’s eight-column banner headline practically screamed at his readers: “S.B.I. Nabs More Klansmen.”<sup>97</sup> Eighteen officers participated in 8:00 a.m. raids that collared eight suspects “on charges of conspiracy to kidnap, kidnapping and assault.”<sup>98</sup> Five of those taken into custody, including Early, were the same as a week earlier.<sup>99</sup> They were charged with an attack on a pregnant black girl, Esther Lee Floyd, who was abducted at gunpoint on November 14, 1951, from her parents’ home.<sup>100</sup> Her condition saved her from a beating, but a cross was cut in her hair, the *Tribune* related.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> “Latest Developments Of Klan Incidents,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 27, 1952, 5. According to the article, the SBI “expressed some disappointment at the FBI having received the lion’s share of credit for the arrests.” Carter noted that with twelve unsolved floggings, “the SBI can enhance its position by making arrests in those cases.” Ibid., 5. In a March 5 editorial, Carter gave the greatest share of the credit to the FBI, but also took “our hats off” to the S.B.I. and local law enforcement agencies. “Our best bow to them all,” Carter wrote. “SBI And Sheriff’s Dept.,” editorial, *Tabor City Tribune*, March 5, 1952, 5.

<sup>97</sup> “S.B.I. Nabs More Klansmen,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 27, 1952, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. One of the men arrested was named Leamon Ward, an apparently common name at the time. Carter’s story carefully pointed out that “this is NOT the Leamon Ward who is county commissioner and it is NOT the Leamon Ward who is postmaster at Nakina.”

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

In a page five story headlined “Latest Developments of . . . Klan Incidents,” Carter reported the arrest of two Klansmen, this time in Horry County, by the South Carolina State Law Enforcement Division.<sup>102</sup> One of those arrested had been charged in an earlier Klan attack.<sup>103</sup> They were charged in the kidnapping and beating of a mother of six children on February 11.<sup>104</sup> The men were “not wearing Klan regalia,” during the beating, but told her they were with the Klan.<sup>105</sup> The woman had written Governor Byrnes, who ordered an investigation.<sup>106</sup>

In the March 5, 1952 edition, the *Tribune*’s banner story involved the arrest of four more Klansmen, one of them, Frank Lews, another former police chief of Fair Bluff.<sup>107</sup> A page two article described grand jury indictments against ten former Klansmen on the new charges of conspiracy in interstate commerce.<sup>108</sup> Sixteen Robeson County men were arrested under an 1868 statute that “forbids membership in a secret political or military organization,” the *Tribune* reported and were “given the opportunity of renouncing their membership and going free or facing trial.”<sup>109</sup> Ten took advantage of

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<sup>102</sup> “Latest Developments Of . . . Klan Incidents,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 27, 1952, 5.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> “Charges Brought Against Four More Ex-Klansmen,” *Tabor City Tribune*, March 5, 1952, 1.

<sup>108</sup> “Jury Indicts Ex-Klansmen On Columbus Kidnap Count,” *Tabor City Tribune*, March 5, 1952, 2.

<sup>109</sup> “Robeson Men Face Trial Friday On Klan Charges,” *Tabor City Tribune*, March 5, 1952, 1.

the offer.<sup>110</sup> Four men, though, refused, and were tried.<sup>111</sup> The trial eventually ended in a mistrial, with ten jurors favoring conviction and two voting for acquittal.<sup>112</sup>

In the midst of the arrests, the Tabor City Merchants Association selected Carter “Tabor City Man of the Year,” and gave him an engraved watch at a banquet on March 22, 1953.<sup>113</sup> Though public support would have been more valuable in the depths of the Klan’s violence, the accolade did indicate at least some level of support from an important segment of the community. Carter may have also enjoyed some protection as the commander of the Tabor City American Legion Post.<sup>114</sup> His election to that position also indicated some silent support of him in the community, even in the midst of the Klan “uprising.”<sup>115</sup>

In the *Tribune*’s March 12 issue, a soldier wrote a letter to the editor praising Carter’s coverage, remarking that your “answer to the [tripe] written by Mr. Hamilton is a work of art.”<sup>116</sup> A week later, Veanna James, a journalism major at Winthrop College and Loris native, wrote an “infamous history” of the Klan for the *Tribune*, which took up almost half a page.<sup>117</sup> The April 2, 1952 issue of the *Tribune* carried another banner story

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> “Klan Case Trial Today,” *Tabor City Tribune*, March 26, 1952, 1. One thing becomes readily apparent when reviewing the avalanche of Klan cases; justice *was* speedy half a century ago.

<sup>112</sup> “Mistrial In Klan Case,” *Tabor City Tribune*, April 2, 1952, 4.

<sup>113</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 143.

<sup>114</sup> No headline, story under photo of Horace Carter, *Tabor City Tribune*, January 9, 1952, 1.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> “To The Editor,” *Tabor City Tribune*, March 12, 1952, 2.

<sup>117</sup> “Infamous History Of KKK,” *Tabor City Tribune*, March 19, 1952, 3.



about Klan arrests.<sup>118</sup> After two days of deliberation, a Columbus County grand jury indicted twenty-five KKK members in forty-four cases.<sup>119</sup> Six defendants not previously charged were indicted, including the incumbent Fair Bluff chief of police, Jack Ashley, the third chief or former chief from the town exposed as a Klansman.<sup>120</sup> The charges, on North Carolina warrants, were for conspiracy, kidnapping, and assault.<sup>121</sup> Three of the men, including Brooks, were indicted in as many as three separate flogging incidents, the *Tribune* article stated.<sup>122</sup> The *Tribune* began to carry stories detailing trial dates, starting with the April 2 edition, and dozens would appear regularly throughout the next year as KKK members worked their way through the legal system.<sup>123</sup> The SBI arrested two more men in connection with KKK floggings, this one relating to the beating of an auto mechanic, as reported in the April 23 *Tribune*.<sup>124</sup>

**Federal trial.** Early Brooks, “the Svengali of the Klan mob which terrorized Columbus County for two years, caught a five-year penitentiary rap in Federal court in Wilmington,” the *Tribune* reported in its May 14 issue.<sup>125</sup> A former klavern secretary,

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<sup>118</sup> “Grand Jury Puts Bee On Floggers; Six New Defendants Are Named,” *Tabor City Tribune*, April 2, 1952, 1.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> “S.B.I. Arrests Two More For Floggings,” *Tabor City Tribune*, April 23, 1952, 1.

<sup>125</sup> “Klansmen In Flogging Case,” *Tabor City Tribune*, May 14, 1952, 1. In a boldface insert in the story, separated by rules top and bottom, Carter noted that “Hamilton once denied in a letter to The Tabor City Tribune that the Fair Bluff had had anything to do with the Columbus county floggings but his tale was disproved in no uncertain terms this week as both State and Federal courts found members of that infamous group guilty of law violations.”

“who turned state’s evidence,” received suspended sentences on two counts.<sup>126</sup> In all, ten Klansmen were sentenced, with Brooks’ sentence the longest.<sup>127</sup> Several received suspended sentences.<sup>128</sup> Most of the Klansmen, Carter noted in his banner story, were in “shirt-sleeves and open collars” and “received their sentences without [emotion].”<sup>129</sup> Later, “several broke down and wept,” the *Tribune* stated.<sup>130</sup>

The *Tribune* published a lengthy recap of the trial, which combined all the defendants’ cases into one proceeding.<sup>131</sup> The “most colorful speech” was delivered by Defense Attorney George Keels, who “pranced and stomped” as he spoke first in a “booming voice” and then in “a husky whisper.”<sup>132</sup> The *Tribune* described the “flogging of Woodrow Johnson, . . . typical of the rest of the beatings, in detail.”<sup>133</sup> Johnson, who Keels claimed was a drunk wanting to be a martyr, told the court how he was lured outside his home, awakened from a “drunken sleep,” and then kidnapped and taken to a cemetery.<sup>134</sup> Klansmen were “ranged about the flogging scene, . . . most of them hooded and robed,” while he was beaten as he stood and chastised for his “excessive drinking.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

He told the court his “spine still troubles him” from the after-effects of the beating.<sup>136</sup>

Brooks and some of the others were sentenced in another Klan state trial reported in the same issue.<sup>137</sup> Brooks received a two-year road sentence that would be served prior to the federal sentence.<sup>138</sup> Three others, but not Brooks, received road sentences that were suspended upon payment of a \$100 fine, and they were then given probation.<sup>139</sup>

Carter came as close to gloating as he ever did in print that week in his page one editorial, “Justice – As Prescribed by Law.”<sup>140</sup> “The floggers,” Carter editorialized, “got their justice in a manner prescribed by law. That’s the only kind that we believe in . . . [They] deserve no more consideration than a chicken thief or a bank robber.”<sup>141</sup> Carter continued:

In Judge Williams’ court, these refugees from hoods and robes put their case before 12 good men, they had the benefit of an array of legal talent and could tell their story in its most favorable light. Yet they could not escape the gravity of their deeds, and now must pay the penalty. In applying their Klan interpretation of justice, Woodrow Johnson [one of those severely beaten] had no such opportunity to hear his case tried. He had no opportunity to secure legal aid, nor did he have the opportunity to select a jury from 250 men who were unbiased and without prejudice in the case.<sup>142</sup>

Carter mentioned unsympathetically that, “like criminals of all

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> “State Passes Sentence On 11 Night Riders In Johnson Case,” *Tabor City Tribune*, May 14, 1952, 1.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. One man, who defended himself, claimed to have happened on the scene of a flogging while searching for a bathroom and was not involved in the attack. His explanation did not prove persuasive.

<sup>140</sup> “Justice – As Prescribed By Law,” *Tabor City Tribune*, May 14, 1952, 1.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

descriptions, most of them are repentant now.”<sup>143</sup> Seeking to disarm those who felt those beaten had in some way deserved it, and demonstrating his moralistic stand against anyone who violated ethical or legal standards, Carter stated in his concluding paragraph:

From the first, we have had no compliments for the people who the floggers whipped. There’s no doubt that some were involved in affairs bordering on the illegal. Yet, we still maintain that the courts, and the law alone, has the American right to punish its citizenry. Our only compliments to most of those flogged persons is on their courage to tell their story to the law. In that respect, they have not failed us, and in doing so have made our county a better place in which to live. The virtual eradication of the night-riding Klan is an accomplishment for Columbus County and North Carolina and it is our belief that [the KKK] will never rise again.<sup>144</sup>

**Hamilton charged.** Earlier in the previous year Hamilton elevated himself to Imperial Wizard from Grand Dragon and it was bearing that title that he appeared in Recorder’s Court in Whiteville to be formally charged with conspiracy to kidnap and conspiracy to assault in connection with a pair of beatings in Columbus County.<sup>145</sup> Carter triumphantly headlined his banner story: “Klan King Arrested; Conspiracy Charged.”<sup>146</sup> Carter observed in the May 28 banner story that the “bespectacled” Hamilton appeared in a “natty navy blue suit,” but “without any white-robed ‘Imperial Guard’” surrounding him.<sup>147</sup> Hamilton posted \$10,000 bond, paid by a Fair Bluff supporter.<sup>148</sup> Hamilton had

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> “Klan King Arrested; Conspiracy Charged,” *Tabor City Tribune*, May 28, 1952, 1.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

waived extradition in South Carolina, the *Tribune* reported.<sup>149</sup> It had been feared that Hamilton might flee, so a fugitive warrant had been issued as a precaution, but was not needed.<sup>150</sup> Hamilton was charged in the beating of Evergreen Flowers near Chadbourn on January 18, 1951, after her home was stormed and her husband chased away.<sup>151</sup> According to the *Tribune* account, her husband had been the intended victim by a mob of nearly 50 men.<sup>152</sup> Hamilton was also connected with the flogging of Woodrow Johnson.<sup>153</sup>

The *Tribune* told its readers that state and federal investigators had been working hard to create a chain of evidence connecting Hamilton to the Klan violence, but had been frustrated until the indictments and trials of others had commenced.<sup>154</sup> Rev (his first name, not a title) Connor, a farmer, who pleaded no contest to charges he beat Woodrow Johnson, “first introduced the name of Hamilton” in Superior Court.<sup>155</sup> Connor told investigators his recollection of a letter Grand Cyclops Brooks read to a klavern meeting. According to Connor, the letter ““said that some Fair Bluff women had written [Hamilton] that a horse trader would have this woman’s husband arrested and then go out with her.””<sup>156</sup> Hamilton instructed, in his letter, that it be ““taken care of

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

immediately,”<sup>157</sup> Another Klansmen recounted the process of his membership in the Klan. He told the court he gave his membership application directly to Hamilton, with a \$10.00 initiation fee, \$6.00 for robe and hood, and \$2.00 in quarterly dues.<sup>158</sup> Another link against Hamilton was forged by Brooks’ admission that Hamilton promised Brooks \$4.00 of every \$10.00 collected from new Klansmen.<sup>159</sup>

**Tabor City involved.** Reporting on grand jury indictments against an additional twenty-five alleged Ku Klux Klan members in its June 25 issue, the *Tribune* observed that Tabor City residents “had escaped direct indictments in the numerous grand jury actions against” the KKK.<sup>160</sup> That changed with the latest batch of indictments.<sup>161</sup> Troy Bennett, a first-term member of the board of town commissioners, was indicted in connection with the Evergreen Flowers attack.<sup>162</sup> Another local man, Sid Scott, was charged with involvement in both the Flowers and Johnson cases.<sup>163</sup> The *Tribune* remarked that an even 100 members had been indicted in the Klan “roundup,” involving 13 known “night riding raids.”<sup>164</sup> “Fairly prominent” individuals were expected to be

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. According to the *Tribune*, Federal Judge Don Gilliam, during Hamilton’s Wilmington trial, said in open court, ““I think this grand dragon . . . was more interested in the money he was taking out”” of the Klan, than the floggings. Ibid., 10. In Carter’s memoirs, he further quoted Gilliam saying, “Grand Dragon Thomas Hamilton sold the gullible clayroad farmers of Columbus County a sorry bill of goods. He was interested in the Fair Bluff Klan only for the money he could get out of it.” Carter added that, during the course of the various trials, “testimony indicated that Hamilton had pocketed a substantial sum of money from Klan dues and the sale of robes and hoods.” Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 156.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> “Two Local Men Indicted For Alleged Klan Floggings,” *Tabor City Tribune*, June 25, 1952, 1.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

indicted after further grand jury deliberations, the *Tribune* revealed.<sup>165</sup> Forty-eight cases, the story concluded, had been examined in the most recent grand jury proceedings, and all but two had indictments returned as a result.<sup>166</sup>

**An altered plea.** A parade of witnesses detailed Hamilton's direction of the planning and execution of numerous attacks and beatings.<sup>167</sup> One Klansman quoted the imperial wizard as saying, "[D]o a good job (on the beating) or you will have to go back and do it over."<sup>168</sup> The witness also "put the finger" on Hamilton for personally selecting the Klansmen who would participate in the flogging.<sup>169</sup> Other witnesses quoted Hamilton's ambitions to control North Carolina politically and enroll enough Klansmen so that the organization would become jury-proof.<sup>170</sup> In the face of convincing evidence and as an anticlimax to a much-anticipated courtroom battle, Hamilton abruptly changed his plea from not guilty to guilty.<sup>171</sup>

That week's front page was filled with Klan-related stories.<sup>172</sup> One reported the arrests of seventeen more men in connection with Klan violence.<sup>173</sup> Bennett, the town

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid. Parenthetically, Hamilton was disparagingly referred to as the "daddy rabbit" by Carter in the banner story.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> "Hamilton Enters Guilty Plea," *Tabor City Tribune*, July 23, 1952, 1.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> *Tabor City Tribune*, July 23, 1952.

<sup>173</sup> "New Arrests Are Made," *Tabor City Tribune*, July 23, 1952, 1.

commissioner, charged with complicity in the Klan's activities, resigned from the town board.<sup>174</sup>

In type nearly two inches tall – and bold and black and all in capital letters – the *Tribune* announced in the next issue: “HAMILTON GETS 4 YEAR TERM.”<sup>175</sup> Carter extended the deadline of the *Tribune* in order to publish the news of the sentencing of 62 Klan defendants by Judge Clawson Williams.<sup>176</sup> For the first time in his crusade, Carter led with the term “today.”<sup>177</sup> Carter's story began: “At exactly 12:55 [p.m.], Judge Clawson L. Williams sentenced Thomas L. Hamilton to four years on the road, two years on two counts of conspiracy with one term to begin when the other ends, at the KKK trials in Whiteville. Hamilton took the sentence calmly and [sat] down when the judge completed his lecture . . . The judge said that he had his life before him after he had paid his penalty for his crimes and advised him to live it in an honorable manner.”<sup>178</sup>

In early October 1952, scarcely 10 weeks after his sentencing, Hamilton went to jail. The *Tribune* contacted a prison official at Prison Camp 303, near Wilmington,

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<sup>174</sup> “Troy Bennett Resigns From Town Board,” *Tabor City Tribune*, July 23, 1952, 1.

<sup>175</sup> “Hamilton Gets 4 Year Term,” *Tabor City Tribune*, July 30, 1952, 1. Carter recounted in his memoirs how the type choice came about. “Printing foreman J. A. Herlocker hunted through the type cabinets for the largest, blackest letters he could find. He came up with some bold two-inch-high wood type. Bringing the word ‘Hamilton’ to my office, he asked for my approval for the banner headline . . . it was just right. Obviously a little cocky now and certainly with a feeling of self-satisfaction inside, I grinned and said, ‘Really, J.A., I was saving that big type for the second coming of Jesus Christ, but in that you found it, let’s run it.’” Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 168.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.



inquiring after Hamilton.<sup>179</sup> Superintendent John Williams responded, “[A]ll I know is that he is a prisoner and it’s my job to see that he works.”<sup>180</sup>

*Tribune* readers must have almost heard the exasperated sigh that Carter undoubtedly let loose when he sat down to pen another editorial lecturing the community on the Klan on the last day of an eventful 1952. He titled his December 31 missile, “Some Never Learn.”<sup>181</sup>

When the Ku Klux Klan was riding high in Columbus and Horry counties a few short months ago, law-abiding citizens rose to the occasion to speak their piece and vote their convictions from the jury and grand jury boxes. Those juries put many night righters [sic] on the prison gangs . . .

You would think that other adventurous souls who see a phony glamour in wearing a bedsheet and watching a cross burn would learn something from their predecessors who are paying the price for lawlessness now. But apparently such is not the case.<sup>182</sup>

Carter then described, briefly, the situation surrounding a Klan rally in nearby Goretown, South Carolina. He contended the reason for the rally was the change of sheriffs in Horry County.<sup>183</sup> “Present law enforcement in Horry,” Carter asserted, “has failed to convict Klansmen of any consequential crime although major crimes have been committed by

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<sup>179</sup> “Powell Answers Hamilton,” *Tabor City Tribune*, October 8, 1952, 1. As a last gasp defense – and a novel one at that – defense attorneys for the Klansmen with the longest sentences, appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals in Richmond, Virginia, claiming that the floggings were, in fact, “church whippings,” and part of a practice predating the Klan from “the early days of our [colonizing America] in the era of Puritanical intolerance.” Klansmen, the reasoning went, were doing nothing more than enforcing, in time-honored tradition, rural religious values. The Court of Appeals, according to Carter, “did not buy” the church-whipping claim. Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 178.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. Hamilton, in common with other North Carolina prisoners at the time, was put to work building and repairing roads.

<sup>181</sup> “Some Never Learn,” editorial, *Tabor City Tribune*, December 31, 1952, 1.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

hooded night riders for two years – even one murder.”<sup>184</sup> He went on to hope that the new regime would operate differently, and wondered whether the Klan would resume its former ways.<sup>185</sup> “Federal assistance should be sought, and quick,” Carter urged.<sup>186</sup> Incoming Sheriff “John Henry knows that he can expect no support from us if he fails to make a sincere effort to enforce the law regardless of how big or how little the persons involved may be. He knows and we know that he received a lot of votes from members and ex-members of the Ku Klux Klan but election support should have no bearing on law enforcement.”<sup>187</sup> In summation, Carter said “every honorable citizen expects criminals to be brought to justice and failure to do so undermines the very essence of democratic government.”<sup>188</sup>

**Dénouement.** With many Klansmen either in jail, under indictment, or on the run, 1953 seemed to resemble more of a winding down of Carter’s campaign than a continuation, like the quiet and the calm that follows a thunderstorm. For nearly half a year, the columns of Carter’s *Tribune* were nearly empty of mention of the Klan. Months earlier, most issues had two or three articles and/or editorials dealing with the KKK. After the turn of the year, weeks went by with scarcely a mention of the group. In fact, there was no article, photo, or editorial on the Klan during the entire month of March. Nonetheless, the FBI was still active, at least early in the year.<sup>189</sup> An additional nineteen

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> “FBI Nabs More Night Riders,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 21, 1953, 1.

men were arrested – and their uncomfortable, grim, and nervous visages were captured in a front-page *Tribune* photo – in connection with a “little-publicized” flogging of George Kemper Smith on October 20, 1951.<sup>190</sup> According to a *Tribune* article, the arrest of the nineteen brought the total of men arrested to ninety-eight and the number of indictments to 229, all in less than twelve months.<sup>191</sup> Smith was grabbed in front of his home, after being asked to help with a faulty truck starter, driven across state lines from near Nichols, South Carolina, to near Fair Bluff, North Carolina, to a “point . . . known as Lovers’ Lane.”<sup>192</sup> A revolver was held on him “to compel obedience,” according to the *Tribune* story.<sup>193</sup> Smith was then beaten using the “fender-strap flogging method.”<sup>194</sup>

Two weeks later, Carter editorialized that North Carolina state legislators needed to help law enforcement officials who were hamstrung with “inadequate laws,” making the task of combating the KKK longer, harder, and more “painstaking” than otherwise necessary.<sup>195</sup> Carter advocated an anti-mask law, to “prohibit persons from wearing robes, hoods and masks on public property within the State.”<sup>196</sup> Carter observed that many states had such laws.<sup>197</sup> He concluded that “an iron-clad anti-mask law would leave no doubts in the minds of the masses that to take part in Klan activities is illegal and

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. In all, there were 254 indictments and sixty-two convictions.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> “The Job Needs Completing,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 4, 1953.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

punishable in a court of law.”<sup>198</sup> Further, he thought a clause should be included making it a crime for city, county, and state police officers to be “affiliated with a terrorist band of the caliber of the Ku Klux Klan.”<sup>199</sup> “If the proper law were put into force now in North Carolina,” Carter believed, “the Tar Heel citizenry could rest assured that night riding would forever be reduced to a minimum in the state.”<sup>200</sup>

Carter’s editorial stand may have had some effect.<sup>201</sup> Two weeks later at the urging of Columbus County District Solicitor Clifton B. Moore, State Representative Addison Hewlett, Jr. and State Senator Vivian Whitfield announced plans to introduce anti-mask bills in the North Carolina state legislature.<sup>202</sup> According to Moore, “the law is the same as one passed after the War Between The States to outlaw the Klan.”<sup>203</sup> The proposed law would also make it “mandatory that the secretary or other responsible officer of every secret organization be publicly known as such,” and covered secret political and military societies, and those striving to resist or circumvent the law.<sup>204</sup> The *Tribune* banner story added that the law “flatly prohibits cross burning on private

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> “N.C. Assembly To Get Anti-Ku Klux Bill,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 18, 1953, 1.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

property without permission of the owner.”<sup>205</sup> The North Carolina proposed statute “goes considerably further than most statutes” in other states, the *Tribune* reported.<sup>206</sup>

**Preceding the Pulitzer.** On page two, where Carter’s Column had been running, Carter announced that he had received the North Carolina Junior Chamber of Commerce’s Distinguished Service Award as Man of the Year.<sup>207</sup> Modestly, he described his “small part in combating the Ku Klux Klan.”<sup>208</sup> He did not feel deserving, he wrote, of such “widespread recognition or . . . such personal honors.”<sup>209</sup> When he received the award, in front of 500 Jaycees and their spouses, he admitted he had “never before . . . been at such a loss for words.”<sup>210</sup> Recalling the start of his Klan campaign, Carter wrote, “[A]t the time when we began our little crusade against lawless mob action, we had no ideal that it would reach the proportions to which it has.”<sup>211</sup> Carter said he felt “proud of having won and realize[d] that the highlight of our lifetime [had] been reached.”<sup>212</sup> He thought it possible that “no equal distinction or responsibility will ever be placed upon” his shoulders.<sup>213</sup> That was not to be. In the banner story of the April 22 edition of the

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> W. Horace Carter, “Carter’s Column,” *Tabor City Tribune*, February 18, 1953, 2.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

*Tribune*, Carter announced his candidacy for Tabor City mayor.<sup>214</sup> The *Tribune* noted that Carter had “no previous experience in politics.”<sup>215</sup> Mayor Williams, the incumbent, had decided against seeking reelection.<sup>216</sup> A candidate eventually opposed him, F. N. (Slewfoot) Spivey, but Carter won handily with just over 84 percent of the votes cast, 393-73.<sup>217</sup> He served just one two-year term. Coincidentally, the election was held the same day Carter received the Sydney Hillman Award in New York City.

**The Pulitzer.** Carter described it as “just another Monday workday,” but the telephone call he answered himself the morning of May 4, 1953, was much more than that.<sup>218</sup> It would crown his campaign against the Klan with the highest professional journalism award.<sup>219</sup> Jay Jenkins of the *Raleigh News and Observer*, who had covered the Klan “uprising” as well, was on the other end of the line, and informed Carter “with such clarity that there was no mistaking his words,” that the *Tribune* had won the 1952 Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious Public Service.<sup>220</sup>

According to Jenkins’ subsequent story in the *News and Observer*, Carter was “worrying about the placement of advertisements in what for the *Tribune* is a big paper –

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<sup>214</sup> “Dameron, Shelley, Hughes, Wood, Jernigan File For Board; Carter Files For Mayor,” *Tabor City Tribune*, April 22, 1953, 1.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> “Shelley, Wright, Woody Win Town Board Posts; W. Horace Carter To Mayor’s Position,” *Tabor City Tribune*, June 10, 1953, 1. Carter later toyed, briefly, with seeking a seat in Congress, contending for the Seventh District seat of retiring Representative F. Ertel Carlyle. He was dissuaded by veteran politicians who felt, in the 1950s, his support for Republican Dwight Eisenhower in his column and editorials would have sunk any realistic chances in the heavily Democratic state.

<sup>218</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 201.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

10 pages – when he heard his paper had been tapped for a Pulitzer. It jarred him, but it was a very pleasant jolt.”<sup>221</sup> Jenkins described Carter taking the news of his Pulitzer “buoyantly” and quoted his reaction: “Certainly back when we started this crusade we never had any idea it would gain national recognition. We had no idea of reward.”<sup>222</sup> Almost simultaneously, a Western Union messenger appeared with a telegraph from Grayson Kirk, president of Columbia University, announcing that, “I have the honor to advise that university trustees have awarded Pulitzer Prize to the Tabor City Tribune and Whiteville News Reporter for public service.”<sup>223</sup> In his memoirs, he remarked on the irony that the “local Western Union franchise was held by . . . Troy Bennett, one of the Klansmen convicted for participating in the attacks.”<sup>224</sup>

Over the next twenty-four hours, Carter was “flooded” with requests for photographs, biographical information, and copies of some of the articles and editorials he had written against the Klan, and with countless letters, phone calls, and telegrams of congratulations.<sup>225</sup> He especially treasured the telegram from his alma mater.<sup>226</sup> “It marks

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<sup>221</sup> Jake Jenkins, “Cole, Carter Get Pulitzer Prizes,” *News and Observer*, May 5, 1953, 1. “A modest young Raleigh journalist, who gave little thought to writing and newspaper work until after he finished college, yesterday captured the very top prize in editorial composition – the Pulitzer award for 1952,” the *News and Observer* wrote in the same issue it reported Carter and Cole’s awards. The North Carolina native was Vermont C. Royster, senior editor of the *Wall Street Journal*. Jenkins would eventually become editor of the *News and Observer*.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 202.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

a great day for North Carolina country journalism,” wrote Thomas Lassiter and Walter Spearman of the UNC-CH School of Journalism.<sup>227</sup>

Jonathan Daniels, the *News and Observer*’s editor, had nominated Carter for the award, administered by the trustees of Columbia University, and Carter had been made aware that he was being considered, although he believed he “had no hope of actually winning.”<sup>228</sup> Daniels told him of his intention to nominate him in an October 15, 1952 letter.<sup>229</sup> In it, he requested that Carter “get together . . . issues of your paper showing the story of the fight on the Klan,” something that could be compiled into a scrapbook for the Pulitzer judges.<sup>230</sup>

**Second Coming type.** Despite all the hoopla surrounding the Pulitzer, Carter still had to put out a newspaper. Herlocker “dug up that big type again that I was saving for the second coming of Christ.”<sup>231</sup> In a dramatic departure from the *Tribune*’s page layout, the headline and story of the Pulitzer ran above the newspaper nameplate on the front page.<sup>232</sup> The story was headlined simply: “TRIBUNE WINS PULITZER PRIZE.”<sup>233</sup> In part, the story read:

The Pulitzer Prize – the highest award made to newspapers in the United States – was won by The Tribune this week when

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 201.

<sup>229</sup> Jonathan Daniels to Horace Carter, October 15, 1952, loose in box 2, W. Horace Carter papers #4565, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>230</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 203.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> “Tribune Wins Pulitzer Prize,” *Tabor City Tribune*, May 6, 1953, 1.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.



the trustees of the University of Columbia, New York City, announced their 1952 selection.

The award was also made to the Whiteville News-Reporter, the selection of both papers having been based on their joint crusade against the Ku Klux Klan in this area.

In receiving this award, the Tabor City Tribune became the first weekly newspaper in history to have been selected for the prize and it marks the first time in history that any North Carolina newspaper, regardless of size, has won it.

“[Every] man in the newspaper business dreams of the Pulitzer Prize. It is the greatest award in the writing field and I was never as surprised or as happy in my life,” Carter said when notified of winning the big award.

“I want to emphasize that this award was made to ‘The Tabor City Tribune’ and that includes all members of the staff. I am proud to have such a capable group of associates and feel that the moral support and encouragement they gave me when the Klan tension was the highest had a great deal to do with our winning the award. During the times when it seemed futile to keep sticking my neck out, they constantly encouraged me to keep up the fight and I appreciate their invaluable help.

It is needless to say for me to go into the details of what this newspaper did during the Klan crusade. The readers of this paper are aware that we did everything that we could to discourage its organization and activities. I do not know whether our efforts were of value in the downfall of the Klan or not, but for the effort that we put forth, the awards have been received.”<sup>234</sup>

Carter singled out the merchants of Tabor City and elsewhere “for their fine advertising support during the critical period,” especially in the face of Hamilton’s boycott threat.<sup>235</sup> He praised his subscribers for their loyalty to the *Tribune* “even while

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. Earlier in the article, Carter acknowledged that he had written “all the anti-Klan editorials and news articles that won the award.”

Klan sympathizers and members were doing all they could to disrupt” the newspaper and for their foresight in seeing “in the Klan . . . the threats to our [American] way of life.”<sup>236</sup>

**Paroles.** More former Klansmen were paroled in mid-1953. A front-page article in the *Tribune* of May 27 named six former Klansmen, released after serving about a third of their original sentences.<sup>237</sup> It also listed a number of other prisoners eligible for paroles, but not yet released.<sup>238</sup> The solicitor, Clifton Moore, who had prosecuted the Klansmen, recommended their parole, “based on the conviction that the Klan crackdown had been effective and that the ends of justice had been met.”<sup>239</sup> “All the returning prisoners had been assured of gainful employment,” the *Tribune* noted.<sup>240</sup> Carter did not comment editorially on the paroles.<sup>241</sup>

In the June 24 *Tribune*, on page five, Carter ran a story headlined: “Court Slate in Columbus Wipe[d] Clear of Klan Cases.”<sup>242</sup>

The Superior Court docket of Columbus County was cleared of its last Ku Klux Klan case last week.

Autie Simmons of Whiteville, charged with being [with] the mob which flogged Clayton Sellers, entered a plea of guilty to forcible trespass and was allowed to pay the cost for which the county was liable [and was let-off without jail time].

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid. An award as prestigious as the Pulitzer usually brings job offers in its wake; Carter’s experience was no different. The United States Rubber Company offered him a job in South Carolina in public relations. A newspaper in Pennsylvania also offered him a position as well.

<sup>237</sup> “Six Klansmen Out On Parole,” *Tabor City Tribune*, May 27, 1953, 1.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> “Court Slate In Columbus Wipe Clear of Klan Cases,” *Tabor City Tribune*, June 24, 1953, 5.

Solicitor Clifton L. Moore accepted the plea after receiving information that the defendant's health had been poor during the past year. Simmons has spent considerable time in a hospital.

Unless there is a break in the Robert Lee Gore case, which involved violation of the federal law regarding the crossing of a state line in the course of committing the act of kidnapping, the Klan crackdown appears to have come to an end. Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation have been working on the Gore case for several months.

State Bureau of Investigation agents have done little more than keep a weather eye on the local situation since the 65-man court trial last August. There is apparently no public indication of any behind-the-scenes development. The state's new anti-mask law, requiring secret organizations to keep their rosters available for public inspection, is expected to serve as a deterrent to another Klan uprising. However, there has been no indication any such movement has been contemplated [sic] anywhere in North Carolina.<sup>243</sup>

News stories on more paroles appeared in the *Tribune* on July 8, July 29, and August 6.<sup>244</sup> In the August 6 edition, the *Tribune* observed that Hamilton was the only prisoner remaining in prison for Klan activities.<sup>245</sup> Hamilton attempted to change that distinction, and once again choosing one of the newspapers that opposed him as a vehicle for his opinions, wrote a repentant letter to Cole at *the News-Reporter*, Carter reported in the *Tribune*'s October 28 issue.<sup>246</sup> Cole "scooped the state" with its report of Hamilton's

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> "S.C. Klansman Gets Parole," *Tabor City Tribune*, July 8, 1953, 1; "Ex-Klansmen Granted Paroles," *Tabor City Tribune*, July 29, 1953, 5; and "Three More Ex-Klansmen Receive Paroles Afer Serving One Year," *Tabor City Tribune*, August 26, 1953, 3.

<sup>245</sup> "Three More Ex-Klansmen Receive Paroles Afer Serving One Year," *Tabor City Tribune*, August 26, 1953, 3.

<sup>246</sup> "Hamilton Renounces All Klan Activities," *Tabor City Tribune*, October 28, 1953, 1.

letter repudiating the Klan.<sup>247</sup> He urged “all my friends everywhere to disband the Ku Klux Klan wherever it exists.”<sup>248</sup> The letter was written from the New Hanover County prison camp where Hamilton was in the midst of the second year of his four-year sentence.<sup>249</sup> The *Tribune* story quoted Cole: “Hamilton showed no resentment toward the newspapers which helped to bring him to justice, and pledged his future to the cause of good citizenship.”<sup>250</sup> Hamilton made no reference to the extent of his role in the floggings that put so many Klansmen in jail.<sup>251</sup> The *Tribune* article continued:

[Hamilton’s] most positive declaration of intent was stated near the end of his seven hundred word letter . . .

Hamilton admitted he had not arrived at renouncing the Klan without some qualms of conscience. “It has not been easy for me to come to a parting of the ways with many loyal followers who felt they had a duty to perform in the interest of society,” he said frankly. “I know they are as dedicated to the principles of honesty and decency as I tried to be. However, I have prayed over the matter and I’m sure that God would want me to stay aloof from any organization which presents an opportunity for a person to hide himself behind a mask and commit a crime. I now know that the possibilities for evil more than offset any good which might be accomplished in this manner.”<sup>252</sup>

Hamilton called for the “dissolution of Klan units which I helped organize.”<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

Moore did recommend parole for Hamilton, and neither Cole nor Carter objected.<sup>254</sup> In fact, Carter recalled the two editors, prompted by an official request for an opinion on the potential parole, might have written a letter favoring Hamilton's early release.<sup>255</sup> "But I can't prove that," he remarked.<sup>256</sup> "He'd already served two years, and I think that was enough."<sup>257</sup> However, the parole board did not agree. Hamilton was eventually paroled on February 22, 1954. He returned to Leesville for a time, until the completion of his probation on September 6, 1955, and then moved to Georgia where he became an ordained Baptist minister.<sup>258</sup>

By the end of 1952, Cole, Carter, and Thompson had stood virtually alone for just under two years. But their campaign had fractured the Klan, sent many of its members – including its leaders – to jail . . . and to religion (in Hamilton's case). Racism is a more complex issue to disentangle from the campaign. Carter was plainly at least reconciled to continuing segregation, at least while allowing time and gradualism to remove it. He editorially opposed, initially, federal involvement in civil rights in the South. However, his campaign became more mature over the course of the Klan uprising. While he initially eschewed federal involvement in civil rights, eventually he not only welcomed it, he demanded it in several editorials. Carter did not see the irony in expecting the federal government to involve itself in law enforcement problems involving racial issues, while

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<sup>254</sup>Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 195.

<sup>255</sup> Carter interview, March 25, 2003.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 195, Carter interview, September 27, 2002, and the North Carolina Department of Correction Combined Records, file number 15701-WM, discharge number 83351.

at the same time opposing federal intervention to deal with the unresolved issues from the Civil War and Reconstruction of the previous century. The tradition of a separation of the races was so deep and Carter and the others did not directly question it . . . and never, with one possible half-exception, urged its dismantlement. Accommodation was the watchword. For Carter, for instance, despite his statements in interviews five decades after the event, there is very little evidence of the third point on the pyramid of this dissertation, that of liberalism. His opposition to the Klan was grounded in religion and the law. Furthermore, the Klan to Carter was more a scourge of morality among all races and so race was only tangential to much of his opposition to the clandestine organization.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> The “real reward” for Carter, as for many writers he believed, does not come from the paycheck. “All writers that I know are egotists. We want to see our by-lines on our creations and often that name means more than money.” The first magazine article Carter wrote was in 1946, about his in-laws’ purebred Jersey milk cow that set a production record. It appeared in the *American Jersey Cattle Magazine*, and he did not receive any pay for it, “but you have never seen anyone any more vest-popping-proud than I was when that story came out [in 1946] with my name on it.” Carter, *A Man Called Raleigh*, 250.

In the early Seventies, Carter and his wife, Lucile, moved to Cross Creek, Florida, where he “semi-retired.” He continued writing his column, and had a hand in running the *Tribune*, but he had turned over management of the business to his son, Russell. Carter, *Only in America*, 375. Even though he was just two years out of college, Carter knew his son was “smart” and “had the ability to run the family business,” which he has done with great success, helping turn it into a business with \$250 million in annual revenues. By moving to Florida, Carter also hoped to let his son manage the business without being in his father’s shadow. Carter interview, March 25, 2003 and Carter interview, March 28, 2007.

“Prosperous and secure financially” for the first time in his life, and with time on his hands, he became like a “worm in hot ashes,” needing to do something productive “or lose my sanity.” He tried being a fishing guide for several years, although he never charged anyone for his services, taking payment in smiles and the pride they displayed in their catches at the end of the day. After meeting a naturalist, Dr. John Hamlet, who had “many sensational stories to tell that I know would interest fishermen and hunters everywhere,” and encouraged by his wife, he decided to turn his hand to outdoor writing. He sold his first article, “Why Rattlesnakes Don’t Rattle Anymore,” to *Bassmaster* magazine for \$300. Carter was “amazed” that the article was accepted, and “always wondered if the fact that I told him about winning the Pulitzer Prize in my submission letter had anything to do with his buying my first magazine piece.” He has written for such publications as *Field & Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, and *Sports Afield* and authored twenty-five books, mainly about freshwater fishing. During one three-year period, he sold over 180 articles, more than three a week.

Carter’s idyllic second career was shattered by Lucile’s breast cancer. Despite a successful mastectomy and a good prognosis for recovery, the cancer returned, and spread to her neck. “The horrors of chemotherapy, radiation and everything else the physicians at Duke . . . suggested” did not halt the

In the end, Carter's community agreed, indicting and convicting dozens and then electing him mayor, as their political leader as well as his self-appointed role as opinion leader and moral conscience. Equally tellingly, and unlike the situation in nearby Whiteville, the *Tribune* did not suffer a subscription collapse; circulation stayed remarkably steady at 1,500 issues a year throughout the period studied.<sup>260</sup> In 1950, Tabor City had 2,033 residents, according to the U.S. Census.<sup>261</sup>

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progression of the disease. Twenty-nine months after the first surgery, she died. Carter was devastated and wondered if he "shouldn't have died with her." After thirty-seven years of marriage, "living without her seemed useless" and had "lost its meaning." Eventually, though, he met and married Brenda Strickland, twenty-three years his junior. "Purpose crept back into my life and I began writing seriously again." With Brenda at the wheel, they drove all over the U.S. as he covered fishing events and conducted research for the books that poured from his typewriter during this "most productive time in my life." After twelve years of marriage, the couple agreed to a "friendly divorce" in 1994. Carter moved back to Tabor City and threw himself at 73 into "working full-time and long hours on the *Tribune*" where he had started. "It was fun," Carter noted, but, again, "life seemed as dreadful as after Lucile's death." The loneliness of "going home at night was like going to jail," he wrote. The loneliness was short-lived. He made the reacquaintance of a former *Tribune* advertising representative, Linda Duncan, and they married in October 1995, on the deck of a little ship cruising the Sea of Galilee, Israel "within sight of the ruins of the home of another fisherman, the Apostle Peter." Carter, *Only in America*, 375-77, 382-86.

<sup>260</sup> From a circulation of 1,500 at the time of the Klan rebirth, the *Tribune* has grown to 4,200 weekly subscribers, although that number fluctuates by several hundred copies depending on the week. According to Carter, circulation is split equally between Tabor City and Loris, South Carolina, just across the state line. Carter interview, March 28, 2007. When Carter returned to the *Tribune* full-time in 1995, he added Loris to the *Tribune*'s name, creating the new *Tabor City-Loris Tribune*. "We cover the news . . . in Loris just as well as in Tabor City." Carter interview, March 25, 2003.

<sup>261</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, North Carolina – Number of Inhabitants. Table 6. Population of Counties by Minor Civil Divisions: 1930-50 at <http://www.census.gov/>. Accessed June 4, 2007.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### COLE AND THOMPSON CONFRONT THE KLAN

*“The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it,  
ignorance may deride it, but in the end; there it is.”*

– Winston Churchill

On Saturday evening, July 22, 1950, the Ku Klux Klan suddenly appeared on the streets of Tabor City, North Carolina, a handful of miles from Whiteville. A little over a week later, *The News-Reporter* on July 31, 1950, ran the first of dozens of editorials opposing the Klan. Unlike the *Tribune* under Carter, *The News-Reporter* allowed one issue to pass by before commenting or publicizing the Klan motorcade. That first editorial was probably written by Publisher Leslie Thompson.<sup>1</sup>

Columbus County has no need for such demonstrations  
as was staged recently by the Ku Klux Klansmen in Tabor  
City. Indeed, it has no need for the Klan.

It may be that some good may have been done by this  
organization [in the past] but the evil so outweighs  
the good that any county and any state can well do  
without this type of fraternity.

Any organization, whose roster of members is not  
available to the general public, may be, quite  
properly, looked upon with considerable skepticism.  
However orderly their parades and their meetings  
may be, Ku Klux Klansmen need some distinguishing  
characteristic other than a face covering before they

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<sup>1</sup> Klan activities in Whiteville had been “performed for the most part in secretiveness” for many years,” according to the *Carolinian* of Raleigh, a black newspaper, after interviewing some of the “most frightened of the citizens of both races” in the area. According to the story, Whiteville was the focal point of Klan activity. “KKK Is ‘Taking Over’ Town: Whiteville is Site of Klan’s Boldest Moves: Hooded Order Giving Ultimatum Pointing out Klan’s History,” *Carolinian*, 5 May 1951, A1+.



have any place in the American way of life.<sup>2</sup>

There was no separate story about the Klan parade in the same issue, perhaps because the newspaper considered it more properly within the *Tabor City Tribune's* coverage area. Weekly newspapers approach news differently than dailies; their coverage is usually very carefully, if narrowly, defined by the town that it is invariably in its name. This would change somewhat over the course of the next several years, although both newspapers invariably dealt only with events in their own town and immediate surroundings. County news, though, was in a separate category.

**Background.** Willard Cole is given the credit for *The Whiteville News-Reporter's* Pulitzer Prize – the newspaper even stated so itself when it was awarded.<sup>3</sup> There are, however, a number of important hints that suggest owner and publisher Leslie Thompson's role was more important than it appeared. He is the forgotten man in the newspaper campaign against the Ku Klux Klan. Clearly, he is in the background, now, of the entire Pulitzer Prize hubbub. Perhaps at the time he was not. When the coverage of Thompson and Cole are looked at in comparison to Carter, *The News-Reporter's* coverage is more straightforward, less emotional – by degrees – and seems more reasoned and more thought-out. It is more professional, better edited, and there are far fewer typographical errors, indicating more financial resources.

Thompson graduated from Trinity College, now Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina with an A.B., intending to become a physician. He had been admitted to the

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<sup>2</sup> “Unwanted,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 31, 1950, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Cole wrote a column entitled “Cole-ctions,” largely a digest of humorous and interesting anecdotes gleaned from other newspapers. During the period studied, it appeared fewer than two dozen times and did not mention the Klan.

University of North Carolina at Chapel School of Medicine in the fall of 1927.<sup>4</sup> He took a summer job at *The Robesonian* in Lumberton, North Carolina and heeded the siren song of journalism – and a steady income – and never attended medical school.<sup>5</sup> Evidently, he also worried about running up a debt for his medical education.<sup>6</sup> He had no formal journalism training and his first job with the Lumberton paper was as advertising manager.<sup>7</sup>

Along with J. A. Sharpe, Thompson purchased *The News-Reporter* in 1938.

Thompson bought out Sharpe in the early 1950s and paid off the debt shortly before his death in 1959.<sup>8</sup> He married Margaret Farrior of Lumberton in 1931 and the couple had one child, Carolyn Thompson High. On Thompson's death, she became owner along with her husband, James High, who had been working at the paper for about a year after receiving a degree in journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.<sup>9</sup> High is still publisher and his son, Leslie Thompson High, is editor, and was named in honor of his grandfather.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of the Klan rising, Thompson had been at least part-owner and publisher of the twice-a-week paper for over a dozen years. He was president of the North Carolina Press Association and a trustee of the Journalism Foundation of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was a past president of the Whiteville

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<sup>4</sup> Herbert O'Keef, "Tar Heel of the Week: L. S. Thompson," *News and Observer*, January 15, 1956, Sec. 14, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Rotary Club, a member of the Board of Stewards of Whiteville Methodist Church, vice president of the Merchants Association, secretary of the board of directors of the Whiteville Broadcasting Company, and a board member of People's Savings and Loan Association of Whiteville.<sup>11</sup> While he may have been self-effacing, he was certainly highly visible and prominent in the community.

In an interview in the *News and Observer* when that newspaper named him Tar Heel of the Week in 1956, Thompson was somewhat forthcoming about his role.

Willard Cole was editor of *The News-Reporter* then and Thompson says that the prize came because Cole was a good, crusading editor. But, Thompson was the publisher and could have stopped the crusading – but didn't [even] when people stopped their subscriptions, cancelled their advertisements and even when he received threats against himself and his family.<sup>12</sup>

Someone at the *News and Observer* seems to have felt that Thompson's role had been overlooked, perhaps even Jonathan Daniels who had nominated both community newspapers for the Pulitzer. Thompson and Daniels probably knew each other from their work on the North Carolina Press Association, though this is only surmise.

But why did not Thompson keep the Pulitzer itself, since the Prize for Public Service was awarded to the newspaper and not any individual, and why did he not go to the award ceremony in New York? His son-in-law had an explanation.

Well, he was a modest man. He was intense as to newspapering and the cause of newspapering . . . I had a lot of conversations about it, but he believed in it [the Klan campaign], believed what he was doing was right . . . [H]e thought Willard was doing a very good job and that he really deserved the credit for it . . . [H]e did not really seek

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<sup>11</sup> O'Keef, "Tar Heel of the Week," 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

the credit.<sup>13</sup>

But it was more complex than just that, perhaps, and an analysis of *The News-Reporter's* coverage revealed a significant lapse in the newspaper's coverage. For ten months after the motorcade in Tabor City, *The News-Reporter* ran only editorials; no news stories appeared. And there were only a handful of editorials. Compared with the coverage in the *Tabor City Tribune* and in two black newspapers in North Carolina also covering the Klan uprising, the *Carolinian* of Raleigh and the *Carolina Times* of Durham, Klan activity did not cease even though *The News-Reporter's* coverage was spotty.

Did either Thompson or Cole get cold feet? Carter, after all, for a several-week period after the first blast of coverage, did announce a cessation of coverage, perhaps due to pressure from advertisers, readers, and politicians in addition to threats from Klansmen. There were other brief gaps. High did not have an explanation and was unaware of the gap in coverage.<sup>14</sup> Carter, however, indicated in an interview that he “knew about that lull in the publicity,” adding, “I’ve got a feeling that they got some flack back” as he did because of *The News-Reporter's* coverage.<sup>15</sup> Thompson, “maybe . . . just said, ‘Let up on that Klan, you’re stirring up more trouble than we can handle.’”<sup>16</sup> Carter acknowledged he did not have personal knowledge of the reasons

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<sup>13</sup> High interview, March 28, 2007. According to High, Thompson was relatively small in stature, about 5’4” and weighed about 100 pounds. High called him both “strong-willed” and “unassuming,” and still after six decades called him “Mr.” Thompson.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Carter interview, March 28, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

behind the gap in coverage.<sup>17</sup> At least one possible explanation – a financial one – will be explored subsequently. Whatever the reason, for weeks and months, Cole and Thompson barely covered the Klan after September 1950 until well into 1951.

Thompson, according to High, “wrote many of the editorials” during the Klan uprising, something echoed by the *News and Observer* article.<sup>18</sup> Most of the editorials in *The News-Reporter* were unsigned, as is traditional in newspapers. This makes it difficult to definitively determine who wrote which ones. However, there are stylistic differences that can suggest authorship through textual analysis. Some, in fact most, of the editorials, are very creative, very loose feeling, rhetorical, and with a wider vocabulary. These, it would seem, judging by the editorials/opinion pieces that were signed by Cole, can be assigned to Cole with a certain amount of certainty. No editorial bore Thompson’s name. However, a number of the editorials were more straightforward, less artistic and less creative in approach and language.

Other editorials after Cole left the newspaper were compared with those written during Cole’s editorship. Thompson tended to equivocate more than Cole. He was not sure it was the Klan burning down the Flowers’ home or plastering stickers around Whiteville. He was adamant and unambiguous that the violent actions were unacceptable; he just seemed to waffle as to who was responsible. Perhaps this was due to threats. Perhaps to an honest open-minded attitude. Perhaps to gullibility. Cole was more florid and artful in his language, while Thompson’s prose was more unadorned, a bit more wooden, and less lyrical. Cole was a more literary writer, though Thompson was more in

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> High interview, March 28, 2007; and O’Keef, “Tar Heel of the Week,” 3.

the mold of editorial writers from larger cities. That is, except when it came to religion. *There* they were both eloquent.

This textual comparison at least suggests the presence of two voices, that another individual wrote at least some of the editorials during the Klan campaign. Furthermore, within two weeks after Cole's departure from *The News-Reporter* in 1953, Thompson added editor to his title of publisher. In the *News and Observer* article naming him "Tar Heel of the Week," it was noted flatly: "Thompson writes the editorials."<sup>19</sup> High considered "Mr. Thompson . . . a good writer also."<sup>20</sup> Clearly, he was capable of writing editorials, did write editorials later, had the authority to write editorials, and logically *could* have written editorials during the Klan campaign in addition to Cole. According to High, Thompson was substantially and intimately involved in writing the editorials opposing the Klan in his newspaper.<sup>21</sup>

[Thompson] did write much of the editorial writing and I'm sure I have no idea what the balance was. But I know that he did because he spent more time on the editorial page than any place else . . . [H]e felt like the editorial page was a strong part of the newspaper . . . Willard was involved with the editorial end of [the Klan campaign], but I think his main focus really was in the news end . . .<sup>22</sup>

Once Thompson took a stand, he was resolute, in his son-in-law's estimation. In fact, when Cole left *The News-Reporter*, Thompson allowed him to take the Pulitzer

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<sup>19</sup> O'Keef, "Tar Heel of the Week," 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Since neither of the principals are alive – and Carter has no first-hand knowledge – it is impossible to state conclusively who wrote all of the unsigned editorials and any claim to the contrary would be conjecture. However, in the ensuing analysis of *The News-Reporter's* coverage, authorship will be assigned. The qualifier needs to be added that, except where specifically noted as being a signed editorial, all editorials were unsigned and the author's name is added as an educated guess.

<sup>22</sup> High interview, March 28, 2007.

medallion with him. So, that leaves one suggestion left: that Thompson did not accept the Pulitzer and did not keep the medallion because it was Cole, not Thompson, who was in the vanguard of the campaign against the Klan and pulled an unwilling Thompson along with him. His refusal to accept the Pulitzer and keep the medallion, then, could have been because of a guilty conscience. In addition, it is entirely possible that Cole did write all the Klan editorials. Finally, it is also possible that it was Cole who had second thoughts and got cold feet, not Thompson, and that the drop-off in coverage was because Cole as editor looked elsewhere for news to fill *The News-Reporter's* columns.

There is scant support for any of these conclusions. What is certain, however, is that in the early part of the Klan uprising and for the last year of it, *The News-Reporter* was relentless in its campaign against the Klan. It did not waffle and it did not prevaricate; it was consistent and insistent. At the worst, Thompson allowed the coverage to move forward and at the best he was an active participant.

I never knew him to waver what he had done [and] the position he took, the position he allowed . . . [H]e was a strong believer that . . . freedom of the press – his newspapers – started in his [chair] and that he *did* know what went in the paper, probably read it before it every went in and certainly gave it [his] okay . . . I never did know him to particularly spike a story . . .<sup>23</sup>

**Why is Thompson important?** Why is it important to credit Thompson with authorship of some of the editorials of *The News-Reporter's* campaign against the Klan? Strictly speaking, it is not. The newspaper's editorial stand is what is important, and it proceeded apace without bylines on any editorials (in long-standing newspaper tradition) and with bylines over only a few news stories and opinion pieces. Giving Thompson his due is, firstly, only fair. Secondly, it corrects historical inaccuracy or misunderstanding, a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Spike means to reject a story or prevent it from being published; occasionally to postpone it.

sufficient justification on its own. And thirdly, it deepens an understanding of the dynamics at work within *The News-Reporter* staff and shows them to be more complex and nuanced. Full comprehension of the Watergate and Pentagon Papers crises at the *Washington Post* is only possible if the role of Publisher Katherine Graham is also considered. Thompson had to authorize the campaign in the first place – it was his newspaper and he employed Cole, after all – and was then responsible for any lapses in coverage. Without consideration of his role, Cole might be blamed for the gaps. That Thompson also wrote some of the editorials shows even more involvement in the greatest crisis that ever faced the newspaper.

**Not a left-Democrat.** Thompson was a southern Democrat, but certainly not a “left-Democrat,” as High described it.<sup>24</sup> He would probably have become Republican as so many southern Democrats have become since the mid-1960s. According to High, Thompson was “centralist, very fair-minded, very much for the people” and very pro-Columbus County.<sup>25</sup> On racial matters, “he would be very liberal,” according to High, particularly considering the times.<sup>26</sup> Like Carter, Thompson’s parents were hardscrabble North Carolina farmers; it is impossible to say what views on race they held.<sup>27</sup>

Thompson hired and fired employees, something he shared in common with Carter (whose staff was much smaller) and something that was not included in Cole’s job description, though as editor he would likely have had some input into the hiring of reporters. According to High, *The News-Reporter* employed blacks in the production

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<sup>24</sup> High interview, March 28, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



department, as printers and Linotype operators,<sup>28</sup> but not any as reporters.<sup>29</sup> “If they were good workers,” High stressed. “That’s what suited him fine.”<sup>30</sup>

Thompson’s religion, according to High, did give him a moral grounding that was not blinkered on the issue of race, as so many southerners were. Thompson and his wife were very involved with the Methodist Church in Whiteville.

He had a great understanding of the difference between right and wrong, and I think that here again this was a main factor of him lending the newspaper to do what it did. I’m sure he didn’t start this to win a Pulitzer. I think that was about the furthest from his [thoughts]. I think he felt like this was a fair and the right thing to do.<sup>31</sup>

High thought Thompson’s motivations clearly involved “ethical right and wrong.”<sup>32</sup> His worldview, then, was molded by his faith and his newspaper’s campaign was framed by Christian virtues, logic, and morals.

**Cole’s background.** Cole was born in Miller’s Creek, North Carolina, and graduated from North Wilkesboro High School.<sup>33</sup> The son and grandson of itinerant Methodist ministers, Cole spent a life in newspapers, jumping into journalism without a college education.<sup>34</sup> “We were brought up without any concept of race,” his daughter,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Linotypes are automated machines for setting type, using molten lead in molds to create a column-wide line of type.

<sup>29</sup> It is possible, of course, that there were no black applicants for reporter jobs.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Jo Burnette, interview by author, telephone conversation, Raleigh, North Carolina, July 17, 2007. Burnette is Cole’s daughter.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Mary Jo Burnette, explained. “We were brought up to take account of people’s character, not their color.”<sup>35</sup>

Cole worked first at *The Journal-Patriot* in North Wilkesboro in the printing department. According to his daughter, the *Journal-Patriot*’s publisher “came back and asked if there was anyone here who can write. My dad raised his hand. Two years later he was editor.”<sup>36</sup> He was also editor of the *Ashe County* (N.C.) *Journal*, following that with a stint as a reporter for the *Winston-Salem Journal*.<sup>37</sup> He was married twice and divorced once from his wife.<sup>38</sup> In the midst of the Depression, gambling debts forced him to leave his family and hide with a relative in Ohio.<sup>39</sup> He lived “the life of a hobo,” according to Burnette, drifting from jobs in the coalfields to construction.<sup>40</sup> He took over Horace Carter’s job for two years as executive secretary of the Tabor City Merchants Association.<sup>41</sup> He became editor of *The News-Reporter* in 1948.<sup>42</sup> He left *The News-Reporter* in 1954 for several years, working as a field representative of the United States Brewers Foundation. In 1958, journalism lured him back again, and he assumed the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> “Willard Cole, 58, Crusading Editor: 1952 Pulitzer Prize Winner Dies – Fought the Klan,” *The New York Times*, May 29, 1965, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Burnette interview, July 17, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

editorship of the just-launched *The Lumberton Post* in Lumberton, North Carolina.<sup>43</sup> He worked at the *Post* for five years before founding the *Robeson County Enterprise*, located in Lumberton, in 1963.<sup>44</sup> The *Enterprise* was eventually absorbed by the *Post*, which was later merged with several other newspapers.

**The status quo.** The status quo exerted great power and great inertia. While there are plenty of venal reasons to support a continuation of segregation, possibly one of the most banal and commonplace explanation involves habit and risk. Thompson and Cole “wanted the system just to work,” according to High, who knew both.<sup>45</sup>

In rural North Carolina, or rural Columbus County, I think the system here again was so ingrained to the good ole boys . . . and they were the ones that elected the officials, they were the ones that decided law and order would be by their standards, and not necessarily by the system. So, I think [Cole and Thompson] were asking the system to pay attention, and I think they got the system to pay attention.<sup>46</sup>

According to High, *The News-Reporter* lost subscribers in rural areas and in small towns on the margins of its circulation area. Its circulation remained stable in Whiteville.<sup>47</sup> In 1950, Whiteville had 4,238 residents, according to the U.S. Census.<sup>48</sup> At Fair Bluff, 20 miles away, the newspaper was particularly hit hard by circulation losses.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> High interview, March 28, 2007.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, North Carolina – Number of Inhabitants. Table 6. Population of Counties by Minor Civil Divisions: 1930-50 at <http://www.census.gov/>. Accessed June 4, 2007.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

According to High and Carter, *The News-Reporter* lost a significant number of subscribers during the Klan campaign, dropping over 45 percent, from 4,500 subscribers per issue to 2,400.<sup>50</sup> Advertising revenue dipped as well, although High did not have precise figures. This had to give Thompson pause – and it was his decision, his worry, not Cole’s. Moreover, Thompson in the midst of the Klan uprising took out a loan and bought out his partner in *The News-Reporter*, leaving him with debt as his circulation and advertising revenue plunged. Thompson had to weigh heavy personal, family, professional, and financial costs.

**Sparse coverage.** The first mention of the Klan appeared in *The News-Reporter*’s January 9, 1950 edition, just about six months before the first parade through Tabor City. And in that very first editorial, religion was invoked.

If there is a single point other than the acceptance of God as Divinity upon which all citizens of the county should agree, it is that the Ku Klux Klan is not wanted in Columbus County . . . Anything the KKK may have accomplished in recent years in the name of Americanism is more than offset by the evils which have resulted.<sup>51</sup>

*The News-Reporter*’s second editorial and Cole’s first appeared in the August 31 edition – no news stories had yet appeared in *The News-Reporter* – and was in response to the Klan attack on Fitzgerald’s Myrtle Beach nightclub that resulted in the death of a police officer/Klansman. “When James Daniel Johnson donned the pants, shirt and coat

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<sup>50</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002 and High interview, March 28, 2007. Interestingly, an analysis of official North Carolina Press Association circulation figures for the three years studied did not show a drop. Thompson may not have wanted to disclose to outsiders – advertisers and fellow newspaper publishers – the effect the Klan was having on his business. High had no explanation for the discrepancy, although he was adamant, as was Carter, that the decline did occur.

<sup>51</sup> “Not Wanted,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 9, 1950, Sec. B, 4.

of a Conway policeman,” Cole editorialized, “he was wearing the uniform of protection. When he draped himself in the robe of a Klu Klux Klansman, he was wearing the uniform of deception. It was in such a uniform that he was killed.”<sup>52</sup> Cole continued,

Public judgment should . . . be withheld until an inquiry is completed . . . and only then will we know the full extent of the ignominy of this officer’s demise.

If the information now available to the public is correct, Policeman Johnson got only what he deserved . . . The Klansmen, of which Johnson was one, had turned into hoodlums and “torn up” the dance hall . . .

It was bad enough for private citizens to cover themselves in the garb of the KKK, but for a policeman to put a KKK robe over his officer’s uniform and then engage in hoodlumism is almost incomprehensible.

The hope here is that there will be more men who don the uniform of protection and fewer who don the uniform of deception.<sup>53</sup>

While the violence was some distance away – in South Carolina – Thompson took another editorial stand in a September 21, 1950 editorial. He lambasted the Klan for dragging a swimming instructor from his car and beating him.<sup>54</sup> *The News-Reporter* blasted Hamilton for inciting mob violence in that same incident. “Sometimes there are extenuating circumstances when a man or men commit crimes of passion,” Thompson observed, “but there can be no mitigating circumstances when robed hoodlums attack innocent persons on the public highway.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> “Wrong Uniform,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, August 31, 1950, 2. Cole did extend “[o]ur sympathy . . . to his family he left behind [though] it would be difficult to eke out a tear for the victim of this act of violence.”

<sup>54</sup> “Time for Action,” editorial, *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, September 21, 1950, 4.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

While the Klan was flogging those of whom it disapproved, civil rights leaders were also agitating for integration, especially in schools. In October 1950, a federal district court in North Carolina ruled against an African-American student who was trying to gain admission to the University of North Carolina School of Law at Chapel Hill. *The News-Reporter* (probably Thompson) praised the decision, calling it “a victory for the Negro race.”<sup>56</sup> The editorial stripped away any veneer of liberalism that might have existed; the newspaper was clearly supporting the status quo and one that accepted segregation as the foundation of southern society. At the same time *The News-Reporter* editorialized against the excesses of the Klan, it supported a system that the Klan also supported. The editorial continued,

The ruling of Judge Johnson J. Hayes that the University of North Carolina not be compelled to admit Negroes to its law school is a victory for the Negro race even though it represented defeat for the plaintiffs . . . Even greater victories would be decisions by the Circuit Court of Appeals and the United States Supreme Court upholding Judge Hayes.

The question the Federal jurist had to decide was whether equal opportunities are provided for legal students of the two races. He held that the law school at North Carolina College [now North Carolina Central University] is substantially equal to that of the law school at UNC.

[T]here is no doubt that the Negro law student is far better off at North Carolina College . . . [He] gets individual attention at NCC. He is provided an opportunity for developing leadership. He has a friendly atmosphere in which to work. He is a fish in a small pond which gives him a psychological advantage . . .

At Carolina, things would be different. There he would be a fish in a big pond where all the disadvantages of his home background would show up sharply (and there isn't

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<sup>56</sup> “Victory For Negroes,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 12, 1950, 4.

anybody who would contend that he, with only 80 some years of freedom and limited home library and cultural opportunities, would be outstanding among UNC students). He would make no contacts with the very men and women who might employ him to defend them in criminal actions, obtain a divorce, or otherwise represent them in the courts.<sup>57</sup>

Judge Hayes, a Wilkes, North Carolina native, the editorial concluded, “will be recognized as the best friend the Negro people of North Carolina has had since Lincoln if his decision is affirmed” by higher courts.”<sup>58</sup> The *News-Reporter* editorial writer trotted out many of the usual arguments that prevented black advancement for a century, fashioning an opinion that seemed at odds with its opposition to the Klan. The South was too complex for that easy a dichotomy: it was perfectly understandable and justifiable for a southerner to oppose violence and unfairness based on race, while agreeing that segregation was better for both black and white.

**A lapse.** It would be nearly four months before the Klan reappeared in the pages of *The News-Reporter*. A mass rally outside Tabor City, beyond the newspaper’s circulation area, went unreported at the time, though Cole would later refer to it. The *Tribune* stepped outside its circulation area to report on the Klan frequently; *The News-Reporter* chose not to do so. The next mention of the Klan and was in the context of an anti-lynching editorial. There were only two lynchings – a white man in Alabama and a black man in Georgia – in 1950, *The News-Reporter* told its readers, a third as many as the previous year.<sup>59</sup> The newspaper then chastised the Klan, though in general terms.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. Ultimately, Hayes’ decision was overturned by the Circuit Court of Appeals in March 1951, and African-Americans were subsequently admitted to law, medical, and graduate schools at UNC-CH.

<sup>59</sup> “1950 Lynching Record,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 4, 1951, 4.

There is no place in this free America for mob enforcement of law and no place for the Kluxers who take the law into their own hands. Whether the Kluxers were or were not involved in the two lynchings last year, they got credit for one of them and undoubtedly were blamed for many other acts of violence.<sup>60</sup>

**A cross carved.** Evergreen Flowers was severely beaten by an unmasked mob of 40-50 men and was “virtually unable to walk,” *The News-Reporter* revealed in a January 22, 1951 front-page article.<sup>61</sup> It was the first news story of the Klan uprising in the newspaper; all the other mentions were in editorials. As a “caravan of cars” encircled the Flowers’ rural home, Mrs. Flowers’ husband, Willie, retrieved his gun, but found he was out of ammunition.<sup>62</sup> He “ran outside and went to the home of his brother about a half-mile away to obtain shells.”<sup>63</sup> The newspaper used deprecating language when referring to Mr. Flowers in a way Carter and the *Tribune* never employed. “In the meantime, according to the Negro and his wife, the mob had entered their home and began shooting.”<sup>64</sup> The reporter who wrote the story allowed some skepticism to slip into his story, using the word “claim” or a variation several times, plus this passage: Sheriff “Nance and [Deputy] Ferrell later found five empty shells which substantiated this portion of their story.”<sup>65</sup> According to *The News-Reporter* account, the location of the shells indicated they had been firing at Mr. Flowers as he fled the house for

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> “Negro Woman Is Beaten By White Mob Near Chadbourn,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 22, 1951, 1+.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



ammunition.<sup>66</sup> The reporter also called Mrs. Flowers “The Flowers woman.”<sup>67</sup> Neighbors did not recognize any of the cars or their occupants, the story stated. Because neither Mr. nor Mrs. Flowers was “robbed or marked,” this eliminat[ed] any suspicion that it was an organized act of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>68</sup> Since the Flowers could not identify any of their assailants it was “difficult to make any progress in the investigation.”<sup>69</sup>

Evidently some sort of progress was desired, because in *The News-Reporter*’s next edition, a front-page article revealed that the State Bureau of Investigation had joined the investigation into the Flowers attack.<sup>70</sup> No further violence had been reported to authorities, the newspaper observed. New details of the attack were released. Mrs. Flowers had been beaten with a gun and sticks and shoved in the trunk of a car.<sup>71</sup> The Flowers’ daughter was also home at the time of the attack, which occurred just before midnight.<sup>72</sup> Conversations overheard between the nightriders indicated that Willie Flowers was the target of their attack.<sup>73</sup> Special protection had been offered the Flowers, but they declined.<sup>74</sup> Authorities still clung stubbornly to their original assessment regarding the perpetrators, as did *The News-Reporter*: “There was a strong presumption

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. The *Tribune* account differed, noting that Mrs. Flowers was injured and had a cross cut in her hair – perhaps a symbol of the Klan. Future events would demonstrate that it was a Klan attack.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> “SBI Men Here To Assist With Violence Probe,” *The Whiteville-News Reporter*, January 25, 1951, 1+.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

that the Ku Klux Klan, as an organization, had nothing to do with the attack,” *The News-Reporter* continued. “It was believed that a gang of hoodlums, some of them from outside the county, had imbibed too freely and had set themselves up as judge and jury.”<sup>75</sup>

However, the article concluded, “The proximity of the Chadbourn incident to Horry County, where the Ku Klux Klan has been charged with numerous crimes against helpless victims, served to heighten State and national interest.”<sup>76</sup>

Four days later, in a January 29 editorial, *The News-Reporter* discussed the Flowers incident, but without mentioning the Klan. Instead, it still referred to the nightriders as a mob and as gangsters.<sup>77</sup> “There is no sanity in such a mob and not a semblance of decency in the entire group,” Cole (probably) wrote. “Columbus County has no need and just as little respect for mob violence. Those responsible for this outrage deserve all the loathsome epithets that have been hurled in their direction and they must feel terribly cheap to have to listen in silence when called the sneaking cowards they are.”<sup>78</sup> Finally, Cole stated, “Columbus County does not want men of their stripe to take action against any citizen, no matter what the provocation.”<sup>79</sup> A month later, the Flowers’ home burned to the ground.<sup>80</sup> The Flowers family, however, had moved out of the rental property weeks earlier, though some of their property was still in the house and was

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> “Unwanted Here,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 29, 1951, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> “House Once Occupied By Mob Victims Burns,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 26, 1951, 1.

destroyed.<sup>81</sup> A Columbus county sheriff's department examination found no evidence of arson.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, the SBI was invited to assist in the investigation, according to *The News-Reporter's* story on February 26.<sup>83</sup>

Also in the January 29 issue, *The News-Reporter* echoed Carter's comment in the *Tribune* after a white taxi operator slapped a black school teacher: one "wonders what public reaction would have been had a Negro taxi operator slapped a white school teacher."<sup>84</sup>

**Unannounced.** "Unannounced and unobserved," Klansmen fanned out across Whiteville, North Carolina in the dark overnight hours of April 27, 1951, plastering Klan stickers across town.<sup>85</sup> The stickers read, "KKK: Yesterday, Today and Forever" next to a Klansman on horseback waving a torch. It had been nine months since nearly 100 of the robed men had driven down the main street of nearby Tabor City, brandishing weapons, the lead car bearing a red cross, and three months since the previous *News-Reporter* article.<sup>86</sup> Handbills and notes were slipped under the wipers of Cole's car and under the door of *The News-Reporter's* office, warning that the Klan was watching.<sup>87</sup> Cole's

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> "Tabor Incident," editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 29, 1951, 4.

<sup>85</sup> "KKK Stickers Put on Store Windows Here," *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, April 30, 1951, 1.

<sup>86</sup> "Ku Klux Klansmen Hold Orderly Parade in Tabor," *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 24, 1950, 1.

<sup>87</sup> Lee Hinnant, "Brave editor Willard Cole took on the Ku Klux Klan," *100 Years Serving Columbus County and Her People: The News-Reporter Centennial Edition* (Whiteville, North Carolina: The News-Reporter Co., October 1996), 8.

children had a personal curfew, keeping them indoors after dark.<sup>88</sup> Occasionally, the family would be awakened at their Clay Street home in the middle of the night by knocking at the front door. But there would be no one there.<sup>89</sup> Cole's car was vandalized.<sup>90</sup> James High was courting Leslie Thompson's daughter and only child during the height of the Klan campaign. "We were just not allowed to park outside of the house and stay sitting in the car," he recalled.<sup>91</sup> In those days, couples would often sit on the porch on a summer's evening, but that, too, was unacceptably dangerous. Coming home from a date, the couple "had to knock on the door and announce who we were . . . because the door was locked," something "a little unusual" during the early 1950s in rural North Carolina.<sup>92</sup> During much of the Klan uprising, Carolyn Thompson was away at college, attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.<sup>93</sup> Although Thompson was a bird hunter, he did not keep a loaded gun in the house, according to his son-in-law, unlike Carter and Cole.<sup>94</sup>

Cole would often write late at night and the shadows and the darkness and the noises of the old building and the outdoors left him uneasy. "When you're working at night and the wind blows sometime and the doors shake" made Cole justifiably nervous,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> High interview, March 28, 2007.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. Both High and Carolyn Thompson High were only children.

<sup>93</sup> O'Keef, "Tar Heel of the Week," 3.

<sup>94</sup> High interview, March 28, 2007.

in High's opinion.<sup>95</sup> On his desk, piled with papers and next to an old manual typewriter, Cole kept a revolver and a bottle of bourbon. Sports writer Jiggs Powers found the gun poked in his face one night, when he entered *The News-Reporter* building quietly.<sup>96</sup> Both men often worked late at night, Powers because of the nature of sports and Cole, probably because of the lack of distractions. "At night [Cole] would rare back in his chair, brought him a glass [of bourbon] . . . and on his right side he had a pistol . . . and they would converse about" what Cole had written, High stated.<sup>97</sup> "'What do you think about this? . . . Let me read you something,'" Cole would ask Powers, according to High.<sup>98</sup> "Then he would light up a cigarette, maybe take a swig, but always like I say, had the pistol."<sup>99</sup>

A memoir of Cole and his times by James Saxon Childers, an author, professor, Rhodes scholar, journalist, and editor of the *Atlanta Journal*, was published in *The News-Reporter's* centennial edition:

I was expecting to meet a stalwart man, one of the blunt, rugged kind they breed in the hills of North Carolina. This fellow was rather short and he was soft spoken. He had an easy smile . . .  
In Cole's 8-by-10 office, the plaster was chipped and the chairs battered.

Cobwebs drooped from the ceiling, and newspapers and books were splattered on an old metal frame. Cigarette ashes, tapped toward the tray, had skidded across the desk. Sometimes Cole would sit with one foot on a chair, sometimes with both feet on the desk. However he sat, he looked straight at you.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Hinnant, "Brave editor Willard Cole," 8.

<sup>97</sup> High interview, March, 28 2007.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

Cole uses his Pulitzer Prize for a paper weight.<sup>100</sup>

Legends sometimes spring up about certain events. One was that Willard Cole was an alcoholic, something Carter believed.<sup>101</sup> High disagreed. “He liked to take a sip, but that ended it,” High observed.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps taking a job with the Wine and Beer Association in North Carolina added fuel to that charge, High felt.<sup>103</sup> High described Cole’s news writing style as more like commentary, “more of a column rather than just straight news” and quite descriptive.<sup>104</sup>

**Cole, whiskey, and a typewriter.** Cole’s late-night worries were well placed, according to the memoirs of Early Brooks, a former police chief at Fair Bluff before and during the Klan uprising. Brooks was a dangerous man; while chief, he killed one man, a prisoner, by one account, and in self-defense, according to his own account.<sup>105</sup> “It was very well know[n] the New Reporter editor slept with his pistol at his bedside, as well as traveled with it,” recalled Brooks. “Most any of us would have taken a chance with him on his travels, but the occasion never presented itself.”<sup>106</sup> Klansmen were given orders “keep away from [Cole’s] home after dark.”<sup>107</sup> Since abduction seemed unlikely against

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<sup>100</sup> Hinnant, “Brave editor Willard Cole,” 9.

<sup>101</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>102</sup> High interview, March 28, 2007.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> High interview, March 28, 2007.

<sup>105</sup> *Tabor City Tribune*, February 20, 1952, 1; *Crucifixion*, 27-28; and Horace W. Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 128, (Tabor City, North Carolina: Atlantic Publishing), 1991. Brooks was also the Fair Bluff klavern’s Grand Kleagle in the early 1950s. He was shot in the back twice while police chief.

<sup>106</sup> *Crucifixion*, 85.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

someone prepared to resist with deadly force, Klansmen decided to harass him in other ways, by “placing KKK stickers on his office windows, pamphlets and other KKK material on the doors of his automobile.”<sup>108</sup>

**Unequivocal.** In a May 5 editorial, *The News-Reporter* responded to the plastering of stickers around Whiteville by Klansmen in unequivocal language.<sup>109</sup>

Whether the pasting of stickers on doors and windows in Whiteville was the work of Klan representatives or pranksters, this is the sort of thing that is unwanted here. The KKK has no place in a democracy.

The KKK is a symbol of mob violence. And mob violence is too much like a foreign ideology to be desirable in America.

Even if it were assumed that the Klan always has a noble objective when it marches in mobs, that is not the American way. Floggings lead to lynchings and lynchings lead to riots.

It cannot be said that justice is always meted out in a democracy, but there is no justice in mob action.<sup>110</sup>

“If there are Klansmen in this area,” the editorial concluded, “let them take warning that their presence does not meet with the approval of the citizenry.”<sup>111</sup>

**A Sunday school picnic.** *The News-Reporter* splashed word of a night rally across the front page of its August 13 edition. It was promised to be a “spectacular demonstration” not seen in the Southeast for a quarter century, complete with a cross

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> “Unwanted,” Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 5, 1951, 4.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

burning.<sup>112</sup> Hamilton and Grand Dragon Bill Hendrix of Florida were slated to speak at the rural rally on Saturday, August 18.<sup>113</sup> Three days later, *The News-Reporter* indicated that District Solicitor Clifton Moore would prosecute anyone caught disguising their voice, giving secret passwords, and covering their faces under the old North Carolina anti-mask statutes.<sup>114</sup> Moore claimed it was neither dare nor threat.<sup>115</sup> Hamilton announced that the rally would go on as planned.<sup>116</sup>

In elegant prose, Cole reported on the rally in a front page article on August 20, 1951. Almost without exception, every Klan article (editorials excepted) at least began on the front page.

The Ku Klux Klan openly invaded Columbus County with a spectacular, circus-like roadside show eight miles south of here Saturday night and defiantly declared that “there will be many more such meetings in North Carolina during the coming months . . .” Turning out for the well-advertised assembly were an estimated 5,000 people – robed Klansmen, Klan sympathizers, and those drawn through curiosity. The well-organized meeting apparently went off as planned. There was no disorder. . . Police seemed to be everywhere as a reported 97 robed Klansmen went through their ritual, but they had nothing to do except handle traffic. The Klansmen were as peaceful as a Sunday school picnic and the crowd was just as orderly.<sup>117</sup>

“Occasional applause filtered through the throng” at various points of the speech.

Hamilton and Hendrix “thundered” against “niggers” and “Jews, but this did not produce

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<sup>112</sup> “Klan Plans Saturday Nite Meet In County,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, August 13, 1951, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> “Klan Meet To Go On As Scheduled,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, August 13, 1951, 1.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>117</sup> “Klan Leaders Declare Intention to Push Membership in North Carolina,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, August 20, 1951, 1.



“pronounced or sustained hand clapping,” Cole wrote.<sup>118</sup> Communists, labor unions, newspapers, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were also attacked.<sup>119</sup> The two Klan leaders “blasted virtually everything but the Bible and the Klan in a 90-minute . . . rabble-rousing” exhibition.<sup>120</sup> Photographers lit the scene eerily with “almost continuous” picture taking.<sup>121</sup> Adding to the bizarre atmosphere, three Klansmen posed for photographs in front of their Klan banner, like a tourist attraction.<sup>122</sup>

The speech, despite desultory audience reactions, encouraged as many as 700 of those present to ask for membership applications, according to a source “believed to have been as reliable as anything outside actual Klan records.”<sup>123</sup> Applicants were being “sifted” to prevent infiltration by law enforcement or anti-Klan sympathizers.<sup>124</sup>

On an inside page, another article appeared, filled with small observations and anecdotes from the rally.<sup>125</sup> “The audience failed to respond in saying the Lord’s Prayer,” when prompted by Klan leaders.<sup>126</sup> Readers learned that there were “a million flash bulbs” and that *Life* magazine had sent several photographers, as had the Associated

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. Hamilton had invited the press to cover the rally.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Willard G. Cole, “Klan Meeting Sidelights,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, August 20, 1951, 4.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

Press.<sup>127</sup> Hamilton tolerated the flashes until a photographer snapped a shot of Klansman passed out from the heat.<sup>128</sup> Hamilton told the crowd, “the KKK stands for truth, right and justice” and would “fight for segregation to the last ounce of blood” regardless of what the Supreme Court might rule.<sup>129</sup>

**Doctrine of Love.** The Klan held a nocturnal rally in a field between Whiteville and Tabor City on August 18, prompting a rare front-page *News-Reporter* editorial.<sup>130</sup> It was the most intensely and overtly religious editorial by either newspaper involved in the Pulitzer Prize-winning campaign against the Klan. The themes discussed – morality, religion, loving thy neighbor, submitting to civil law, conformity to the social order – are many of the general themes interlaced throughout the entire campaign by both the *Tabor City Tribune* and *The Whiteville News-Reporter*. It can be seen, then, as the archetype of the editorial campaign against the Klan.

All the journalists involved probably read each other’s articles and editorials; they commented upon them editorially a number of times. So, Carter would have read this editorial, and given his own religious beliefs, would have been influenced to some extent by it. Was this editorial the turning point? No, but it defined the campaign, intellectually and politically. It was the first editorial against the Klan on the front page of *The News-*

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> “The Doctrine of Love,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, August 23, 1951, 1+. Later in the year, the same “doctrine of love” phrase is used in an editorial that clearly bears the mark of Cole’s writing style. This one is somewhat more rambling, disjointed, and less smooth than Cole’s other work. There is always the possibility, however, that either the topic, his health, deadline pressure, or some intangible caused him to stray from his normal style. However, the term “doctrine of love” was also used in an editorial also attributed to Thompson and praising the mercy of the parole board by letting Hamilton out early.

*Reporter* and that sent a strong message to the newspaper's audience. Carter may have made the campaign a front-page one from the start; with this editorial *The News-Reporter* endorsed that judgment.

The editorial is somewhat patchy and appears to be the cobbling together of several versions. It may have existed in some form long before the Klan rally sparked its eventual publication. That its author chose "love" to frame the editorial is interesting. The Christian message is one of love, not hate and Thompson is making a strong statement by choosing "The Doctrine of Love" as the title of the editorial, a good versus evil, love versus hate dichotomy. There are numerous other similar pairings in the editorial: defiance of the law and obedience, moral and immoral, Christian and antichristian, law and order and chaos. Just below the title of the editorial, in large letters, was a scriptural quotation from Peter: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake."<sup>131</sup> It set the tone for the entire editorial. "Every Christian should be concerned – prayerfully concerned – and every citizen should be concerned with what was advocated at the Klan meeting between Whiteville and Tabor City," the editorial began.<sup>132</sup>

Every citizen of our country should be concerned because the very foundation of our way of life – the Christian and democratic way of life – is at issue. Are we to become a nation where class is pitted against class and race against race?

The doctrine expounded by the speakers at the meeting was, in the main, a doctrine of hate and defiance – defiance of the law . . . Hatred of certain people and groups and races was fervently demonstrated. Certain conditions that exist in our midst were related in an effort to justify this doctrine of defiance of the law and legally constituted authorities . . . The failures, evil and immorality of some were used as some of the pitiful

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<sup>131</sup> Peter 2:13.

<sup>132</sup> "The Doctrine of Love," 1.

reasons, or excuses, to justify this group taking the law into their own hands, becoming self-appointed judges, jury and executioners. Such a philosophy is difficult of acceptance.<sup>133</sup>

After setting the scene, Thompson then moved into the heart of the religious argument in the next section of the editorial. The editorial is also probably the longest editorial in either newspaper throughout the nearly three years that encompassed the Klan rising, from the first motorcade to the awarding of the Pulitzer.

Jesus taught us by saying, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” “And who is my neighbor?” the lawyer asked Him. He answered with the parable about the good Samaritan, with which we are all familiar. This parable teaches us that our neighbor is anyone – red, yellow, black, white, Jew, Gentile, Catholic, Protestant, Budhist [sic], or Moslem . . . Our neighbor is all men because God created man – all men – in His own image, and after the creation, God blessed man.<sup>134</sup>

Then the editorial moved from God’s law and sphere into that of humans: law, liberty, and order. The author contended that Christian duty required obedience to human law and to protect a nation from external and internal enemies.

The very existence of our material world is founded upon the law and order of God, as taught in our Bible. Our social order is founded upon the laws of our land. Our country was founded upon the principles of freedom and liberty. Our laws are based on the wisdom of the ages. We, as citizens of this country, have the Christian duty, as well as the patriotic duty, to uphold and defend our country from attack, both from without and within. We have only to become acquainted with what is going on in the world today to realize that ours is the most favored nation, and we, as citizens of it, are the most favored of all peoples. We reached this position, not by defiance of authority, but by living under and in obedience to the laws which we have (or should have) a part in making. We reached this position, not by hating one another, but by an honest effort to understand our neighbor.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

A continuing undercurrent of southern history is that the South is a region with a people blessed by God; Thompson expanded that view to include the entire country and all its citizens. Thompson then moved into an analysis of morality and spirituality and its relevance to prejudice and the underpinnings of the Klan's worldview. He clearly considered that morality could exist separate from religion.

Is it spiritually or morally right for us to hate any man, or group of men? Can we justify before our God the teaching of a doctrine of hatred against any man or race of men?

Two thousand years have not dimmed the light of love or the Christian doctrine of going to the aid of a man in need, even though that man be a Samaritan.

The author then lists a number of great hymns of the Christian faith, such as "Abide With Me," "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," "Nearer My God to Thee," "Rock of Ages," and others. "But not one word of hate" in them, he stressed.<sup>136</sup> Then, randomly it seemed, Thompson laid out a few statements that form a portion of the central message of Christianity: "I am the way, the truth and the life . . ." . . . "Do unto others as ye would that men should do unto you" . . . "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: . . . "Pray for them that despise you and do all manner of evil unto you . . ."<sup>137</sup> Thompson compared the world of Jesus with that of the early 1950s. The world the Klan created, in the author's view, was not just immoral, but sinful, which is something deeper. But Thompson also urged forgiveness, not retribution.

The challenge that faces our nation and world today is not the hate doctrine as preached so fervently on this recent humid August night between two of Columbus County's important

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

communities, but the doctrine of love as taught by the Blessed Messiah two thousands years as He walked in a world that was just as sinful as the one we know . . . in a world that He pleaded with to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's . . . in a world where He was to hear men who hated, not loved, so bitterly that it chose a murderer in preference to the Son of God . . . a doctrine of love, not hate, such as Christ manifested when He prayed: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."<sup>138</sup>

The editorial moved into its conclusion, summing up its arguments neatly in just a few sentences and words.

There should be no hatred – no hatred even of the Ku Klux Klan. There should be only an earnest effort to understand that Christ taught obedience to law – that he preached a doctrine of the brotherhood of man.

Ours is the task to light the lamp of love.<sup>139</sup>

**More opposition.** An editorial in the August 20 issue, suggesting that Klan headgear might be masking hoodlums, drew a threatening letter from a Klan sympathizer, published on the front page of the August 27 *News Reporter*.<sup>140</sup> In a few sentences, rife with grammatical errors, Cole was told to "stop your yapping about the KKK," since it was "only out for the right things in life," the letter writer stated.<sup>141</sup> "Every decent person is in favor of the KKK & their purpose," so "stop acting the fool" and "you wont have anything to worry about."<sup>142</sup> The letter concluded with a warning against further

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>140</sup> "Newspaper Gets Warning Letter," *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, August 27, 1951, 1.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

“publistie” and to “watch your step here after.”<sup>143</sup> *The News-Reporter* did not comment or reply editorially.

In early September, the Klan petitioned the City of Whiteville for permission to use the courthouse square for a rally on September 29, *The News-Reporter* related in its September 13 edition.<sup>144</sup> The letter did not come from Hamilton or any local Klansman, but from Bill Hendrix, the Florida grand dragon who had appeared at a number of Columbus County rallies. Whiteville city manager C. D. Pickerell rejected the request, citing traffic concerns for large gatherings, principally that three highways converge at the square. He also indicated that no other large gathering had been approved on the square since the streets had been widened and all but a few feet of the courthouse lawn had been eliminated. Perhaps tongue-in-cheek, Pickerell referred Hendrix to the county auditor, who might arrange use of a courtroom.<sup>145</sup> “The first news that a meeting was being considered in Whiteville broke last week when Hendrix challenged representatives of the Junior Chamber of Commerce of North Carolina to a debate on the evening of Sept. 29,” *The News-Reporter* story indicated. “The challenge came after the Jaycees had branded the KKK [as] un-American and Thomas Hamilton . . . had threatened” a lawsuit.<sup>146</sup>

The next Klan rally, nearly two months after the first, drew a thin crowd that “seemed indifferent and munched boiled peanuts as if bored by the proceedings.”<sup>147</sup> What

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> “Klan Asks For Use Of Square At Courthouse, *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, September 13, 1951, 1+.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 2. A spokesman for the Jaycees welcomed the lawsuit, but none was ever filed.

<sup>147</sup> “Klan Abundant With Hate But Crowd Is Thin,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 1, 1951, 1.

it lacked in numbers, it made up in vitriol, according to *The News-Reporter's* account.<sup>148</sup>

The Klan “emptied its bag of hate in an hour-long tirade before a few hundred people . . . on the same field where it attracted 5,000” people earlier.<sup>149</sup> Instead of “praying language,” Hamilton “hurled unprintable words at the Klan’s pet hates.”<sup>150</sup> The press was criticized, as was famous broadcaster Walter Winchell, whose parental legitimacy was questioned.<sup>151</sup> The leader of the North Carolina Junior Chamber of Commerce was also criticized for refusing to debate Hamilton.<sup>152</sup>

Three days later *The News-Reporter* commented editorially on the rally along with the earlier one in August.<sup>153</sup> “In the August Klan rally, Grand Dragon Hamilton prayed piously and invoked the blessings of God,” opened the editorial, possibly written by Cole. “It was a stirring appeal with every indication of reverence and was accepted as such even by those who disagreed with his subsequent declarations of hatred.”<sup>154</sup> Cole came to the point of the Klan in the next paragraph.

What is underneath the Klan’s cloak of piety came to light at the second rally. Undoubtedly peeved by the lack of public response to his hate campaign, Hamilton could restrain himself no longer and unleashed a tirade of unprintable words, calling people names not used in polite society and certainly not by people who

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> “What’s Underneath,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 4, 1951, 4.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.



claim an affinity with the God of love.<sup>155</sup>

A month later, the Klan rated another editorial, this time in the wake of the arrest of 11 of 25 robed Klansmen for parading down the aisles of a church in full regalia and then stepping onto public property while still masked in violation of a new South Carolina law.<sup>156</sup> About a dozen of the Klansmen escaped police, doing “what any scared rat will do,” Cole remarked, “scurry for the cellar and the attic.”<sup>157</sup> Horry County sheriff Sasser was applauded for “a long struggle in his balliwick” that eventually culminated in the arrests. “He couldn’t convict anybody for the murder of a Conway policeman because a grand jury wouldn’t indict,” *The News-Reporter* editorialized, “but the South Carolina Legislature gave him and other officers an anti-mask law which should prove most effective.”<sup>158</sup>

**Fear Rode Along.** It was rare for a byline to appear in *The News-Reporter* of this period. However, on the front page of the November 19 edition was an exception, entitled “Fear Rode Along” appeared, bylined by Cole and set in two-column type.<sup>159</sup> It was the story – part-opinion, part fact – of one of the victims of the nightriders, and the first specific news-story reference to victims of the Klan’s resurgence. “I saw the dark spots on the victim’s thighs!” Cole began. “Through the red coloring of a common disinfectant,

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> “They Departed Quickly,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 5, 1951, 4.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> “Fear Rode Along,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 19, 1951, 1.

I saw the results of a vicious assault by masked hoodlums,” made by a leather strop “cut from a discarded harness for a horse.” He continued the narrative:

He told me how it happened. He was at home, where all citizens, both good and bad except those convicted of crime and sentenced to jail, should be at 11 o’clock at night. The guise of an emergency was used to bring him out into the open, the details of which will be omitted from this item. Ordered inside a waiting automobile, he sat down with burly men whose faces were hidden by masks. Let all the honest, upright, God-fearing people take this ride with him!

For a mile or so, his eyes were free to see whatever there was to see in a murky night. Others sat in the car, but they were not the only passengers. Fear, with a capital F, rode with him. A screaming, hysterical family had seen him go. Their cries were still ringing in his ears.

Where? What? Why? These were questions which surged through his fear-stricken mind. But for the moment they went unanswered.

As the victim and Fear, and his captors rode along, other cars joined the procession. And a blindfold was put [on] . . . to blot out everything except the unreasoning dread of what might be in store for him.

Cole then turned to the attack itself, delivering images that must have taken his readers right to that spot on the abandoned country road.

Perhaps, it was less than an hour that passed before the victim came face to face with his punishment. Two men held both his arms. And the barbarism of centuries ago welled up in the men who had gathered for this resurrection of savagery and bestiality.

Swish went the instrument of torture as it slapped against human flesh on one leg. Swish went a similar instrument of torture as it struck the other leg. And alternately went the belt-type pieces of leather as a man on the left and a man on the right satisfied their lust for the sight of pain.

When these gentlemen (?) of law and order had finished with their human target, they set him free – free to go home but not free of fear.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

There were not enough police officers to patrol everywhere, Cole wrote. The investigation was at a dead end, and the logistics of the case were daunting. “Can they patrol every [sic] road in the county? Can they call every citizen in for question and get an admission of guilt from the guilty?” Cole asked.<sup>161</sup> He wondered whether it was the work of Klansmen. “Your guess is as good as mine. But they were wearing masks. And this sort of thing wasn’t happening before the KKK was organized in this area,” he believed.<sup>162</sup>

Is this an isolated case of mob violence? Many people know that it isn’t. Scores of such experiences have gone unreported.

The victim I talked to declared emphatically that he was innocent of the fault which the masked men gave as their excuse for the flogging. I don’t know about the merits of the case. I just saw the results.

The bruised flesh made me wonder how many others have been treated in the same manner. It raised the question of how Many citizens cannot go to sleep at night with a feeling of security that they will not be molested in the privacy of their homes.

“Officers will never raise the curtain from this sort of lawlessness and hoodlumism,” he thought, because there simply were not enough personnel.<sup>163</sup> He chose to overlook the obvious corollary – that some of those officers were either Klansmen or sympathetic. It would take “an aroused public” to dismantle and banish the Klan, he

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

concluded. “Until this is accomplish [sic], each citizen may well ask the question: Am I next?”<sup>164</sup>

A photo of the bruised legs of Clayton Sellers, unidentified in the story below, appeared atop Cole’s article.<sup>165</sup> The front-page banner story described two recent floggings,<sup>166</sup> both committed against white men.<sup>167</sup> Sellers was kidnapped from his home, but not without a struggle. Both his wife and he managed to fire five shots at the masked men who abducted him, while his mother nearly pulled off the mask of one of the nightriders.<sup>168</sup> Sellers was taken across the South Carolina line and flogged with a piece of tire, accused of beating his mother, a charge he denied then and later.<sup>169</sup>

The beating of Robert Lee Gore was detailed in another front page story, with a notation that it had not been reported immediately by the victim, according to *The News-Reporter*’s account.<sup>170</sup> The Klan’s campaign of violence was escalating and the pages of *The News-Reporter* began to fill with stories of the KKK.

**A dream.** “We dreamed last night of a trial in court,” Cole began an editorial a week later on November 26, 1951.

On the bench sat a man wearing a robe, but not the robe of a

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<sup>164</sup> “Fear Rode,” 1.

<sup>165</sup> “Masked Mobsters Seize Resident of New Hope Section in Latest Outbreak of Terrorism in County, Night Riders Also Beat Olyphic [sic] Man,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 19, 1951, 1.

<sup>166</sup> Flogging was the contemporary term for a beating. It did, however, usually involve some sort of instrument or weapon being used in the attack, such as a broom or axe handle, a baseball bat, whip, and/or leather strap.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> “Masked Mobsters,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 19, 1951, 1.

jurist. His face was masked and none could tell whether he was . . . any of the . . . legally-trained men who ordinarily occupy the bench in Superior Court.

Over in the jury box were 12 men, all wearing masks and robes. There was no way of knowing whether they were Klansmen or just men who happened to cloak themselves in the regalia similar to that of the Klan . . .

Counsel for the defense was denied the privilege of asking the name of any juror who was about to sit in judgment upon the guilt or innocence of his client. He could make no challenge.<sup>171</sup>

The defense was not allowed to find out whether there was “spite” in the heart of the jurors, whether one of the juror’s “corn had been trampled last summer by the defendant’s stray cows, or whether the judge was a “booze hound, a philanderer, or an honest, God-fearing citizen.”<sup>172</sup>

We knew that this was typical of how victims of mob violence are tried. The only regret was that those who participate in terroristic activities could not have a similar dream, because we know that if any of them were brought into court and asked to stand trial before a masked judge and jury, they would be the first to cry out for their rights in the Constitution.<sup>173</sup>

“It was a revealing dream,” Cole concluded. “May others have the same.”<sup>174</sup>

Three issues later, Woodrow Johnson, a white mechanic, was beaten for “drinking.”<sup>175</sup> He left his house to help two men whose car, ostensibly, had broken

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<sup>171</sup> “A Court Dream,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 26, 1951, 4.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> “Mob Violence Invades Whiteville 40-Year-Old Mechanic is Flogged,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, December 10, 1951, 1.

down.<sup>176</sup> Johnson was hustled into a car and driven to an isolated spot where he was bent over the car's fender and thrashed with a belt.<sup>177</sup> As many as 25 men were involved, Johnson estimated.<sup>178</sup>

**Christmas wishes.** Cole's writing, as with the "Fear Rides Along" editorial, often stepped far beyond the line separating news writing and art. Another example was published in the Christmas Eve 1951 edition of *The News-Reporter*.<sup>179</sup> It was in a letter to Santa Claus. The editorial opened with a list of the three top stories of 1951: the approval of the health and agriculture program in a special election, location of a new industry in Whiteville, and the "invasion of Columbus County" by the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>180</sup> Cole let Santa Claus off the hook for the Klan's appearance. "Our earliest recollection of you and annual contacts for two-score years furnish positive assurance that you strive only to give the best possible for each person you visit," Cole wrote. "So, we're not blaming you for the KKK invasion or the subsequent acts of mob violence."<sup>181</sup> Santa Claus may have been employed as a stand-in or to represent Jesus, allowing a more informal and conversational approach, one that might be regarded as sacrilegious if addressed to Jesus.

[W]e ask you, Mr. Claus, to fill our homes with love for humanity, with a broader understanding of the meaning for Christmas, with a knowledge that the birth of Christ was God's way of showing His love for His people, and with the realization that the Messiah taught a doctrine of love rather

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> "Letter to Santa," editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, December 24, 1951, 4.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

than a doctrine of hate and terror.

If you, Dear Santa, have space in your pack, will you please leave all of us enough of the capacity to think clearly to enable us to understand that when the people run the government, there is mob violence; and when the government runs the people, there is dictatorship. Give us a package of common sense to maintain the balance in which we preserve our liberties and free enterprise and at the same time our cherished tradition of law and order.<sup>182</sup>

**Conflicting reasons.** On December 13, 1951, Whiteville Mayor Lee Braxton wrote North Carolina Governor Kerr Scott about *The News-Reporter's* coverage. In all likelihood, the mayor had shared the same concern with Thompson and maybe even Cole. It might have given Thompson pause; his newspaper's campaign and publicity – disregarding the reality of the Klan violence for a moment – *might* be having a financial effect on the town. Mayor Braxton wrote,

Our people are right much concerned about the recent happenings in our area regarding the people taking the law into their own hands, and I know that you are too, because what happens here might happen in any other community.

The most recent case was the flogging of the Mechanic Johnson last Saturday night. Some say he got what was coming to him, but I am not going to make a point out of this, because I do not agree with the method in which the punishment was administered . . . And it is getting to be pretty serious when a man is not safe in his own home in a community anymore.<sup>183</sup>

Braxton then gets to the real point of his letter, noting that, confidentially, “we were closing the deal [last] Tuesday with a manufacturer to locate a plant here, and he picked up our local paper and saw these big headlines where a citizen of our city had

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Mayor Lee Braxton, Lee, letter to Governor W. Kerr Scott of North Carolina, December 13, 1951, in author's possession.

been flogged.”<sup>184</sup> The executive was “afraid to move into this area” personally and reluctant to bring his employees to Whiteville because they “would not feel safe.”<sup>185</sup> Braxton was unsure whether the deal would go through “as a result” of *The News-Reporter*’s Klan coverage.<sup>186</sup>

“But I am frank to admit that I would hesitate to answer the door call at my home at night unless I could identify the people making the call,” Braxton acknowledged, incredibly, considering that he was the mayor of the city. “I say this not because of any sense of guilt, or a feeling of guilt, but when people take law into their own hands, you do not have to be guilty” if a personal grudge is involved.<sup>187</sup> The publicity was “an embarrassing thing.” Braxton appealed to the governor for assistance.<sup>188</sup>

**Unceasing criticism.** Imperial Wizard Hamilton, apparently, did not take Cole and Thompson’s coverage as personally as that of Carter. He did not write any letters to the editor to *The News-Reporter* during the Klan rising. But one of his acolytes took the Whiteville newspaper and its editor very seriously. “Considering the three Ruffins [sic], the Whiteville News Reporter editor, the editor of the Tabor City Tribune and the Sheriff. I guess we despised the Editor of the Whiteville News Report most, and for good reasons,” Early Brooks, a Klavern leader and former Fair Bluff police chief, wrote in his self-published memoirs. “He conferred titles to the Negro race, referring to them as Mr. and Mrs. He had desegregated his publications . . . Furthermore he had disregarded the

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.



Southern Customs by eating with the Negroes at a Red Cross dinner. His criticism never ceased for one moment against the KKK.”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Early L. Brooks. *Crucifixion of the South*, 84 (Privately printed by author), 1958.

CHAPTER SIX  
THE TURNING POINT  
FOR THOMPSON AND COLE

*“Never give in. Never, never, never, never – in  
nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give  
in, except to convictions of honor and good sense.  
Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently  
Overwhelming might of the enemy.”*  
– Winston Churchill

The New Year 1952 came, and there was no turning point evident. Though it was there, nonetheless.

A month later, two articles relating to the Klan were on the front page of *The News-Reporter*, though neither received banner story treatment. The first detailed the sentencing of three Nakina, North Carolina men to two years on the road gang for “threatening to ‘klux’” a farmer if he did not evict an African-American tenant farmer.<sup>1</sup> The offense happened on Christmas Day, 1951, according to the news story.<sup>2</sup> It was the first conviction. The Ku Klux Klan was not specifically mentioned, according to one witness quoted in *The News-Reporter* story, only that “klux” was used.<sup>3</sup> One of the defendants’ eventual excuse for using the word was that it “had entered the language as a verb synonymous” with beating.<sup>4</sup> The threatened farmer had to chase the trio off with his

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<sup>1</sup> “Trio Sentenced for Threats to ‘Klux’ Neighbor,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 10, 1952, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

shotgun.<sup>5</sup> Columbus County solicitor Robert S. Schulken called the incident “the most terrible thing that has ever happened in Columbus County,” declaring that “when it gets to the place that a man can’t say who is going to live on his place, it is a matter of grave concern.”<sup>6</sup> The tenant farmer was not named in open court, *The News-Reporter* stated.<sup>7</sup>

“Only six hours after three men had been sentenced to two years each for threatening to ‘klux’ a Nakina farmer, mob violence flared again,” *The News-Reporter* noted in a nearby column.<sup>8</sup> H. D. Best was “seized” from his home after being persuaded to look up a phone number for two men searching for a Whiteville car dealership.<sup>9</sup> He was accused of mistreating his wife by a “mob” of at least fifteen men who flogged him until he was “almost numb” and required hospitalization.<sup>10</sup> Columbus County Sheriff Hugh Vance kept most details of the attack “confidential,” declining to confirm whether Best had recognized any of his assailants.<sup>11</sup> The pattern of the attack was “almost identical” to other floggings, the sheriff reported.<sup>12</sup> *The News-Reporter* writer, in the article’s concluding paragraph, noted that “the public has ignored the seriousness of the situation and unsuspecting victims are falling easy prey.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “Another Victim of Mob Action Reported Here,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 10, 1952, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

On January 17, an exhaustive account of a Klan abduction took up almost one column of the front page and three columns on page two, a “graphic,” almost blow-by-blow, minute-by-minute narrative of an attack with a “leather belt and boards as wide as my three fingers and just as thick,” according to one of the victims.<sup>14</sup> “Hoodlums wearing regalia like that of the Ku Klux Klan committed” the “vicious” flogging.<sup>15</sup> Lee and Louise Tyson were snatched while walking in early December, accompanied by Norman Sasser, who was, evidently, not attacked.<sup>16</sup> *The News-Reporter*, though, implied suspicion of Sasser, who had driven the Tysons to Hallsboro, looking for liquor.<sup>17</sup> “The Tysons made no mention of the seemingly remarkable coincidence that they had been carried by the same spot [by Sasser] twice during the course of the evening and that it was on the third trip that” their pick-up truck “was brought to a halt,” by another vehicle, although it did not block the road.<sup>18</sup> At least six men wrenched the Tysons from the truck. Details of the assault were not publicized until more than a month later.<sup>19</sup> The ostensible excuse for the beating was Mr. Tyson’s refusal to attend church or allow his family to

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<sup>14</sup> “Hooded, Robed Mob In Action Near Hallsboro In December,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 17, 1952, 1. Mrs. Tyson was not beaten because she showed the nightriders her bandaged thigh from severe burns of three weeks earlier.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

attend.<sup>20</sup> According to *The News-Reporter*, “Tyson had heeded the mob’s warning” and had “gone regularly since he was flogged.”<sup>21</sup>

According to the newspaper, it was the fifth reported flogging in recent weeks attributed to the Klan; two similar attacks could not be directly blamed on the KKK, although the details were similar.<sup>22</sup>

The coverage and the attacks had been coming so quickly that Cole and *The News-Reporter* considered it newsworthy to wonder in the January 17 edition that “a strange but welcome quiet, as if a ‘cease-fire’ had been ordered, reigned” on the Klan front during the previous weekend.<sup>23</sup> The newspaper speculated that it might be the “proverbial calm before the storm.”<sup>24</sup> Sheriff Vance “declined to speculate on the possibility” that Klan members had “temporarily or permanently” called off their campaign.<sup>25</sup> “In lay circles,” *The News Reporter* observed, “it was regarded as unlikely that the mob had been frightened into hiding.”<sup>26</sup> Police officials would not comment on the possible resumption of the Klan “rampage.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> “Mob Inactive As Probe Continues in This County; No Serious Incident Reported Since Dick Best Was Flogged Nearly 2 Weeks Ago,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 21, 1952, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Columbus County residents “appeared to be accepting the [Klan] situation passively,” *The News-Reporter* explained in the same article on January 21.<sup>28</sup> They became “aroused,” however, once because the “full impact of the violence was hurled” at them by Jay Jenkins of *The News and Observer* of Raleigh and Neil Yancey of the Associated Press, both of whom had recently visited the county and reported on Klan activities.<sup>29</sup> That it took statewide coverage to rouse Columbus County residents drew a bemused comment from the Whiteville newspaper.<sup>30</sup> “Although *The News-Reporter* had repeatedly focused attention on the situation it appeared that the spotlight of State publicity first shocked the citizenry into a state of indignation.”<sup>31</sup> Reports of minor scare tactics were mentioned in the same story, but might have been “personal grudges” using the cover of the Klan controversies.<sup>32</sup>

Thompson, possibly, was the author of *The News-Reporter*’s editorial in the January 21 edition that used the Tyson case as a pivot for the newspaper’s continuing opposition to the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>33</sup> “The Tyson case added little to public knowledge of the mob violence situation, but it re-emphasized that human beings are being tried and sentenced without the benefit of an attorney and without an opportunity to summon witnesses in their own defense,” *The News-Reporter* proclaimed. “It shows that the trial

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> “Prediction,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 21, 1952, 4.

is before a judge and jury who are not known to be impartial and, in fact, may be prejudiced to a high degree.”<sup>34</sup> The editorial continued:

We venture [to] guess once again that these same men, who sat in the jury box and on the bench in this mock trial when Lee Tyson was convicted and condemned to a dozen licks, would not like to be tried under the same conditions . . .

We predict:

1. That the alleged floggers will come into court surrounded by the best legal talent.
2. That they will want to place witnesses on the stand in their own defense.
3. That they will want a jury from their own community and county with the possible hope that flogging sympathizers will be among those chosen.
4. That they will want to know who is sitting on the bench and who is in the jury box.
5. That they will be vigorously oppose a change of venue – meaning a jury from another county where hoodlumism is less thoroughly organized.
6. That their lawyers will object to hearsay evidence such as the mob accepted in the trial of the flogging victims.
7. That they will demand and get proof of their guilt rather than have to run the risk of mistaken identity as may have been the case in at least one of the flogging cases.<sup>35</sup>

“In simpler language,” the editorial continued, “they will want every protection of the court – a protection which was denied their victims.”<sup>36</sup> The writer added, “If anyone doubts the accuracy of this observation, let him clip this editorial and put it away to be dug out again when and if the flogging culprits are arrested.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Publicity about the Klan's uprising had spread far beyond Columbus County and even North Carolina, and the picture other Americans were seeing was not flattering. Three days later on January 24, Thompson addressed this in an editorial.<sup>38</sup> "The real tragedy of the mob violence situation in Columbus County is that too many of us are more shocked by the unfavorable publicity . . . than we are by the horrible outrages that hoodlums are committing."<sup>39</sup> *The News-Reporter* urged its reader to remember Hitler's Black Shirts who were relatively benign, "innocent looking and apparently harmless," at first.<sup>40</sup> Thompson may have gotten carried away by hyperbole as he continued, "Unlike the hoodlum gangs in our midst, it wasn't until years had passed that they knocked on the doors at night and began the reign of terror which developed into the concentration camps and the murder of thousands and millions."<sup>41</sup> The editorial concluded, "May the day arrive, and quickly, that the real shock comes from indignation at the atrocities rather than from truthful reporting of the facts."<sup>42</sup>

**Reaction from the pulpit.** Referring to the Klan in all but name, the Columbus County Ministerial Association "lashed out at hooded lawlessness," according to Cole, beneath an eight-column, two-line banner headline.<sup>43</sup> *The News-Reporter* printed the text of a letter that would be read from the pulpits of churches of all denominations on

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<sup>38</sup> "The Real Tragedy," editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 24, 1952, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> "Columbus Ministers Denounce Wave of Hooded Lawlessness," *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 24, 1952, 1.



January 27.<sup>44</sup> Ministers had been quiet up to this point, something the group alluded to in its public proclamation.<sup>45</sup> “The continued increase in instances of lawless[ness] has made it necessary that we, as ministers, declare ourselves opposed to such acts,” the group announced.<sup>46</sup> The ministers declared, “We believe that the organization which inspired these acts to be destructive of law and order and conducive to individual fear, political corruption, and general anarchy.”<sup>47</sup> It would take “Christian citizens [to] stand against this evil,” and urged cooperation with police.<sup>48</sup>

In a January 28, 1952 editorial, Cole praised the ministers, for their “daring that characterized the spiritual leaders of old . . . the only position that men of God can take.” Cole urged that the ministers be protected. “If any pastor, who has spoken out in defense of freedom, is molested in any way, either by threats or by efforts to oust him, he must have the united backing of every God-fearing man.”<sup>49</sup>

**Un-Klanish behavior.** In a “surprise” action, Hamilton disbanded the Fair Bluff Klavern for “un-Klannish’ activities,” *The News-Reporter* stated on the front page of its January 28 edition.<sup>50</sup> Officials “continued their silence on the possible meaning” of the action.<sup>51</sup> Hamilton did not contact *The News-Reporter*, but notified the Associated Press

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> “Truth Emerges,” editorial, *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 28, 1952, 4.

<sup>50</sup> “Hamilton Disbands Fair Bluff Klavern After Denying Threat Incident There,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 28, 1952, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

instead.<sup>52</sup> Hamilton accused some Fair Bluff Klansmen of the “wrong attitude” and taking “the law in their own hands,” something the Klan did not approve of, according to *The News-Reporter* story.<sup>53</sup> *The News-Reporter* described a threat against a Fair Bluff church for inviting an African-American quartet to perform.<sup>54</sup> The concert was cancelled in the wake of threats reportedly from the Klan.<sup>55</sup> The pregnant wife of the minister was particularly distressed; the minister left town very soon thereafter, suffering from a recurrence of an old stomach ailment and hypertension.<sup>56</sup> “The viciousness of a threat to the church brought a shudder to outsiders as the news gradually leaked out,” Cole wrote.<sup>57</sup> In a January 28 editorial, Cole noted, “[I]f the Fair Bluff Klavern became so rotten as to merit the disavowal of Grand Dragon Hamilton, it must be pretty bad.”<sup>58</sup> Cole urged the Klan leader to release the membership list to authorities, so the guilty could be punished. Otherwise, Cole reasoned, Hamilton was “a rat deserting a sinking ship.”<sup>59</sup>

**Blackville.** Cole claimed in the same editorial that Whiteville had become “Blackville” in the national press—in the sense of having a black eye, although the racial parallel is striking. “Columbus County is . . . known as a place of floggings and mob

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> “Mob Violence Ran Rampant,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 4, 1952, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> “Truth Emerges,” 4.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

violence” caused by Hamilton and his cronies.<sup>60</sup> “The development which substituted ‘black’ for ‘white’ in the name of Whiteville was the hoodlumism which came out of the tirade of hate and pseudo-piety at the Klan rally,” Cole claimed. \ *The News-Reporter* and others “tried mightily to paint the development in the vicious and brutal light that it actually was.”<sup>61</sup> “Only the extermination of this cancerous growth can restore the ‘white’ in Whiteville,” Cole continued.<sup>62</sup> “And this is the time for all honest, decent believers in the future of Columbus County to stand up and be counted. This is the time for the disbanding of all Klaverns.”<sup>63</sup>

The drumbeat of Klan stories, Klan floggings, and Klan threats continued. Several incidents were mentioned in a front-page update in the January 31 issue. A motorist, apparently feigning car trouble, attempted to convince a Whiteville man to help him. The intended victim refused to leave his house and instead gave the man a “raking over” for trying to induce him to work on the car.<sup>64</sup> The next morning the Whiteville man received a warning note from the Klan.<sup>65</sup> A Brunswick County flogging was reported, as was the attack on a woman by nightriders from several months earlier.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> On January 31, Cole published his only political cartoon of the Klan campaign (“What a Ku Kluxer Really Thinks!”); four panels on the front page. A bed-sheeted Klansman holds an argument with himself. Ultimately, he feels ashamed of himself and “anything but American” and “pretty low.” He condemns himself for “taking the law in my own hand.” In the final panel, he hangs up his Klan outfit, promising to bury it the next day.

<sup>63</sup> “Truth Emerges,” 4.

<sup>64</sup> “Car Trouble Tale Told Once More,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 31, 1952. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

On February 4, Cole revealed “newly disclosed” incidents involving a lawyer, flogged early in January, and two other men, one African-American and the other white.<sup>67</sup> The African-American man was flogged for “cussing in front of a white woman,” and for becoming drunk, *The News-Reporter* maintained.<sup>68</sup> The attorney was beaten for “not caring for his family.”<sup>69</sup> A woman escaped a beating because she was pregnant; the Klansmen cut a cross into her hair instead.<sup>70</sup> A widower was also beaten, though his purported crime was not revealed.<sup>71</sup> Yet another man was convinced to leave his home on the pretense of a house-painting job and then flogged.<sup>72</sup>

In another instance, a supposed Klansman knocked at house, but a woman refused to come out, denying that her husband was home.<sup>73</sup> The Klansman replied that he knew differently and made a motion as if to batter the door open with his shoulder.<sup>74</sup> Inexplicably, he then left. “What the men didn’t know, but apparently sensed, was that the intended victim was standing in an unlighted hallway, directly in line with the front door, with a shotgun and was prepared to mow them down when they came through the

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<sup>67</sup> “Mob Violence,” 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

screen” door.<sup>75</sup> *The News-Reporter* would not “vouch for the accuracy of this story,” but it seemed “typical of the armed readiness of many homes.”<sup>76</sup>

**Questions.** “Members of lawless mobs have spread their wave of terror in Columbus County for six months,” Cole opined on February 1.<sup>77</sup>

Men and women and even teen-agers have received threats. Some of them have been seized and beaten. Others have lived through sleepless nights, never knowing when there would be a knock on the door and a summons to a frightening experience. All this in a land where every home and every individual are supposed to be inviolate, where only the law has a right to administer justice.

But members of the mob must also pay. They, too, must suffer. They, too, are suffering.

When these hoodlums go to bed at night, they are no more free than their victims. They, too, live in terror.<sup>78</sup>

What they must fear, Cole surmised, was that a knock on the door would be the FBI or the State Bureau of Investigation.<sup>79</sup> They must live in fear, Cole felt, that a fellow Klansman would turn them in, that one of their victims had recognized them, that they might lose their job due to his report.<sup>80</sup> Cole directed questions to his readers – and those Klansmen who were readers:

“How much do members of the Sheriff’s Department know? What does the SBI know? What does the FBI know? If they come tonight and point the finger at me, what shall I answer?”

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> “They, Too, Must Suffer,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 1, 1952, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

How much dare I tell?

Has somebody in the game ‘spilled the beans’ and put the  
the finger on me? What will my children think? What will  
my neighbors think? What will my church think?<sup>81</sup>

There was a “way to clear their skirts and keep their names out of the public eye,”  
Cole maintained. He offered himself as an “intermediary between such persons who wish  
to place themselves on the right side before it is too late.”<sup>82</sup> Cole never reported whether  
anyone took him up on the offer.

In the February 6, 1951 issue, Cole polled ministers in the Whiteville area about  
the binding nature of an oath, especially the oath of one Klansman to another. “Is an oath  
sacred only when given in a good cause?” the front-page, banner story asked. ““An oath  
should not be binding when taken in ignorance and misunderstanding to an organization,  
like the Ku Klux Klan, which thrives on fear [and] prejudice,”” the Rev. D. A. Bowles  
answered.<sup>83</sup> The Rev. P. F. Newton hedged a bit, expressing his unfamiliarity with the  
Klan’s oath. He admitted, though, that taking an “ungodly oath” in opposition to the legal  
rights of others would be a “very unholy thing” and could be broken.<sup>84</sup> The article took  
up nearly three-quarters of a page; the ministers quoted universally agreed that an oath, to  
a secret group engaged in activities like the Klan, would have no moral weight.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> “Is An Oath Always Binding? Ministers Give Their Views,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 6, 1952, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. If someone took him up on his offer, it was never revealed.

In an editorial, Cole picked up on the theme, writing that “as we interpret citizenship, the citizen’s first obligation is to law and order.”<sup>86</sup> That obligation, Cole editorialized, implied “an oath of allegiance to his government.”<sup>87</sup> Those who keep an oath to the Klan “are aiding and abetting in mob violence and should welcome the opportunity to break the Klan oath.”<sup>88</sup> Those who broke their oath to the Klan should not be “suffering any pangs of conscience . . . to a cause which is found to have no sacredness.”<sup>89</sup>

*The News-Reporter* editorial writer (probably Thompson) obviously found comparison with fascism relevant – after all, the Second World War had been scarcely over five years – and utilized to it in a February 11 editorial, while overlaying it with a dash of Red Scare.<sup>90</sup> *The News-Reporter* compared the Columbus County “reign of terror” with Al Capone in Chicago and Murder, Incorporated in New York City, calling them all blights.<sup>91</sup> “The sore is ugly, unsightly and painful. It is as objectionable as a boil on the face. But it isn’t peculiar to our area,” in the writer’s view.<sup>92</sup> “The same thinking which produced Hitler’s Brown Shirts, Mussolini’s Black Shirts, and Stalin’s Reds has

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<sup>86</sup> “Is An Oath Sacred?,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 6, 1952, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> “Not A Local Issue,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 11, 1952, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

produced a poison which has found expression in mob violence.”<sup>93</sup> *The News-Reporter* found little solace . . . that other communities suffer” as well, noting, “The only comfort worth slumbering on will come when the sore has been pricked and the pus is let out.”<sup>94</sup> In the meantime, “[f]ascist thinking must be battled on all levels.”<sup>95</sup>

**An “Extra.”** “Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation today bagged ten alleged Columbus County floggers,” *The News-Reporter* told its readers in a special, extra edition on February 16, 1952, under a huge headline: “10 Floggers Nabbed.”<sup>96</sup> The banner story continued, “Operating in the cloud-darkened dawn of Saturday morning, between 35 and 40 FBI agents swooped across the Flair Bluff countryside and picked up” the 10 Klansmen “without difficulty.”<sup>97</sup> The story was part of an “extra” edition of *The News-Reporter*, published on Saturday, February 16, hours after the FBI raids were staged.<sup>98</sup>

The Klansmen were charged in the case of Dorothy and Ben Grainger, flogged on October 6, 1951, a case that had been kept quiet by the FBI.<sup>99</sup> Ben Grainger was forced to remove his clothes and Klansmen in their robes and hoods beat him until he defecated,

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> “10 Floggers Nabbed,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, Extra, February 16, 1952, 1.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.



according to *The News-Reporter* account.<sup>100</sup> The couple was taken across state lines into South Carolina.<sup>101</sup>

The Klansmen were “marched, handcuffed, between at least two agents” to be “advised of the charges against” them.<sup>102</sup> The 10 men, some of them “unshaven” and all of them “crestfallen,” did not appear to recognize each other, according to *The News-Reporter*.<sup>103</sup> Two of those arrested were former police officers: Early Brooks, former chief of police at Fair Bluff and Horace Strickland, a former Tabor City policeman.<sup>104</sup> Brooks was Grand Kleagle of the Fair Bluff Klavern, disbanded by Hamilton, and was “alleged to have approached the Rev. Eugene Purcell and warned him” against allowing the African-American quartet to sing at his church.<sup>105</sup>

Thirteen flogging incidents were including in the indictments, *The News-Reporter* indicated.<sup>106</sup> The newspaper detailed, briefly, the incidents, starting with the Evergreen Flowers beating in January 1951.<sup>107</sup> Cole also reported several incidents of “telephone-users” with “stalled automobiles,” who were dissuaded when they saw potential victims display firearms. One potential victim let his bathrobe “accidentally” gap open, revealing

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. Brooks was also a one-time lightning rod salesman, Brooks was a township constable at the time of his arrest.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

a .38 in his belt, *The News-Reporter* stated.<sup>108</sup> Whiteville, Cole wrote, was “shaken” when Dick Best was beaten and the town’s windows were “rattled” when Rev. Purcell was threatened.<sup>109</sup> *The News-Reporter* also published details of a drive-by shooting at an African-American family’s home.<sup>110</sup> At least 18 bullets “rained” into the house; James Stevens and his family were instructed to leave town within 10 days.<sup>111</sup> “Stevens’ testimony in a whiskey case one day earlier may have been a motive,’ the newspaper reported.<sup>112</sup>

In a rare front-page editorial, and beneath a photo of a Klan sign, Cole warned that just “the cessation of violence . . . is not the answer to the county’s present predicament.” He added that, it does not mark the goal which must be obtained . . . to [vaccinate] against this cancerous growth upon the body of society.” Rather, all those “guilty of these atrocities must be ferreted out . . . and punished. Cole concluded,

Over the platform at the great Klan rally last August and on the stickers, which this gang of nightriders plastered on cars and store windows, were the words, “Yesterday, Today and Forever.” Only when “Yesterday is left and “Today and Forever” have been deleted permanently from the Ku Klux Klan activities in this county will the task of our citizenry be accomplished.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid,

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> “Delete Three Words,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 16, 1952, 1 Elsewhere on the front page, the newspaper reported on the arrest of Grand Dragon Bill Hendrix of Florida for “sending defamatory material through” the U.S. mail.

Three days later, in *The News-Reporter's* banner story of its regular Monday edition, the U.S. district attorney announced he would not be seeking the death penalty in the cases.<sup>114</sup> Work was progressing on another 11 cases, the article related.<sup>115</sup> A photo of some of the 10 men arrested in the first wave of arrests was spread across half the front page: "No longer hooded," the caption read.<sup>116</sup>

**The task ahead.** "The unmasking of 10 former Klansmen," Cole wrote in a February 21 editorial, was "merely the first step along the road back to security and orderly existence for Columbus County."<sup>117</sup> He urged readers to "take a second look at any denials" from Hamilton about Klan complicity in the violence.<sup>118</sup> "There is one thing he cannot deny: 12 people were not flogged with ropes and pieces of machine belting in the six months before he spat, with pseudo-piety, his doctrine of hate and prejudice in a dusty field . . . [and] that such floggings did occur in the following six months."<sup>119</sup>

Cole looked deeper at the cause of the Klansman's enmity, wondering whether "education and religion" had failed them.<sup>120</sup> "Have members of this movement and their sympathizers been neglected by society in such a way as to cause a perverted sense of

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<sup>114</sup> "Death Penalty Will Not Be Asked For Floggers," *Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 18, 1952, 1. The major stories from the February 16 Extra were reprinted in this issue as well; rural subscribers had not received a copy of the special edition.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> "The Task Ahead," editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 21, 1952. In a second editorial, Cole took to task a letter writer who signed himself unashamed to be a Klansman, but who "forgot to exercise his duty as a good citizen, unafraid and unlashd, to say where he stands, by signing his name."

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

human values?” he wondered.<sup>121</sup> “Has any agency really tried to help these people in the proper manner?”<sup>122</sup> He urged establishing a “council on family relations” and bringing the parents of juvenile delinquents into court, something that California was experimenting with at the time.<sup>123</sup> He felt it worthwhile to employ an investigator to look into the “cause of the unwholesome atmosphere which the Klan claimed it sought to correct.”<sup>124</sup>

“Maybe our answer will be that we can’t afford this sort of program, that we haven’t time to attempt more than enforcing the letter of the law,” he added.<sup>125</sup> “But it won’t be an adequate answer.”<sup>126</sup> It won’t alter the fact that we haven’t hesitated to ask the Federal Government, the State Government, and the county to spend many, many thousands of dollars” tracking down the nightriders.<sup>127</sup> He concluded:

Mob violence must go. The contemptible cowards who hide behind a hood and robe to deprive men of their liberties, even if only for an hour, must be caught and punished. But an enlightened citizenry must do more than rest easy when that task is accomplished. With the dawn of another day of orderly existence must come a program, intelligently planned and efficiently executed, to encourage slum-dwellers among our rural population to develop a sense of responsibility as to their duties as parents and citizens. Failing that, little will have been

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

learned from this horrible experience with hoodlumism.<sup>128</sup>

**Arrests keep coming.** A floodgate of arrests and indictments seemed to have opened. On February 28, another dozen men were arrested, this time in Chadbourn in connection with an attack on Esther Lee Floyd.<sup>129</sup> Cole called it a “curtain-raiser” to the unfolding drama” of the Klan’s dismantling.<sup>130</sup> Police officials “smiled broadly” when asked whether more arrests were expected.<sup>131</sup> Cole reported that “the Ku Klux Klan nightmare in Columbus County appeared certain to be bared in minutest detail.”<sup>132</sup> Police had followed supposed Klansmen, *The News-Reporter* related, and cases had been built carefully as “positive proof” was sought, rather than “the unsupported identification of a frightened victim.”<sup>133</sup> Four days later, *The News-Reporter* stated a federal grand jury in Raleigh had indicted 10 ex-members of the Klan on kidnapping and conspiracy charges.<sup>134</sup> Several of them had been charged earlier after the first FBI round-up, but others were newly indicted Klansmen.<sup>135</sup> Three days after that, another half dozen men, three of them from Whiteville, and one a second former Fair Bluff police chief, were

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid. Klansmen did not get the message, it seemed. Warning notes – “Beware of the KKK. Join or Else” – were scattered about Whiteville later in the week. “KKK Or Pranksters Take Time To Scatter Warning Notes About City,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 25, 1952, 1.

<sup>129</sup> “Twelve Men Accused in Chadbourn Flogging Case,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 28, 1952, 1.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> “Federal Grand Jury At Raleigh Indicts 10 Ex-Members of Klan,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, March 3, 1952, 1.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

arrested, some of them hauled out of their beds.<sup>136</sup> Warrants for an additional four were being temporarily withheld.<sup>137</sup> A semi-pro baseball player, Floyd Rogers, was also arrested. Rogers was also a sergeant first class in the Fair Bluff Battery of the National Guard, according to the article.<sup>138</sup>

In another front-page story, *The News-Reporter* noted that the Associated Press sent wire photos from Whiteville taken of the roundup of Klan floggers.<sup>139</sup> The photos were sent nationwide, via New York, and appeared in newspapers across the country. “Most of the pictures seen in the newspapers today were transmitted over telephone lines by means of special equipment,” according to the article.<sup>140</sup> The photos were taken by a Columbus County resident, Rudy Faircloth, who was listed as an AP photographer.<sup>141</sup> In addition, journalists and photographers from the *Raleigh News and Observer*, *Wilmington Star-News*, and *Greensboro Daily News* and a reporter, Noel Yancey, of the Associated Press, covered the Klan events in person.<sup>142</sup> A staff reporter from the *Charlotte Observer* could not make it in time for the arrests and press conference because of a snowstorm in Charlotte.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> “Crackdown Nets Six More Alleged Ku Klux Members,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, March 6, 1952, 1.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> “AP Sends Photos From City By Wire,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 28, 1952, 1.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> “Newspaper Men Here For Story,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 28, 1952, 1.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

While *The News-Reporter* seemed to take pride in the attention the Klan arrests was receiving, it was miffed over the area's portrayal in *Time* magazine.<sup>144</sup> "Maybe Time knows more than we do here on the scene," the editorial charged, "but we have been unable to report that prayers were said and hymns were sung between licks as nightriders flogged their victims."<sup>145</sup> The writer continued, "There has hardly existed either the character or religious fervor among suspected floggers to give credence to such a story."<sup>146</sup> *The News-Reporter* thought this example of dramatizing a story cast "skepticism upon its reporting of other events."<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, if it can operate from New York and scoop the boys at home, it deserves all the medals and none will be left for those who got scooped."<sup>148</sup>

The week was a feast of Klan editorials. In another one, the newspaper found itself baffled by Grand Dragon Hendrix's support of the proposed anti-mask law in Virginia.<sup>149</sup> "[W]e fail to grasp the reason or need for Grand Dragon Hendrix or any other leader announcing his enthusiasm for a law that would unmask members of the Klan," *The News-Reporter* stated. "If they are sincere, why not adopt the practice of revealing

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<sup>144</sup> "Time Out For 'Time,'" editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 28, 1952, 4.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> "Should Be Accommodated," editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 28, 1952, 4.

their rosters and unveiling their faces without the compulsion of law?”<sup>150</sup> *The News-Reporter*’s editorial writer, possibly Thompson, made a comparison with bare feet.

Somehow this doesn’t make sense. For example, if we preferred to go barefooted we wouldn’t feel that it was necessary for us to come out in support of a law to make us go barefooted. We’d simply start going barefooted, something we are permitted to do under the present law.

But maybe a warped mind couldn’t be expected to understand why a Klan leader would favor a law forcing the Klan to do what it already has the privilege of doing.<sup>151</sup>

Some in the county were taking advantage of the Klan uprising for other reasons, *The News-Reporter* claimed in another February 28 editorial. Just before the sheriff announced plans to “expose and prosecute those guilty of writing, circulating, and mailing threatening notes,” presumably Klansmen, the writer of one was “tracked down.”<sup>152</sup> The writer turned out to be the man’s sister.<sup>153</sup> According to the editorial, a flood of tears and begging kept her name from being released, and that drew a stinging comment by *The News-Reporter*.<sup>154</sup> “But enough is enough,” the writer began. “Even if such irresponsible persons cannot be prosecuted under any known law, they should be exposed and held up to the ridicule of the public. And that is what we believe ought to happen to all such persons in the future.”<sup>155</sup> The editorial was even more pointed:

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> “Enough Is Enough,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 28, 1952, 4.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.



A half-dozen or so notes, which could hardly be the work of the Ku Klux Klan, were spread around the city during the past weekend. There was nothing funny about them, and whoever is responsible was not at all funny. But if he is caught, the maximum penalty of the law should be imposed, irrespective of the age, family relationship or excuse offered. Actually there is no excuse for such not-so-funny notes. There isn't a school boy who can write or type who doesn't know the seriousness of the present tense situation. If there is, he shouldn't be running at large. Hence, representatives of the law will not be doing their duty if they do not make every effort to catch the individuals responsible and then expose and prosecute to the limit . . . Enough is enough.<sup>156</sup>

Reeling from the arrests, Hamilton lashed out at the nation's newspapers at a rally in South Carolina, according to *The News-Reporter's* March 6, 1952 issue.<sup>157</sup> It was the Imperial Wizard's first public appearance since the mass arrests. "When the truth is out on those floggings in North Carolina, you'll find few Klansmen connected with them," Hamilton claimed. "I have personally tossed out . . . and disbanded Klansmen because they didn't live up to the ideals of the Klan."<sup>158</sup> Hamilton then added, "I will protect God's House to the last drop of my blood and that isn't true of some of our preachers. See them on Sunday wearing robes in church and then watch their actions on the other six days of the week."<sup>159</sup> According to *The News-Reporter*, Solicitor Malcolm Seawell of Robeson County declared that no one could belong to the Klan in his county.<sup>160</sup> "He dug up an old carpetbagger and scalawag law to clamp down on the Klan," Hamilton said,

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> "Klan Leader Attacks Nation's Newspapers For Stories On KKK," *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, March 6, 1952, 4.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

then added, “[b]ut nowhere in the constitution of North Carolina does it say that the Klan is banned. And the attorney general of that state has proven me correct in this argument.”<sup>161</sup>

**Extravagance.** “Somebody is being extravagant in the extreme,” Cole wrote in a March 17 editorial.<sup>162</sup> Evidently five Klan handbills were slipped into his car the previous week. “Needless to say there is hardly a more unlikely prospect for conversion to the Klan philosophy of violence,” he added.<sup>163</sup> “We don’t object to the handbills, but it seems such a tragic waste of paper!” the editorial concluded.<sup>164</sup>

The third Fair Bluff police chief, Jack Ashley, was indicted in connection with two floggings on April 1, perhaps appropriately, and removed from office the next day, according to *The News-Reporter* in an April 3 front-page article.<sup>165</sup> Night officer L. D. Duncan was appointed as the new chief.<sup>166</sup> Early Brooks and Frank Lewis were the other two police chiefs indicted for Klan activities.<sup>167</sup> Legal maneuvers commenced, *News-Reporter* readers learned in another front-page article, something they should have expected if they had kept the editorial clipping from January 21 predicting such an

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> “Wasted Paper,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, March 17, 1952, 4.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> “Duncan Succeeds Ashley As Chief,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, April 3, 1952, 1.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

eventuality.<sup>168</sup> While the case would likely be tried in Columbus County, the jury would be selected from an adjoining county.<sup>169</sup>

Klansmen in Whiteville seemed to have a real enthusiasm for distributing flyers and stickers; they handed out thousands during the Klan campaign. And they had a real talent for avoiding detection, according to a *News-Reporter* editorial on April 7, discussing a “phantom’s most recent visit.”<sup>170</sup> “The ‘Invisible Empire’ must have invisible distributions of its literature,” Cole (probably) maintained, taking a poke at probable police involvement with or overlooking of dissemination of the Klan’s literature.<sup>171</sup> “Despite the fact that many hundreds of handbills and stickers have been placed in cars, under doors and on windows, not once has the distributor or distributors been seen by any policeman.” The “ghost-like quality” of the Klansmen was “comparable to that of ‘The Shadow’ of radio fame.”<sup>172</sup> How Klansmen could pass out its materials without detection at all “is a major mystery, and particularly so since the occasions have been so numerous.”<sup>173</sup>

Judge Chester Morris was assigned by the North Carolina Supreme Court to serve as presiding judge of both the regular and a special term of Superior Court to try some of the Ku Klux Klan flogging cases, *The News-Reporter* revealed in its April 10 banner

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<sup>168</sup> “Trial Date, Place And Jury Unsettled In Ku Klux Case,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, April 3, 1952, 1.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> “Ghosts In The Night,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, April 7, 1952, 4.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

story on the front page.<sup>174</sup> Morris was from Currituck, North Carolina, about 275 miles from Whiteville, chosen presumably because of his unfamiliarity with any of the individuals in the case.<sup>175</sup> Columbus County solicitor Moore filed a motion for a change of venue after indicting 25 men in 44 cases.<sup>176</sup> Judge William Hatch of Raleigh continued the motion and decided the trial judge, Judge Morris, should handle the motion.<sup>177</sup> A Columbus County jury pool was activated in case it was needed, the newspaper reported.<sup>178</sup>

**A bombshell.** Defense attorneys for some of the Klansmen “threw a bombshell into court proceedings,” moving to quash indictments against the KKK members because the grand jury had been “illegally constituted” and had been set up in June, instead of May, as the law prescribed.<sup>179</sup> Judge Williams reserved judgment, according to *The News-Reporter*.<sup>180</sup> The cases of 13 defendants were consolidated, over the objections of one of the attorneys, since all the accused were allegedly involved in the attack on Woodrow Johnson on December 8, 1951.<sup>181</sup> The judge also approved Moore’s request

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<sup>174</sup> “Flogging Cases May Be Tried April 28; Morris To Preside,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, April 10, 1952 1.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> “Defense Claims Grand Jury Illegally Constituted In Columbus Klan Cases,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, April 28, 1952 1.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

for a special jury pool to be used from nearby New Hanover County, although the trial would still be held in Whiteville, the county seat of Columbus County.<sup>182</sup>

In *The News-Reporter's* next edition, that of May 1, "a one-week special term of Superior Court ended with startling suddenness" as Judge Williams indicated he needed more time to study the defense motion to quash the grand jury indictments.<sup>183</sup> The technical legal maneuverings drew editorial comment from Cole in the same issue.<sup>184</sup> He praised defense attorneys' efforts on behalf of their clients, noting that the law was being used, perhaps, to protect men accused of depriving others of "their freedom and actually [using] physical force in administering mob justice."<sup>185</sup> The irony of the situation was not lost on Cole: "Hours were devoted to the protection of the rights of the defendants. There was no effort to brush aside the contentions that the . . . grand jury . . . had been constituted illegally."<sup>186</sup> He added that, "no right of the defendants [were] denied."<sup>187</sup> The Klansmen were guaranteed trial by jurors "who can be seen and questioned."<sup>188</sup> This was, Cole wrote, "in sharp contrast to the treatment accorded the . . . victims of mob violence."<sup>189</sup> "It is conclusive evidence," Cole concluded, "that even those who are

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> "Ku Klux Trials Delayed White Jurist Studies Motion To Quash Indictments," *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 1, 1952, 1.

<sup>184</sup> "Effective Demonstration," editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 1, 1952, 4.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

accused of denying such rights and privileges to other human beings are not themselves denied the protection of the law.”<sup>190</sup>

Judge Williams granted the defense motion, *The News-Reporter* detailed in its May 5 edition, ruling that the previous grand jury had been illegally constituted and dismissed the indictments against all the accused Klansmen.<sup>191</sup> The judge “chided” the North Carolina General Assembly for passing a law that muddied the waters and created the legal quagmire in Columbus County.<sup>192</sup> A new grand jury was “immediately organized” by the judge.<sup>193</sup> Potential jurors were asked whether they had ever been a member of the Klan.<sup>194</sup> According to *The News-Reporter*’s account, Judge Williams did not mention the Klan cases specifically, but “constantly” referred to the “invasion of human rights” and citizens’ rights to be free.<sup>195</sup> The “legal snarl” wiped the slate clean, New grand jury indictments were immediately filed.

**Turning on each other.** *The News-Reporter* front-page columns, once filled with accounts of mob violence, were now filled instead with stories of the trials of those involved in the floggings. And, cornered, the Klansmen began to break ranks, even turn on each other. Former police chief and grand kleagle Brooks changed his plea to “no contest” in a “dramatic” courtroom development just as his victim prepared to testify.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> “New Grand Jury Formed As Old Body Is Dismissed,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 5, 1952, 1.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>196</sup> “Early Brooks Changes Plea to Nolo Contendere,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 8, 1952, 1.

“A murmur swept the courtroom and Brooks immediately left the seat he had occupied as one of the defendants,” *The News-Reporter* related.<sup>197</sup> The victim, Woodrow Johnson, “pointed his finger” at another of the defendants, identifying him, along with Brooks, as the two men who had “lured him into the hands of the nightriders.”<sup>198</sup> Johnson testified that Barfield “grabbed him around the neck” and warned him not to “holler” or he would be killed.<sup>199</sup>

**Convictions.** “Six days and two evenings of toil in a hot courtroom came to an end shortly after 9 o’clock Saturday night [May 10, 1952],” *The News-Reporter* stated on May 12.<sup>200</sup> Eleven of thirteen men were convicted after almost four hours of deliberation.<sup>201</sup> The jurors returned to the courtroom, “tired but unruffled,” to find the defendants guilty of conspiracy to assault and assault.<sup>202</sup> They dismissed two kidnapping charges and acquitted two of the Klansmen on trial.<sup>203</sup> Four road-gang sentences were immediately handed down, while seven men were only fined by Judge Williams, who called them all “organized outlaws and hoodlums.”<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. At a session earlier in the week, another seven men pleaded no contest, according to *The News-Reporter’s* story.

<sup>200</sup> “11 Sentenced In Klan Cases; Investigation To Continue,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 12, 1952, 1.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

A “flurry of excitement swept the courtroom” when Ray Kelly’s sentence was imposed.<sup>205</sup> There were “frenzied sobs” from family and friends and one called out, “That’s what you get for trying to do right.”<sup>206</sup> One “elderly man [an epileptic] . . . went into convulsions, his arms moving in frantic jerks.”<sup>207</sup> Kelly was given a suspended sentence after the judge took into account a coronary condition.<sup>208</sup>

When a defense attorney “appeared to be heading toward a statement of justification for flogging” one of the victims, the judge cut him off, saying, “there’s absolutely no right for anybody to do what they did to that man.” Appeals were unlikely, *The News-Reporter* stated in an adjoining article.<sup>209</sup> Three days after that article, *The News-Reporter* carried a banner story trumpeting federal penitentiary terms for half a dozen floggers, including Brooks.<sup>210</sup> Three Klansmen broke their oaths, the oaths Cole had debated in his news columns weeks earlier, and turned state’s evidence in exchange for probation.<sup>211</sup>

*The News-Reporter* chastised one of the defense lawyers, J. R. Nance of Fayetteville, in his statement to the jury. Nance remarked, “If the good people of Whiteville knew Woodrow Johnson [one of the victims] as you and I now know him, there wouldn’t have been 40 [Klansmen] out there; there would have been hundreds, and

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> “Appeal Unlikely,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 12, 1952, 1.

<sup>210</sup> “Six Floggers Given Penitentiary Terms,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 15, 1952, 1.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.



I'd have been one of them.”<sup>212</sup> *The News-Reporter*, probably Thompson, called it a “scurrilous attack,” but not just against Johnson; it also besmirched Whiteville. “We contend that there aren’t ‘hundreds’ of people in this community who would participate in or go out to see any mob take the law into its own hands at a lonely cemetery or anywhere else . . . [or] countenance or condone the brutal beating of any man, no matter how sorry or how low-down.”<sup>213</sup> In the same editorial, *The News-Reporter* disagreed with the sheriff who felt an impartial jury could be obtained in Columbus County, calling such a thing “distant from the truth.”<sup>214</sup>

The arithmetic is simple. There were 1,562 members of the organization, if reports are approximately correct. Add the wives of these members and the total is 3,124. Most couples have at least two out of their four parents living, and you have another 3,124, making a total of 6,248. You can add another 3,124 from the brothers and sisters of these KKK members, raising the total to 9,372. A man who doesn’t have at least two personal friends, who would be embarrassed to return a verdict against him, is pretty friendless, so you can increase the total to 12,496.<sup>215</sup>

“The chain of friendships, kinship and organization connections could even be carried beyond this point,” the editorial continued. “However this should be sufficient to convince anybody, who seeks the truth . . . ”<sup>216</sup>

**The Imperial Wizard falls.** Imperial Wizard Thomas Hamilton returned to Columbus County, *The News-Reporter* told its readers on May 26, only this time it was

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<sup>212</sup> “Malicious Slander,” editorial, *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 15, 1952, 4.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

“through the persuasive powers of the law.”<sup>217</sup> Hamilton, however, had led police on a hunt, *The News-Reporter* related, apparently having “gotten wind” of warrants about to be brought against him.<sup>218</sup> He “had flown the coop deliberately,” according to *The News-Reporter*. Initially, he went to Augusta, Georgia from his Leesville, South Carolina home.<sup>219</sup> Evidently, North Carolina journalists had accompanied police attempting to apprehend the fleeing Imperial Wizard. “North Carolina newsmen,” *The News-Reporter* observed, “were on the scene as the sometimes comical and sometimes frantic search progressed.”<sup>220</sup> They were “shocked by the indifference of South Carolina newsmen to the story and amazed by the sympathetic attitude” of South Carolinians.<sup>221</sup> Eventually, Hamilton agreed to surrender to authorities at his attorney’s office.<sup>222</sup>

When Hamilton was brought to court to face charges, Cole reported on the scene:

In sharp contrast to the 5,000 persons who attended his initial Klan rally last August, less than 25 people were on hand to catch a glimpse of him as he appeared at the courthouse about 10:30 o’clock this morning to accept service on warrants charging him with conspiracy to kidnap and conspiracy to assault in connection with two Columbus floggings.

Dressed in a natty navy blue suit, Hamilton made bond of \$5,000 in each of the two cases . . .

Unrobed and without any white-robed “Imperial Guard,” Hamilton looked like an average, unspectacular businessman.

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<sup>217</sup> “Imperial Wizard Hamilton Posts Bond,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 26, 1952, 1.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

The 44-year-old Hamilton, plump and bespectacled, surrendered in the office of his lawyer in Florence, S.C. . . . <sup>223</sup>

*The News-Reporter's* account sketched the entire history of the Klan's activities, principally in Columbus County.<sup>224</sup> Hamilton was linked directly by several ex-Klansmen to acts of violence, either by authorizing them specifically or more vaguely instructing that some situation be dealt with "immediately."<sup>225</sup> One former acolyte, ex-Fair Bluff police chief Lewis, admitted to being "swayed by Hamilton's vitriolic speech at the first Klan cross-burning."<sup>226</sup> Later repenting, he said "ruefully" that "I wished I'd took a rock and knocked him off that stand."<sup>227</sup> Hamilton, *The News-Reporter* mentioned, had "always . . . contended that the only beatings the Klan condone are those which occur 'at the ballot boxes'" and that "disgruntled" people – and non-Klansmen – had "carried out floggings under the insignia of the Klan."<sup>228</sup> According to *The News-Reporter* story, SBI officials were looking into a dozen other flogging cases, with more arrests expected "momentarily."<sup>229</sup> The article, though without a byline, bore the verbal mark of Cole: "while the big boss Klansman faces arrest, the hunt for other members of the hooded order is far from over," was one telling passage.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid. A photo of Hamilton, "unrobed and with no more glamour than the average John Doe," was printed adjacent to the banner story.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

At the federal trial in Wilmington, Judge Don Gilliam, Cole reported, remarked that ““this grand dragon is more interested in the money he was taking out of it [the Klan] than in improving morals” of the Klan’s victims.”<sup>231</sup> James Nance, a defense attorney for some of the already convicted Klansmen, agreed, explaining, ““I have the idea that this Hamilton is building up the invisible empire for his economic benefit.””<sup>232</sup>

In the next issue, Cole took an editorial swing at Hamilton. He termed him an “average John Doe,” once “stripped of the colorful robe he wears . . . [and] without the ‘imperial guard’ which usually surrounds him at rallies.”<sup>233</sup> Hamilton “excites no more curiosity than a grease-encrusted dishrag . . . simply a man under suspicion of violating the code of society.”<sup>234</sup> It was “in the role of an average John Doe that he must be considered when he comes to trial . . . and, if convicted, punished like an ordinary John Doe.”<sup>235</sup> All Cole’s invective was not leveled at the Klan’s leader.

Some people, seeking an excuse for the error of their own ways, may seek to place all the blame on Hamilton for their night-riding activities. But nobody can be sold a bill of goods who isn’t in the mood to buy. No con game ever worked unless there was a second party with larceny in his heart. There wouldn’t be any bootlegger if there were no consumer.<sup>236</sup>

Hamilton may not have taken his situation seriously enough. He made comments in a speech in South Carolina that authorities “can never kill the Klan” and “any man who

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> “Just Like The Average John Doe,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 29, 1952, 4.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

gets on the stand and lies about me . . . I'll never forget that man and neither will the people of the organization."<sup>237</sup> North Carolina Attorney General Harry McMullan took that as an "attempt to intimidate witnesses" and said that he would be "vigorously" prosecuted by Columbus County authorities despite those threats.<sup>238</sup> *The News-Reporter* article did not indicate whether McMullan would prosecute Hamilton for his comments.<sup>239</sup> At the same speech, at Deesville, South Carolina, Hamilton declared he kept guns in his home and his car to protect himself and his family.<sup>240</sup> According to the article, "The Imperial Wizard was not quoted as explaining whether he kept the guns to protect himself from officers of the law or from his fellow Klansmen."<sup>241</sup>

Elsewhere in the same issue, Cole confronted Hamilton's "Strange Reasoning" in an editorial.

Mothers of boys who lost their lives during Hitler's efforts to conquer the world will regard with skepticism the statement of Klan leader Thos. L. Hamilton that "Adolph Hitler was a white man fighting for white principles" because "he was trying to run the Jews out. His sympathizers . . . might think that Mr. Hamilton and his kind are a little like Hitler in their thinking. At any rate, some members of the Klan organization seized and whipped people as did Hitler's cohorts.

Mr. Hamilton is consistent . . . His speech at Spartanburg ten days ago was against Negroes, Jews, newspapers and "spineless two-by-four newspaper reporters." If we were among those he had in mind, we

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<sup>237</sup> "Hamilton Accused Of Threat," *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, June 5, 1952, 1.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

feel distinctly honored.<sup>242</sup>

**A “trying” time for Hamilton.** Demonstrating the political ramifications Klan activities was generating statewide, North Carolina governor Kerr Scott assigned an old political foe, State Sen. Junius Powell, to assist Moore in prosecuting Hamilton and 24 other reputed Klansmen.<sup>243</sup> Hamilton was charged in only two of the cases – that of Woodrow Johnson and Evergreen Flowers.<sup>244</sup> Another six cases under investigation were expected to produce arrests, *The News-Reporter* revealed in its June 16 edition.<sup>245</sup> Four days later, that number was significantly increased. It was as if events were piling up too fast for *The News-Reporter* to sift through. Fifty more arrests were “predicted,” *The News-Reporter* revealed, bringing the total number of men indicted to 100. An additional thirty-six new cases would generate indictments, according to *The News-Reporter*.<sup>246</sup> Twenty-two men “not previously identified” were arrested, including the man whose tobacco field was used for the Klan’s first major rally.<sup>247</sup> A total of fifty-five warrants were actually issued and the latest batch solved all the county’s “known” incidents of violence by nightriders.<sup>248</sup> On an inside page, *The News-Reporter* reported that eight men

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<sup>242</sup> “Strange Reasoning,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, June 5, 1952, Sec. 2, 1.

<sup>243</sup> “Stage Set For Trial Of Klan Leader; Senator Powell Will Aid Prosecution,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter* June 16, 1952, 1. There were actually thirty-nine indictments sought against the twenty-five men.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> “Warrants Issued In 6 Klan Cases,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, June 19, 1952, 1.

<sup>246</sup> “Fifty More Klan Arrests Seen; Hamilton, 24 Others Indicted,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, June 23, 1952, 1.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> “Warrants Issued For 26 Former Klansmen,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, June 26, 1952, 1.

were freed by a Dillon, South Carolina grand jury that refused to indict them.<sup>249</sup> They had been accused of flogging an elderly married couple for keeping their gas station open on Sunday and for not attending church.<sup>250</sup> This drew a stinging editorial from Cole.

“Suffice it to say that the Dillon County grand jury follows a pattern all too familiar to South Carolina,” he opined.<sup>251</sup> A grand jury in Horry County, adjacent to Columbus County across the state line, had acted similarly, Cole pointed out, refusing to indict Klansmen for violating the anti-mask laws.<sup>252</sup> “Is the experience of Horry and Dillon typical of what happens to counties where the Klan has taken over and dominates the life and economy? Was this to have been the fate of counties in North Carolina?”<sup>253</sup> Cole admitted that “one cannot go behind the scenes and ascertain just what information the Dillon County grand jury had, but, “whatever the facts,” Cole concluded, “Dillon County’s action offers a sharp contrast to that of the [North Carolina] grand juries, where good citizens saw their duty and did it.”<sup>254</sup>

In the July 10 edition, the SBI brought charges against three Hallsboro men and one Whiteville man in cases involving Clayton Sellers and Lee Tyson.<sup>255</sup> Several other victims were mentioned for the first time, though without elaboration: J. Melton Russ, Lawyer Jernigan, and Greer P. Wright. According to *The News-Reporter*, seventy

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<sup>249</sup> “Eight Freed In Dillon Flogging,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter* June 26, 1952, 2.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> “Dillon Offers Sharp Contrast,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, June 26, Sec. B, 1.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> “Four New Men Are Accused In Klan Mob Violence Cases,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 10, 1952, 1.

defendants were involved in 178 cases brought by various law enforcement agencies, up to that point.<sup>256</sup>

**A mammoth trial.** Through July, the indictments kept coming, culminating in a mammoth trial of 163 cases against eighty-four defendants in late July.<sup>257</sup> The drama was somewhat diminished as the “Klan’s house of cards kept tumbling” with the “most resounding crash” coming with Hamilton’s decision to plead guilty to assault and conspiracy to assault,” a “complete reversal from his claim of innocence.”<sup>258</sup> Other Klansmen began changing their pleas as well, mainly to no contest.<sup>259</sup> There was fall-out from the trial. The Whiteville police chief resigned after it came out during testimony that he had been a Klan member in the early stages of its organization in the area, although before he became chief.<sup>260</sup> He claimed to have attended only one meeting.<sup>261</sup>

In a fourth front-page article on the Klan, Cole described of Hamilton’s dreams of a “Klan empire powerful enough to control the state.”<sup>262</sup> One witness quoted Hamilton saying, “If you get enough Klansmen, no Klansmen will be convicted.”<sup>263</sup> Hamilton’s

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> “Hamilton Pleads Guilty In Court Here,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 24, 1952, 1.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> “Chief Of Police Resigns Position,” *Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 24, 1952, 1. His resignation – and the reason for it – may explain why Klan literature could have been distributed repeatedly throughout Whiteville without detection.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. In another story, the grand jury that acted on ninety-six indictments in two days recommended an all-night patrol of the county, to help guard against nightriding activities. “Grand Jury Recommends All-Night County Patrol,” *Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 24, 1952, 1.

<sup>262</sup> “Klan Leader’s Dream Of Political Empire Fades Away,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 24, 1952, 1.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.



dream evaporated as witness after witness chronicled his instructions to assault “helpless victims.”<sup>264</sup>

**Nearing the end for Hamilton.** In *The News-Reporter*’s July 28 issue, an article was published, containing miscellaneous facts and observations about the ongoing trial.<sup>265</sup> According to the story, there were twenty-two FBI cases and 187 SBI cases against Klansmen.<sup>266</sup> Solicitor Clifton Moore was named “Tar Heel of the Week” by the *News and Observer* for his efforts at the trial.<sup>267</sup> “Rumors do not constitute evidence,” readers were reminded, and arrests do not necessarily mean guilt. However, *The News-Reporter* continued, “So far as the evidence has disclosed, no individual, who is not a member of the Klan or in some way implicated, has been accused . . . [T]o round up so many men without embarrassing several innocent persons is a remarkable achievement.”<sup>268</sup> Curiously, the article observed that, “The law does not ordinarily accuse, indict and try defendants without giving them a chance to employ counsel and prepare a defense, if they so desire.”<sup>269</sup>

The Klan trial spurred *The News-Reporter* to a flurry of editorials in late July and early August. Writing just before Hamilton’s sentencing, Cole (probably) termed him a “pitiful figure.” Hamilton was “[n]o longer arrogant and abusive, no longer defiant and denunciatory, no longer shouting hate while uttering pious and hypocritical prayers.”

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> “Ku Klux Klan Trial Sidelights,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 28, 1952, 4.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. The word “ordinarily” and its practical application would lead the Supreme Court in the 1960s to rule that the right to counsel and a defense was a constitutional right.

[T]he Klan leader appeared to have come to the end of his rope.

Whatever had motivated him, whether money or fanaticism, the ex-grocer had rise to notoriety, if not fame, as the chieftain of a group which defies law and order and sets itself up as the arbiter of community morals.

He was a symbol of dissipated hate – a symbol of heartaches. He was almost friendless, or nearly so, and he knew it. He had brought grief to unsuspecting and misguided followers, and he had brought more heartaches to the people of Columbus County than any man within the memory of the oldest citizen alive today.

If no fines, suspended sentences [or] prison terms were imposed at all in any case against Columbus County's former Klansmen, all of them will have paid a heavy price for listening to the preaching of this disciple of hate. The scars will remain, even after the wound has healed. It is ever thus when a cancerous growth is removed.<sup>270</sup>

In an editorial immediately following, Thompson spoke approvingly of the conclusions of an 18-person grand jury “that there is a substantial weakness in law enforcement in Columbus County.”<sup>271</sup> The grand jury was responding to the attack a man – unrelated to the Klan – who had the misfortune to be assaulted after “officers had retired for the night.”<sup>272</sup> The grand jury recommended a full-time, 24-hour county law enforcement effort, complete with a full-time communications center. “The true facts are that a city of some 10,000 people would not think of hiring only enough policemen to protect the interest of the public during only the daylight hours,” the editorial stated.

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> “Grand Jury Recommendation,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 28, 1952, 4.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

“And, yet, that is the situation in this county.”<sup>273</sup> Thompson urged a reallocation of personnel and resources to make this happen, along with the hiring of one more deputy and the purchase of another “prowl” car.<sup>274</sup> Thompson then drew the comparison with the Klan. “How many heartaches would have been prevented if the first [Klan] flogging crime had been solved! How much better that a few should have been [apprehended and] brought to justice promptly than to have seen the day come when so many of our friends and neighbors were engulfed!”<sup>275</sup>

A few days later, Hamilton was sentenced to four years at hard labor, starting October 1, according to *The News-Reporter*’s July 31 front-page article.<sup>276</sup> Fifteen other Klansmen were given prison sentences varying from eighteen months to six years.<sup>277</sup> Forty-six others drew fines. Judge Williams applauded the generosity of Solicitor Moore and told the convicted defendants that “the law is not vindictive. It does not seek revenge. It is not bloodthirsty.”<sup>278</sup> He told Hamilton that Moore had been very “fair” to him.<sup>279</sup> In a prepared letter to the court, Moore described the Klansmen as “victims of a social disease” and not “criminals in the usual sense.”<sup>280</sup> He said the state was “anxious to

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> “Hamilton Draws Four Years,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 31, 1952, 1. *The News-Reporter* ran a list, taking up a fifth of the front page, detailing all the sentences handed down by the court. “Sentences In Ku Klux Cases,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 31, 1952, 1. Seven men appealed their sentences, which were ultimately upheld. “Circuit Court Denies Appeal Of Klansmen,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 16, 1952, 1.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

rehabilitate this men.”<sup>281</sup> *The News-Reporter* noted that a maximum of 536 years of prison time could have been imposed.<sup>282</sup>

Evidently, not all publicity is good publicity. Admitting “[t]he Klan’s got too bad a name,” Grand Dragon Hendrix announced he was forming an American Confederate Army in Virginia.<sup>283</sup> “[T]he Klan by any other name would have the same odor,” *The News-Reporter* observed. The editorial writer expressed no opposition to any organization, provided it is “wholesome,” even the Klan.<sup>284</sup> However, Cole recommended, “Our sole item of free advice is that Mr. Hendrix post the names of the Virginia membership on the courthouse bulletin board and give the newspapers a copy. If the full membership will stand the light of public opinion and if . . . [they] go about their missions with their faces uncovered, there will be no need to fear his organization.”<sup>285</sup>

**Whisked away.** Except for a small article on an appeal by half a dozen of the convicted Klansmen, the late summer and early fall of 1952 were quiet, at least in the pages of *The News-Reporter* regarding the KKK. A three-column photo of Hamilton, in a double-breasted suit, his face covered with his hat, his hands manacled, almost cowering in a prison cage truck along with several of his fellows, dominated the front page of the October 2, 1952 edition. “Like the lowliest target of his rabble-rousing spleen in the hey-day of his Invisible Empire, Thomas L. Hamilton left Whiteville yesterday in a

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>283</sup> “Triple K By Any Other Name,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, August 14, 1952, 2.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

prison truck cage,” *The News-Reporter* began its banner story.<sup>286</sup> “The once-mighty Klan leader, unsmiling and obviously bitter, was whisked away to begin a four-year sentence to a road gang” at a camp near Wilmington.<sup>287</sup> ““Too many statements have already been made,”” Hamilton was quoted by *The News-Reporter*.<sup>288</sup> “No use to make one with any truth in it.” According to *The News-Reporter* account, he “broke off at that point, obviously implying that the newspapers wouldn’t tell the truth where he was concerned.”<sup>289</sup>

**A final volley.** Before being hauled off to prison, Hamilton “took one last fling at frightening Columbus County,” *The News-Reporter* told its readers.<sup>290</sup> Hamilton sent a letter to State Sen. Powell who had served on the prosecution team.<sup>291</sup> “We are running a complete investigation in Columbus county,” Hamilton wrote, promising to make some people “fear and tremble.”<sup>292</sup> Part of the purpose of the letter was to distance him from the widespread rumor that he had approached Powell to be defense counsel, *The News-Reporter* observed.<sup>293</sup> He lashed out at *The News-Reporter*, accusing it of constructing a

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<sup>286</sup> “Klan Leader Tom Hamilton Whisked Off to Road Gang,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 2, 1952, 1.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid. When Hamilton arrived at the prison camp, curious prisoners heckled him. One voice urged other prisoners to get their “robes pressed,” so they looked ““purty.”” Another urged Hamilton to get out so they could get better acquainted. Others laughed at his “sporty outfit.” Ibid., 2.

<sup>290</sup> “Hamilton Says ‘Some People’ May Come to ‘Fear and Tremble,’” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 2, 1952, 1.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

false picture of him. He claimed to have no difficulty getting any resident, “White or Black to the door at any hour of the night,” even in rural areas.<sup>294</sup> He claimed to have conducted a “fight of Truth and Right.”<sup>295</sup>

In a powerful editorial in the same issue, Cole trumpeted: “The Klan Rides Again.”

Some of the men who rode under the banner of the Klan were honestly misguided. They got into the organization for various reasons. A few carried a Bible in one hand and a pistol in the other. Some sought political power. Others hoped for business gain. Some wanted to control the courts. Others felt they were “lifting” up erring humanity. Some entered for adventure . . . Others sought to [prevent] the consolidation of Negro children with white children. Back of it all, however, was a grasping hand, linked to a man whose mind was filled with beastly thoughts of brutality. “Do a good job or you’ll have to do it all over again” was one view he took of the flogging of Mrs. Evergreen Flowers . . .

Yesterday, the Klan rode again. This time the brains of the Ku Klux Klan, minus his satin-looking robe, went on a ride to a prison road gang where he will have four years to form new Klaverns and perhaps elevate himself anew to Imperial Wizard.

Most of the people in Columbus County prefer that he ride there instead of in their midst . . .<sup>296</sup>

**Still more arrests, jailings.** Five Klansmen were sent to federal prison in November, *The News-Reporter* reported in mid-November. Jail time for the five ranged from one to three years.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid. Hamilton further claimed to have been acting in defense of Christianity and quoted Ephesians: 6:11: “Put on the Whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” Cole and Thompson, evidently, had bedeviled him.

<sup>296</sup> “The Klan Rides Again,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 2, 1952, Sec. B, 1.

A sixth man, Brooks, received a two-year federal sentence that would be tacked into his five-year stretch in the state case.<sup>298</sup> Ten days later, three other men were fined, nearly rounding out the court cases against the ex-Klan members.<sup>299</sup> A Klansmen who had been in the military was apprehended in late December.<sup>300</sup>

In a crackdown that had gone on for over eleven months, the FBI “reached over into South Carolina.”<sup>301</sup> Nineteen men, including many previously indicted and some in prison at the time, were indicted on kidnapping and conspiracy charges, according to *The News-Reporter*’s story.<sup>302</sup> George Smith had been kidnapped in October 1951, threatened with a revolver, and then beaten with a leather strap on “Lover’s Lane.”<sup>303</sup> Nine of the men arrested were “new faces” in the long-standing Klan crackdown.<sup>304</sup>

**Pulitzer Prize.** “Cole was seated at his desk chatting with a visitor about the city elections,” a May 7 *News-Reporter* article related, “when George Munger of the *Greensboro Daily News* broke the news by telephone.”<sup>305</sup> In quick succession, others

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<sup>297</sup> Five Klansmen Go To Federal Prison,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 17, 1952, 1.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> “Chadbourn Men Pay \$500 Total In Klan Cases,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 27, 1952, 1.

<sup>300</sup> “Klan Defendant Nabbed Monday,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 1, 1953, 1. In the same issue, the Klan uprising was recognized as the big story of 1952.

<sup>301</sup> “FBI Agents Crack Smith Flogging Case; 14 Nabbed,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 19, 1953, 1.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, 1-2.

<sup>304</sup> “9 New Faces In Klan Picture,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 22, 1953, 1. Seven of them were eventually given prison terms. “Seven Klansmen Given Terms In Smith Flogging,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 21, 1953, 1.

<sup>305</sup> “Congratulations Pour Into Local Editorial Desks,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 7, 1953, 1. Daniels had nominated Cole and Carter for the Pulitzer. Ibid., 2. A few days later, Edward R. Murrow featured the two editors and their fight against the Klan in his “See It Now” television show. Murrow, the

called, including Jonathan Daniels of the *News and Observer*.<sup>306</sup> Cole gave “a major share of the credit to Sheriff H. Hugh Nance and Solicitor Clifton L. Moore,” the *News Reporter* observed, noting that “without honest, upright men in the key positions . . . no crusade against crime can be successful.”<sup>307</sup> There was no mention of Thompson or his reaction to the Pulitzer.

In an editorial, Cole did not think the “greatest reward” was the Pulitzer. “Rather, we believe the richest harvest from this experience is a renewal of our faith in the soundness of an awakened citizenry and a restoration of full confidence that right and justice can triumph in any community and on any level if good men united in the cause of righteousness.”<sup>308</sup> Cole also acknowledged the important part Daniels and Jay Jenkins of the *News and Observer* “played in arousing sentiment against the Klan.”<sup>309</sup> He did not mention Thompson’s role (if any). “Officially the 1952 gold medal awards” were presented to the newspapers, a *News-Reporter* article explained.<sup>310</sup> “Actually, the awards were won by the editors of the two newspapers, Willard G. Cole of Whiteville and W. Horace Carter of Tabor City.”<sup>311</sup> This is the only contemporary evidence in the

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*News Reporter* account said, “that the future of the nation rests in the hands of an awakened citizenry on the local level.” “Columbus Put in ‘Good’ Light In television Show,” *The Whiteville-News Reporter*, May 11, 1953, 1. Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 237.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> “Acknowledgement Of Gratitude,” editorial, *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 7, 1953, Sec. B, 1.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid. Starting the next week, the *News Reporter* placed the following slogan above its front-page nameplate: “Only Semi-Weekly Ever To Win Pulitzer Prize For Meritorious Public Service.” It was, perhaps, in response to Carter inserting a similar motto that the *Tribune* was the only weekly newspaper ever to win a Pulitzer Prize.

<sup>310</sup> “News Reporter Wins Top Pulitzer Prize: Cole And Carter Receive Highest Honors In Field,” *Whiteville News Reporter*, May 7, 1953,

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.



newspaper that gave Cole either all or the lion's share of the credit for the campaign. It does not contend that he wrote everything, however, though it might be reasonable to conclude that he wrote the majority.

Headlines in type larger than the nameplate of the newspaper proclaimed on May 7 that "News Reporter Wins Top Pulitzer Prize."<sup>312</sup> The Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious Public Service was awarded on May 4, 1953 by Columbia University.<sup>313</sup> The award was shared with the *Tabor City Tribune* of Horace Carter.<sup>314</sup> The joint award marked the first time a nondaily newspaper had been awarded a Pulitzer Prize.<sup>315</sup> It was also the first time any North Carolina newspaper had taken the top journalism prize.<sup>316</sup>

Cole also gave "a great amount of credit for the eventual Klan collapse" to his wife, a teacher.<sup>317</sup> According to a *News and Observer* article, "people who were beaten by the Klan were understandably loath to report the incidents to the police" and this handicapped their investigations.<sup>318</sup> Mrs. Cole "listened to children gossiping at school and learned of three beatings" and "relayed the information via Cole to the authorities who pried the information out of the reluctant victims."<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> "News Reporter Wins Top Pulitzer Prize: Cole And Carter Receive Highest Honors In Field," *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 7, 1953, 1. Besides the medallions, a \$500 check accompanied the award.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Jenkins, *News and Observer*, May 5, 1953, 1.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

*The News-Reporter* received letters of congratulations from *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, winner of the Public Service Pulitzer the year earlier.<sup>320</sup> Walter Spearman of the School of Journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill also sent his congratulations.<sup>321</sup> The article did not mention whether Whiteville's mayor added his congratulations.

**Dénouement.** In a bid to be released from prison, Hamilton repudiated the Klan in an October 1953 letter addressed to Cole.<sup>322</sup> He urged his “friends” to disband the Klan ““wherever it exists and work wholly out in the open for the causes in which they believe.”<sup>323</sup> According to a statement Cole released to the press – and published in *The News-Reporter* – Hamilton promised never again to belong to a secret organization that hid its membership list from the public.<sup>324</sup> He also apologized for the “suffering and heartaches” the Klan caused.<sup>325</sup> He did admit to qualms about renouncing the Klan, because of his loyal former associates who believed they were acting in the best interests of society. He hoped no one would doubt his “humility and repentance.”<sup>326</sup> He acknowledged he would be seeking parole to resume family life, since his wife and daughter needed him more than any organization.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> “Hamilton Repubiates [sic] Klan,” *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 22, 1953, 1.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 1.

Two days later, *The News-Reporter*, reacted to Hamilton's personal rehabilitation, in an editorial titled, "Hamilton's Manly Apology."<sup>328</sup> The editorial was probably written by Cole and was generous and forgiving in tone. "While Columbus County will not soon forget the heartaches and suffering which Thomas L. Hamilton brought to its people," the editorial began, "it will applaud his forthright declaration that he is through with the organization he once headed."<sup>329</sup>

While the scars will remain on the hearts of the misguided followers, both they and the casual, uninvolved citizenry are Christian enough in their thinking to accept his manly apology. Expressed in such words of humility, only an unforgiving people could do otherwise.

He is no small man who, after years of activity and fanatical devotion to the Klan, can come to the point of publicly admitting that he was 'misguided and wrong' in his thinking.

"Let us all turn our faces to the Christ [Hamilton wrote] and join him in bringing a better and more glorious day to our Southland and country."

It is regrettable that his entire statement is not available for reading and study by every Klan-minded person in America . . . [I]t once more shows that the only doctrine which has a place in the lives of men is the Christ doctrine of love.

[Hamilton] has . . . affirmed his faith in the Christian practice of working wholly out in the open for the causes in which he believes. Furthermore, he indicates that he is trying to get on God's side instead of praying for God to get on his side.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> "Hamilton's Manly Apology," editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 24, 1953, 4.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

In late February 1954, the former imperial wizard was released after serving 17 months of a four-year sentence.<sup>331</sup> In an editorial in *The News-Reporter's* February 25 issue, Cole praised the parole board's decision, despite questioning whether Hamilton's conversion was "sincere and complete."<sup>332</sup> Cole noted that had the parole board not acted, Hamilton eight months later, could have walked out a prison "without a single string attached" and "gone back to South Carolina and renewed his preaching of hate."<sup>333</sup> By paroling him, Cole pointed out, "the remainder of his prison term" would hang over his head and he could be forced to spend the full term in jail if he resumed his former agitation.<sup>334</sup> This fact alone convinced Cole that Hamilton's repentance was genuine.<sup>335</sup>

**Moving on.** Perhaps fittingly, but certainly in a sense drawing the saga to a neatly packaged close, Cole announced he was leaving *The News-Reporter* in the same February 25, 1954 issue that it was announced Hamilton was leaving prison.<sup>336</sup> He described "an indelible moment when the flames of duty leaped madly into action" and noted that "not always could one be certain that justice and right and humanity would triumph."<sup>337</sup> Cole paraphrased John W. Davis' definition of a democrat: "He only deserves to be called an

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<sup>331</sup> "Former Leader Of Klan Group Granted Parole," *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 25, 1954, 1.

<sup>332</sup> "Wise Action Of Parole Board," editorial, *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 25, 1954, Sec. B, 1.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> After leaving Whiteville, Cole and starting his own newspaper in Robeson County at Lumberton, Cole suffered several strokes in the early 1960s. James High recalled that the stroke scarcely slowed him down. "He had his manual typewriter set up and had a way so that he could use his foot to bring the carriage forward, and he would basically have it type [that way] much of the time . . . with basically one finger. Maybe a lot of this typing was one finger way back before that, but his level of writing is what, I think brought him back into newspapering." High interview, March 28, 2007.

<sup>337</sup> "A Personal Valedictory," editorial by Willard Cole, *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 25, 1954, Sec. B, 1.

editor who cannot see a wrong persist without an effort to redress it, or a right denied without an effort to protect it.”<sup>338</sup> He repeated the words he had used nearly seven years earlier, on May 26, 1947, in his first issue as editor.<sup>339</sup> “Your newspaper is more than a builder of cities . . . It is, and must continue to be, the lamp which lights the pathway of humanity to higher cultural values, to better living, and to God.”<sup>340</sup> In his only nod – and possibly a grudging one at that – to the owner of *The News-Reporter* who had supported him despite personal dangers and economic calamity, Cole concluded, “We have never worked with a finer publisher.”<sup>341</sup>

Thompson in an editorial in the March 4, 1954 issue was also somewhat noncommittal.<sup>342</sup> He wrote that coverage of Hamilton’s parole and Cole’s departure in the same issue was “a strange but fitting and interesting coincidence” and allowed “the departing editor . . . to write finis to his biggest story.”<sup>343</sup> Thompson did give credit to Cole for winning the “Pulitzer Prize for his crusade against mob violence.”<sup>344</sup> The editorial did not, however, wish him well or congratulate him on his tenure as editor. Starting with the March 11, 1954 edition, Thompson added editor to his publisher title.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> “Strange But Fitting Coincidence,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, March 4, 1954, Sec. B, 4.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, March 11, 1954, Sec. B, 4.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

*“Virtuous motives, trammelled by inertia and timidity, are no match for armed and resolute wickedness.”*

– Winston Churchill

Horace Carter entitled one of his memoirs *The Virus of Fear*, trying to capture the atmosphere the Klan created among residents in Horry and Columbus counties and the infectious nature of the Klan’s brand of hate. “The Doctrine of Love,” the title of *The News-Reporter*’s August 23, 1951 front-page editorial might be the title for the entire campaign. In it, Thompson suggested that, “Every citizen of our country should be concerned [about the Klan] because the very foundation of our way of life – the Christian and democratic way of life – is at issue.”<sup>1</sup> According to the editorial, the Klan preached “a doctrine of hate and defiance.”<sup>2</sup> Thompson quoted the parable of the Good Samaritan in his editorial. “Two thousand years have not dimmed the light of love or the Christian doctrine of going to the aid of a man in need, even though that man be a Samaritan.”<sup>3</sup> Even if that man is black. He asked whether it was “spiritually or morally right for us to hate any man, or group of men?”<sup>4</sup> Even if those men were black.

This dissertation began to test a set of relationships, illustrated in Fig. 3.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Doctrine of Love,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, August 23, 1951, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

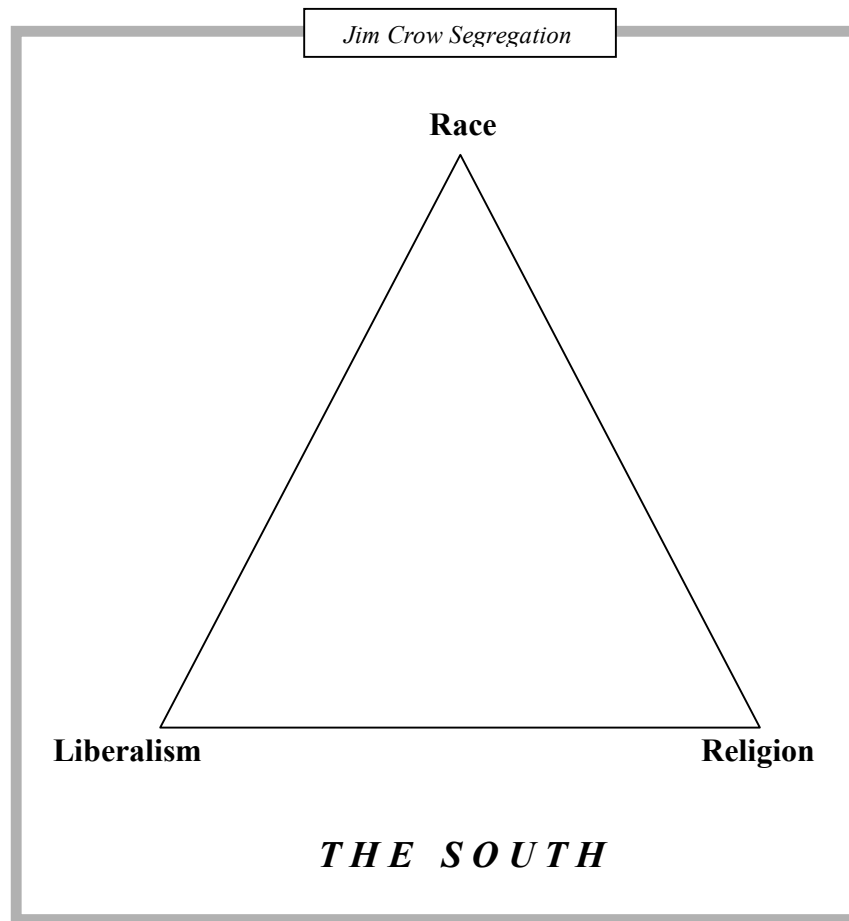


Fig. 3 Dynamics of southern philosophy

As indicated earlier, on the issue of race Carter, Cole, and Thompson did show courage. Did they show growing liberalism – a liberalism that is still growing? Rather, liberalism was merely an echo in the far distance, like a thunderstorm just over the horizon, unseen and scarcely heard. Perhaps the three journalists were influenced unknowingly by the few liberal journalists in the South. Perhaps they just did not choose to mention those developing strains in the South or liberalism's influence on them. Whatever the deeper motivations, liberalism very clearly did not figure in the coverage of the Klan. It was religion and faith and the trust in the Christian precepts of the New Testament that informed and drove the coverage of *The News-Reporter* and the *Tribune*.

It was in all three men's writings, and it was not subtle. Oddly, the Klan in the person of Imperial Wizard Hamilton cloaked itself in the bed-sheets of religion as well, praying and calling on the same God and savior as Cole, Thompson, and Carter. The Klan's ideologues found support for a separation of the races in scripture; Carter, Cole, and Thompson found compassion, love, and equality in the same writings. Larger newspapers in the North and the South that took a principled stand against segregation and the Klan were, perhaps, uncomfortable with religion; journalists often are. Not so Cole, Thompson, and Carter. They were not embarrassed in the least to use God and Christianity in their fight against the Klan.

Certainly, also, public opinion played an important role in the Klan fight; both Hamilton and the three journalists were trying to convince the public that their perspectives were righteous. That word appeared repeatedly: righteous (or righteousness). The Klan punished area residents who they alleged were drunkards, spousal abusers, lapsed churchgoers, and immoral (unmarried but cohabitating). These were issues that resonated with Columbus and Horry county residents. Carter, Thompson, and Cole had to counter that by claiming it was un-American and well as un-Christian, that lawlessness was a moral as well as legal wrong. Both sides were grappling with each other for the same prize.

Both *The News-Reporter* and the *Tribune* used headlines that claimed the public favored this position or that view, that residents were delighted at Hamilton's arrest or that they wished the Klan would leave the area. Their news stories used, without any evidence or polling data, comments claiming to be speaking on behalf of public opinion. The editors and publishers probably made those statements out of whole cloth. Carter



claimed he made his Klan fight a “front page campaign,” knowing his stories there meant more prominence and better readership. The Korean War and the continuing scourge of polio were important issues that were demoted in importance by both newspapers. *News-Reporter* publisher James High believes that his father-in-law, Leslie Thompson, was aware of the importance of the front page. The entire campaign, its circumstances and motivations, are far too complex to untangle authoritatively and definitively, but there are hints. Religion spoke to an audience that was largely religious.

It is also impossible to separate race from the religious views of the three journalists. Of course, race is part of practically every aspect of southern life and history. The three journalists, but most obviously Carter, were of two minds. There is no evidence that they were anything other than committed members of the status quo on race and segregation in the South. Carter editorialized that the rest of the nation should leave the South alone. Thompson felt that African-Americans were better served in a law school of their own at North Carolina College, rather than integrating the one at Chapel Hill.

Williamson split southerners into three mentalities. Cole, Carter, and Thompson were quite obviously conservative. They did not want to dismantle the southern system, but they felt that the Klan was wicked and that they had to oppose it. Ultimately and perhaps even unwillingly, this helped wash away the sand upon which the Jim Crow structure was precariously built.

It also took perseverance in the face of widespread fear, ambivalence, and indifference from the public *The News-Reporter* and the *Tribune* was serving, informing, and attempting to influence. Thompson, Carter, and Cole are unusual in another way: they were willing to hazard becoming pariahs to meet the challenges of their own

religious faith and consciences. To live a comfortable, unmolested, respected, and financially secure life by every member of a society (macro or micro) forms the superstructure of the status quo. This is a subtle form of social control favoring the status quo.

**Human agency.** This dissertation is predicated on the importance of human agency and of the power of individual action. And human agency is not limited to great figures in history, but also to individuals who have great effects on their communities. Horace Carter, Leslie Thompson, and Willard Cole alone and at great personal risk, grappled with their consciences as well as the Klan to decide what was, first, the moral thing to do and then what was the best course for their communities.

Since the Klan rising of the early 1950s, the clandestine organization has not reappeared in anything more than sporadic appearances.<sup>5</sup> This may be no more than happenstance or coincidence. Or, it may suggest that the actions of Carter, Cole, Thompson, and others willing to speak out on race, were either attractive to a far broader swathe of southerners who kept quiet than was evident through public demonstrations at the time.

**Why?** Why did Thompson, Carter, and Cole stand up to the Klan in the face of the almost overwhelming pressure to conform and keep silent? Williamson concluded there were a number of reasons for Cable's maverick stance on race in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that compelled him to publicly take positions at odds with his neighbors and the prevailing opinions in the South.<sup>6</sup> He had a deep and devout faith in God and coupled that

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<sup>5</sup> High interview, March 28, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 98-99.

with a “courage to match his beliefs.”<sup>7</sup> He bore a “great sensitivity to the plight of others” which was that “rare and valuable quality of being able to put himself in other people’s places, and to walk a mile – or more – in other people’s shoes.”<sup>8</sup> His was a racial liberalism, true, but it was powered by his John Knox Presbyterianism and grounded in the Bible. His favorite scriptural passage was from Luke: “Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.”<sup>9</sup> And he translated this into action because, in Williamson’s view, “Cable was a moralist who could not remain inactive in the face of immorality.”<sup>10</sup> In addition, he “thought that truth had already been made evident in three basic documents: the Bible, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution.”<sup>11</sup> He found it irreconcilable that a nation “founded upon the concept of the natural rights of man could . . . support slavery or unequal citizenship.”<sup>12</sup> He was, Williamson considered, “one of those rare Southerners before very modern times to recognize an American dilemma in its race relations.”<sup>13</sup> That description summed up Carter, Cole, and Thompson. Cable, according to Williamson, experienced “a steady, intense pressure to put himself into communion with God’s will.”<sup>14</sup> So did Carter, Thompson, and Cole. There is no evidence that these three men patterned themselves

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Luke 6:26.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 97.

after Cable, but they are clearly of a very, very small breed of southerner who looked around, saw what was morally wrong, and acted upon that belief.

### RELIGION

Carter, Cole, and Carter grappled with the demons of the South's past and with its racial realities, basing that opposition first and foremost on their religious views. More than liberalism and community, it was religion that was the base of their opposition to the Klan. In a way, their words were, if not *antiracial*, at least *unracial*. They railed editorially against the Klan's moral presumptions that they were the arbiters of morality. Largely – but certainly by no means exclusively – their arguments were just as applicable to whites as to blacks. Whites were whipped and hauled across state lines. Perhaps more whites reported the Klan's outrages – after all they would not have felt intimidated (as much) by white police officers – than blacks, but the crimes against whites were virtually as complete as against blacks. Klansmen walked down the aisles of white churches – they might have been prudently avoided black churches where they would have been outnumbered – and Klansmen paraded through white as well as black neighborhoods.

This theme of religiosity is largely ignored in the literature, whether because it is little understood or because scholars and historians are not used to working in religious environments. Many scholars are also liberals and have formed a worldview based on liberality. Religious beliefs make some people uneasy. The editorials in the *Tabor City Tribune* and *The Whiteville News-Reporter* cannot be read or interpreted without understanding religion. Carter, like Cable, grounded some of his opposition in the American democratic tradition. In an April 1951 opinion column, he did not resist taking a swipe at the Klan, “an undemocratic” group that was attempting “in every way [to] stir

up trouble between the races,” rather than allowing “God’s natural growth method [to] prevail.”<sup>15</sup>

In the wake of court decisions integrating the law school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Carter laid out his position on race the most persuasively and completely of the entire campaign.<sup>16</sup> Neither Cole nor Thompson came anywhere near this close to challenging the underpinnings of the racial system in the South.

Never have I in my heart judged a man by the kind of shoes he wore. Neither have I judged him from what color he was. And in the long run, he had more control over the kind of shoes he wore than what color he was.

From childhood until now, I have felt that a man’s a man for all that. Or in other words, let a man be black, white, yellow or green and if he as an individual is honest, kind, religious, charitable and peaceable that’s the basis upon which he should be judged.

That’s the basis upon which I would found my criticism of a student sitting down beside me at the University of North Carolina Law School. Nor would I in any way feel insulted to sit down by the side of a Negro who as a man could put himself up with any other race and compare favorably except for the color of his skin . . .

And of all our races in the United States, what race should be the most dissatisfied? What race has been purposely held back for generations? What race has more reason than all others to be dissatisfied with their way of life?

Carter drew back, however, recovering his conservative footing. He went on to state that changes would take “generations” before equality was truly achieved.<sup>17</sup> He urged “the Negro population” not to “rush this coming day of non-segregation through

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<sup>15</sup> *Tabor City Tribune*, April 18, 1951, 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Tabor City Tribune*, April 18, 1951, 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

organizations, legislation and pressure groups,” because those actions “will bring upon themselves the greatest damage possible.”<sup>18</sup> He suggested “continued patience” and “adherence to the laws of the land.”<sup>19</sup> In a rhetorical pirouette, Carter wrote that “God created all men free and equal. Man has changed that equality after birth . . . As a nation [we] will in time grow away from prejudices that were handed down by fathers and grandfathers. There will come along a generation some time that will only half remember those prejudices. That prejudice gets less with every generation. Sometime it will be just legend.”<sup>20</sup> In his concluding paragraph, Carter said “Christ humbled himself to all races,” and Carter did not believe it was “keeping with His desires that any man should put himself up as being superior to any other, regardless of his color.”<sup>21</sup> It was the only instance of either newspaper almost crossing the Jim Crow line and advocating its destruction.

Ministers, and lay people like Carter, who advocated integration, “were subject to abuse and alienation, even threats of death, at the hands of their fellow Baptists.”<sup>22</sup> It is small wonder almost all kept quiet, until the prosecution of Klan members began. A Methodist minister preached once against the Klan, but only once.<sup>23</sup> Carter’s church? “My own church, never! Not until the last arrests were made,” Carter said.<sup>24</sup> Carter tried

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard, “The Baptists,” quoted in Rosenberg, *The Southern Baptists*, 162.

<sup>23</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

to put himself in his pastor's position. "They could look out across . . . 400 or 500 people and see 100 or 200-odd . . . Klansmen. So, preachers are human, like the rest of us; they [have] to make a living. They didn't want to alienate that many people."<sup>25</sup> And this left Carter, Cole, and Thompson without what might be regarded as natural allies in their opposition to the Klan.

To Myrdal, this would not have been surprising. "Ministers," he indicated, "have often been reactionaries in America. They have often tried to stifle free speech; they have organized persecution of unpopular dissenters and have . . . been active as the organizers of the Ku Klux Klan and similar . . . movements."<sup>26</sup> One minister in the Tabor City area was a member of the Klan and was indicted for his role in some of its violence, according to Carter.<sup>27</sup> For Myrdal, someone like Thompson, Cole, and Carter would have represented "the fundamental tenets of Christianity [that] press for expression even in the most bigoted setting."<sup>28</sup> He termed American religion "not particularly bigoted, but on the contrary, rather open-minded."<sup>29</sup> He attributed this to the competition among denominations and "the mere fact that there are many denominations."<sup>30</sup> This spurs religion in its American expression to increased tolerance and a "greater humanism and interest in social problems than the people in the churches would otherwise call for."<sup>31</sup> In

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Carter interview, September 27, 2002; and *Tabor City Tribune*, November 7, 1951, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Columbus County, however, this did not seem to be the case in the early 1950s, or throughout most of the South.

## RACE

Religious scholar Paul Harvey calls the grounding of racism in religion, the Bible, and Christian teachings and heritage “theological racism.”<sup>32</sup> It is, according to Harvey, “the conscious use of religious doctrine and practice to create and enforce social hierarchies [by] privileged southerners of European descent.”<sup>33</sup> Using religion as a prop helped create an “interlocking system of [racial]power.”<sup>34</sup> This justification for Jim Crow segregation in scripture was, of course, open to interpretation. However, in the coverage of the Klan uprising in the *Tabor City Tribune* and *The Whiteville News-Reporter* race is nearly invisible, if it is there at all. Unquestionably, race is the primary issue in the South and has been for centuries. However, it was tangential to the campaign against the Klan by Carter, Thompson, and Cole. They certainly mentioned blacks and whites – and identified them by race, though mainly this was reserved for African-Americans. White races was just assumed. However, race was almost never the prime focus of an editorial. Invariably, if it was discussed at all, it was to support religious arguments.

The great strength and insights of the coverage by Thompson, Cole, and Carter was that they eschewed race and instead hammered away at the unchristian nature of the Klan and its philosophy. Even had they been firmly committed to racial equality – and this is unlikely – they would have known an appeal on the basis of race would have obtained little

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



traction among a white audience at least that, probably, would have had sympathy with many of the Klan's views on race, if not its methods. The three journalists drove home the point that scripture was open to different interpretations and that contradictions would not go away. While the Old Testament certainly offered examples of the existence of slavery – though not necessarily arguments in favor of it – the New Testament and its emphasis on the brotherhood of Man was problematic for a biblical justification for either slavery or segregation. This “Christian mythic,” as Harvey termed it, was largely discarded by supporters of segregation by the 1960s, a legacy of the fights of the immediate postwar years.<sup>35</sup> By the Sixties, supporters of segregation defended it based on the (white) southern way of life, tradition, and state's rights. A biblical justification had disappeared, but in the early 1950s in the hands of Cole, Thompson, and Carter it was still a vibrant weapon against segregation and the Klan.

Before the modern civil rights era, “the theology of segregationism was handed down as confirmed dogma,” according to Harvey. “The social ordering of the races had been sanctified, and a properly religious cloak thrown over Jim Crow's skeleton.”<sup>36</sup> Children were raised to believe God created different races for a purpose and they should be kept separate. According to Harvey, almost all white clergy and church members “accepted segregation either as divinely ordained or simply as the best and most workable social system for the South.”<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the leaders of the white denominations were advocating desegregation, while “their constituent churches shored up the received social

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

hierarchies.”<sup>38</sup> Largely, white ministers at the local level kept silent, neither supporting their denomination leadership to their parishioners nor their flocks’ views publicly.<sup>39</sup> This was certainly the experience in Columbus and Horry counties. Naturally, there were exceptions.

#### LAW AND JUSTICE

Besides religious imagery and rhetoric, it is a commitment to the American system of law and justice that is most evident in a study of the coverage of the *Tribune* and *The News-Reporter*. The Klan was excoriated repeatedly for taking the law into its own hand and meting out its brand of extralegal justice. Both newspapers criticized the Klan for this roundly and consistently and from the earliest months. In the first July 26, 1950 editorial, Carter stated that, “Punishment must be kept within the law” and “[a]ny organization that has to work outside the law is unfit for recognition in a country of free men.”<sup>40</sup> If current laws are insufficient, Carter reasoned, then the laws need to be “enlarge[d] upon.”<sup>41</sup> Moreover, he noted six months later, “this hooded group is unfit and unworthy to administer justice on anyone.”<sup>42</sup>

Both newspapers continually pounded away that, while some actions of area residents were worthy of censure, whether moral or criminal, it was up to the legally constituted authority (police, prosecutors, the FBI) to punish them, not the Klan. “There’s no doubt that some were involved in affairs bordering on the illegal,” Carter editorialized in May 1952. “Yet we still maintain that the courts, and the law alone, has the American right

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 229-30.

<sup>40</sup> “No Excuse for KKK,” *Tabor City Tribune*, July 26, 1950, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Carter, “Carter’s Column,” *Tabor City Tribune*, January 16, 1952, 1.

to punish its citizenry.”<sup>43</sup> Thompson rebuked the Klan for its “doctrine of defiance of the law and legally constituted authorities.”<sup>44</sup> Thompson noted the American “social order is founded upon the laws of our land.”<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the country had become great, “not by defiance of authority, but by living under and in obedience to the laws which we have . . . a part in making.”<sup>46</sup> Thompson took the Klan to task for becoming “self-appointed judges, jury, and executioners” a criticism *The News-Reporter* would return to.<sup>47</sup> Once Klansmen were arrested, according to a *News-Reporter* editorial, “they will want every protection of the court – a protection which was denied their victims.”<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps the most moving reference to the Klan’s extrajudicial behavior came in an elegantly written editorial by Cole, titled “A Court Dream.”<sup>49</sup> A victim of the Klan, Cole wrote, was judged and sentenced in the dream by a judge and jury of masked men. “We knew that this was typical of how victims of mob violence are tried,” the editorial stated. “The only regret was that those who participate in terroristic activities could not have a similar dream, because we know that if any of them were brought into court and

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<sup>43</sup> “Klan King Arrested; Conspiracy Charged,” *Tabor City Tribune*, May 28, 1952, 1.

<sup>44</sup> “The Doctrine of Love,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, August 23, 1951, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “Prediction,” editorial by Leslie Thompson (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 21, 1952, 4.

<sup>49</sup> “A Court Dream,” editorial by Willard Cole (attributed), *The Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 26, 1951, 4.

asked to stand trial before a masked judge and jury, they would be the first to cry out for their rights in the Constitution.”<sup>50</sup>

It was demand for the rule of law and the prevention of mob rule that was, perhaps, a fourth leg of the triangle, changing the shape into that of a rectangle. It was a theme, not put as often in the editorials, but delivered with just as much conviction. The *Tribune* and *The News-Reporter* acknowledged on several instances that some of the actions of the Klan might appear to be justified. Moreover, the newspapers equally understood how citizens might react violently to the Klan’s behavior. Call this “righteous wrath,” but it fell within the practice and tradition hundreds of years of white southerners seeking justice outside the courtroom.

**Blackness and whiteness.** Those inside Charlie Fitzgerald’s dance club in Myrtle Beach in August 1950, attacked by Klansmen, were mainly black. “Mainly,” but not entirely. A few whites, obviously, were there as well. This was the worry of many whites, “the enemy hidden within,” blackness secreted in whiteness.<sup>51</sup> There was that primal fear, whites who liked black culture, black music, the black experience. And white women who liked black men. All the controversy, anger, and violence over black men raping white women overlooked the possibility that white women were willing participants. This idea of an acceptable and desirable level of blackness was seditious and undermined all the centuries of the elite white civilization in the South. All around in the wider American society this blackness in whiteness could be seen. It was deeply evident in jazz. Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong; their music was seductive and encouraged

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 7.

immorality, according to many whites. Black in white was highly visible in sports. Joe Louis and Jackie Robinson took whites on and won.

Is this something the Klan was punishing in Columbus and Horry counties in the early 1950s? Were Klansmen trying to coerce a separation of the races, enforcing the historic taboos? If so, it was a distant whisper among the pines, too subtle to discern in the coverage of *The News-Reporter* and the *Tribune*.

### LIBERALISM

C. Wright Mills claimed almost half a century ago, “No social study that does not come back to the problems . . . of history, and [its] intersections within a society, has completed its intellectual journey.”<sup>52</sup> It is a part in history that newspapers and journalists play that occupies this dissertation. Too often, newspapers are, if not part of the problem, at least complicit in it. Few large – and extremely profitable – newspapers stood up to the Klan or opposed segregation in general for decades. In fact, one North Carolina newspaper, the *News and Observer* of Raleigh under Publisher Josephus Daniels, was instrumental in establishing the Jim Crow system in the state.

There was no evidence of liberalism or liberals in the *Tribune* and *The News-Reporter*’s coverage, no arguments based on liberal logic or rhetoric. There was no mention of liberal journalists. If liberalism influenced Cole, Carter, and Thompson they did not admit it. Liberal influences were not evident in their coverage, except in the shadows where comments about equal treatment of blacks might indicate opinions, if not liberal, at least out of step with Jim Crow status quo.

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<sup>52</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford, 1959), 6.

Carter opposed the Klan rising and even tried to convince his skeptical (and bigoted) father that there are “only two types of free newspapers in America anymore . . . free to write what an editor really believes,” those “owned by a company that is independently wealthy . . . or the little newspaperman who has nothing and therefore can lose nothing,” like Carter and his *Tabor City Tribune*.<sup>53</sup> Whether those at larger newspapers would have opposed segregation – had they felt economically independent enough – the fact is they did not. Textual analysis of what they did do when confronted with the opportunity to oppose segregation – in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling finding separate but equal education unconstitutional – is illuminating. North Carolina weekly newspapers – other than the black press – largely ignored *Brown*, while the daily newspapers were very circumspect, if not outright opposed to federal interference in southern society. Whatever apologists or revisionists now claim what newspapers wrote and how they covered *Brown* at the time is the most eloquent – or damning – elucidation of their views.

But it is probably more than just having little to lose; the independence of having a smaller, less entrenched bureaucracy has its advantages. Changing the political opinions and culture of any large organization, can be compared to steering the *Titanic*. Hard to turn quickly. Carter was able to arrive at a conclusion or conviction and put his opinions into action, because he had no one to convince other than himself (and perhaps his wife, Lucille). At larger newspapers, reporters had to convince editors, editors had to convert other editors, the top editor had to lobby the publisher, and the publisher, if he or she was

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<sup>53</sup> Horace W. Carter. *A Man Called Raleigh* (Tabor City, North Carolina: Atlantic Publishing Co., 1988), 240.

not the owner, had to answer to other owners, whether at corporate headquarters or among other family members. This is a recipe for stagnation and inertia, regardless of any moral consideration.

Carter, Cole, and Thompson challenged the stability and predictability of the status quo and of the Jim Crow segregationist social structure in the South. This is not necessarily liberal, just aberrant. Nature may abhor a vacuum, but it also celebrates uniformity and conformity and predictability. The construct of segregation in the South was based on “exploiting social stratifications” to the benefit of the powerful.<sup>54</sup>

“[D]iscrimination is predicated on social dominance that depends on established, constructed power differences, fortified by customs and laws,” in Fuller’s evaluation.<sup>55</sup>

“A social consensus such as Jim Crow . . . functions to keep an entire group of people weak and usable by the dominant group.”<sup>56</sup> The amazing thing is that Carter, Thompson, and Cole were part of that dominant group, and powerful and were prospering within the environment segregation had created. Their newspapers were flourishing and yet the three men challenged the status quo that was so agreeable to their financial situation and their status.

### CLASS

It can be argued, and Joel Williamson has done so in *The Crucible of Race* and elsewhere, that class can be substituted for liberal during long periods of southern history. The term liberal is a very inaccurate descriptor when applied to, say, a southern Democrat from South Carolina in 1948 and a northeast Democrat from Massachusetts in 2007. Carter,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 6.

Cole, and Thompson are more properly conservative or at least neo-conservative in Williamson's triad of liberals, conservatives, and radicals in his *The Crucible of Race*. Conservative thought was predicated on a persistent and even natural assumption of the inferiority of African-Americans. Conservatives believed the key was to accommodate the wider society to blacks, that is, if "outsiders and aliens would simply leave black people alone."<sup>57</sup> This mentality was, essentially, the stance that *The News-Reporter* and the *Tribune* took, guided by Carter, Thompson, and Cole. That is what Carter especially said in his first editorial, what Thompson meant in his editorial supporting separate law schools in North Carolina, and what both newspapers editorialized on several occasions. And its echoes can also be heard in the rhetoric of Hamilton and the Klan. Carter, Cole, and Thompson, then, believed as Williamson's conservatives believed, that society had to conserve blacks "by defining and fixing [their] place" in America.<sup>58</sup> "There were limits to how liberal Southern Liberals would be," he wrote.<sup>59</sup> "Physical integration" was something anathema in varying degrees to most white southerners.<sup>60</sup>

**Federal involvement.** The two newspapers were basically opposed to federal government interference and national public opinion in the southern way of life, no matter how much they themselves criticized it. Ironically, they both called upon federal forces – notably the FBI – and a national awareness stirred by publicity to help defeat the Klan. It is another of the many contradictions that confuses observers and scholars of the South during

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<sup>57</sup> Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*



this period. Cole, Thompson, and Carter expressed no confusion or anguish over the issues, at least not that they demonstrated in their coverage. The two were, somehow, not conflated.

“I think what I was writing and what Willard Cole was writing for the *News-Reporter* had a direct bearing on [the FBI] coming here,” Carter believed. “[T]he more it got circulated in the daily papers around the country – Wilmington, Charlotte and Raleigh, all of them took up this fight after a year or so that we’d been in it.”<sup>61</sup> So, Carter is convinced it was not “us little weekly newspapers down here’ in the backwoods that secured FBI involvement, but rather the *Tribune* and *The News-Reporter*’s influence on daily newspapers that prompted federal involvement. “[W]hen it got in the big papers [there was] much more chance of the FBI being interested,” in Carter’s view.<sup>62</sup>

Carter was adamant, though about the role and value of the two newspapers’ fight against the Klan. “I do believe that had we kept our mouth shut, I believe that [the] Klan would have grown,” he insisted. “I believe it would have [involved] thousands of people in the long run, and it would eventually come down to almost a vigilante war.”<sup>63</sup> Carter continued,

I believe that if *The News-Reporter* and Willard Cole and I hadn’t got on to this editorial binge that were on for [two] or three years, I believe then the daily papers would probably not [have gotten] the details on it and [Hoover] might never have made the headlines. I think [our] senators [and] House of Representatives and various other official government couldn’t help, but said down there in Horry County and Columbus County they have trouble with the Klan and we need to do something about it. And my guess is that some of our Congressmen probably went to J. Edgar Hoover and told him they wish he would do something about that lawlessness

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<sup>61</sup> Carter interview, 18 May 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

in Carolina.<sup>64</sup>

James High agreed and looked back with pride on the role his *News-Reporter* played in the downfall of the Klan in the early 1950s. “The reporting took the starch out of [the Klan] and put it on the editorial page, as well as the front page,” High commented. “Of course, the front page is what really made it be exposed . . . Mr. Thompson’s philosophy basically was . . . if it’s important, it does on the front page; if it’s not, it goes to page . . . 10, 11, or 12.”<sup>65</sup>

**Reflections.** Possibly the most eloquent and reflective of Carter’s writings appeared in a chapter entitled “End of the Line,” near the conclusion of his book about his father.<sup>66</sup>

The funeral was over . . . I drove along silently headed east past the muddy river, up and down mountains, over winding blacktop roads. I smiled at three small black children who waved along the roadside . . . Smoke curled up from a brush fire on a distant hillside. Rows of soybeans and corn covered farmlands in the valleys. Buzzards circled overhead where an opossum had been mutilated under the wheels of a passing car. Some old crows darted out of our path as they rushed in for bits of the dead animal. Then we passed through a village where we stopped momentarily for a red light before moving on to the east and the flatlands where tobacco yellowed in the sandy fields.

I was on a lonely trip back home. Solemn thoughts sneaked out of the crevices of my mind where they had been tucked away for a long time . . . Life is a trip that we all must take. Good and bad dreams come true as we travel along toward a destination where we expect flags to be waving and fragments of our life miraculously merge into a finished product.

Sometimes it seems the trip takes forever. Life is so slow and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> High interview, 28 March 2007.

<sup>66</sup> Carter, *A Man Called Raleigh*, 255-56.

painful and we curse the lonely hours and the days that loiter and make us wait . . . for the happy goal at the final destination. Then there are fast moving moments and events that we would like to freeze and relive forever and ever . . . We must stay on the trip and keep moving, moving, moving.

Then you stop and think more realistically. There is no one place, no one age or one time that you reach and keep forever. The joy of life is not just a dream that constantly is beyond our grasp and we never quite get there. The true joy of the trip is the life we hold in our hand today. Not tenable forever but not elusive forever either. We can't focus on the regrets of yesterday or the uncertainty of tomorrow . . .

Joy of the trip comes when we quit packing the aisles and stop counting the miles. We must take more vacations, eat more candy, hug more loved ones, fish more lakes, climb more hillsides, wiggle our toes in the surf . . . laugh more and cry less . . . Joy comes from the way we live as we move down the road exploring each moment, loving each mile and determined to smile . . .

As the tightrope walker said, "Nothing counts but the time we spend on the wire."<sup>67</sup>

Carter remains on that wire at the *Tribune* in his mid-eighties, he still writes his weekly column and editorials, takes care of the business side, and writes feature stories.

**Triangle of influence.** There is power in each of these, in each of the points of the triangle (Fig. 4). One, however, was dominant; that of religion. Loosely put, three men revealed themselves and their relationships to the South and their community in what they published, and through interviews and books. Segregation can be viewed as the master frame of the South, but religion was certainly its anchor, requiring a reconfiguration of the triangle. So, a newly redrawn and revisioned triangle would look more like this:

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

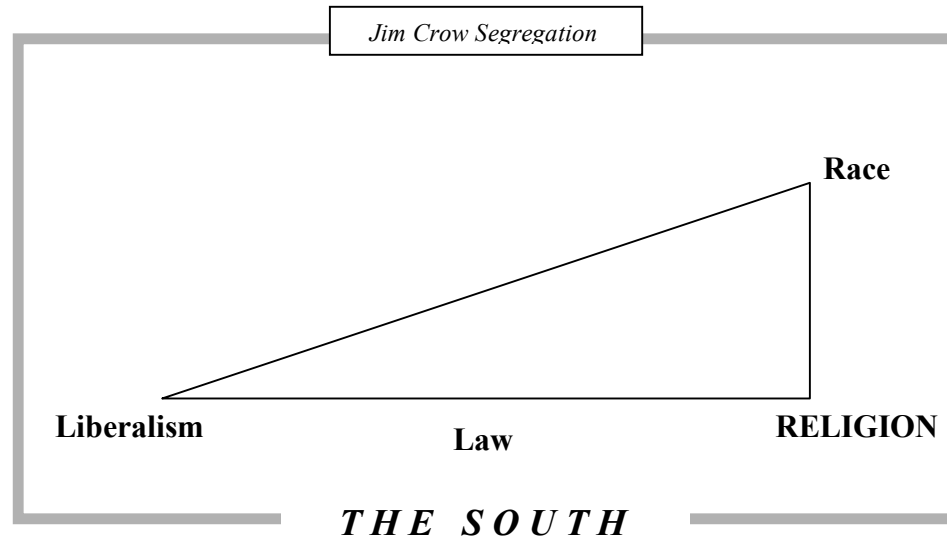


Fig. 4. A Cole, Thompson, Carter Triangle

This new triangle suggests the old spiritual, “Old-Time Religion,” that provided the title for this work. Religion was not absent in the early 1950s and it is not in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as well. Of course, the influences *were* more than religion. It required – in strong measure – courage as well to oppose such a violent and secret organization as the Klan.

Reconceptualize the triangle, based on these three journalists’ experiences and actions and words during the Klan campaign. Religion was strongest, with race and liberalism as clearly secondary influences. There *was* liberalism in the South among a few journalists, at least that variety called southern liberalism. Ralph McGill. Jonathan Daniels, and Hodding Carter, Jr. are notable examples of the breed. But the reflections of these liberal strains as they related to race were discernible in the larger southern sense, not in the arena where Carter, Cole, and Thompson lived. Carter, Thompson, and Cole were conservative southerners, not liberal ones, as judged principally by their coverage (and in Carter’s case, personal interviews). They grounded their opposition to the Klan on religious precepts and saw the situation from a Christian perspective. The moral and racial enforcements of the

Klan against whites and blacks they opposed because they were immoral and violated Christian views. In fact, most of the publicized examples of Klan floggings were against whites, and while the three journalists may have, privately, been made aware of outrages against blacks, they based their coverage and editorial stances on the Klan's chastisements of whites for refusing to allow their children to attend church, for living together without marriage, for alcoholism, and for spousal beatings. Those had nothing to do with race.

Both newspapers grounded their opposition to the Klan on legal grounds, arguing that the Klan was trying, convicting, and punishing people extra-judicially, something that violated the due process of the law rights of Americans. If punishments were to be levied, it was up to the courts, not Klansmen, to do so, Carter, Cole, and Carter argued.

Given the notable lack of news articles about floggings of blacks, perhaps there were no more attacks on blacks than those reported in the press. Possibly blacks did not report beatings, cross burnings, and threats from Klansmen because those things did not occur. Though implausible, given the history and philosophy of the Klan before and after the 1950s, it is certainly one possible explanation for the lack of coverage in the *Tribune* and *The News-Reporter*.



Most of the South stumbled along in lockstep with historical practice, while most of the rest of the nation looked the other way, though, perhaps, expressing indignation when forced to confront it. That is the greatest achievement of Carter, Thompson, and Cole, whether you call them conservative or southern liberal and the handful of genuine liberal journalists in the South; they looked on injustice, and whether motivated by white guilt, religious fervor, or liberal principles, they did something about the situation.

Almost no one else did. And that took courage, stubbornness, and conviction. Both

newspapers were indignant, persistent, angry, preachy, persuasive, and insistent to roughly equal extents.<sup>68</sup>

**Research questions redux.** This dissertation addressed the following researching questions: How did Horace Carter, Willard Cole, and Leslie Thompson go about challenging the Klan through their newspapers, the *Tabor City Tribune* and *The Whiteville News-Reporter*? What techniques were employed by the three journalists in their newspapers? And what motivations impelled them to challenge the Klan?

It was principally religion and religious beliefs, strongly held, that impelled – even *compelled* – Carter, Thompson, and Cole to use their news coverage and their editorials to drive the Klan out of their communities. And that coverage, particularly and most powerfully, the editorials, exhibited religious conviction and fervor. It is as if an unseen hand guided them. Given the triangle of race, religion, and liberalism that helped illustrate the forces at play in the South during the early years of the modern civil rights

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<sup>68</sup> Horace Carter still goes to work at the *Tabor City Tribune* most every day. The title on the door reads “editor emeritus,” and he still writes his weekly opinion column. His eyesight is getting worse – he suffers from macular degeneration – and a slight stroke has made him a bit tottery on his feet.<sup>68</sup> He still believes in what he did and would do it again. Now, he is desperately worried about the threat of Islamic terrorism and thinks it poses a great threat to America. He regards the Muslim challenge through the eyes of a Christian and believes it is a religious war, not just a war of conflicting political systems. Carter interview, March 28, 2007.

Former Imperial Dragon Thomas L. Hamilton died September 30, 1976 in Augusta, Georgia. He had been a pastor at several Baptist churches and was a member of the North Augusta First Baptist Church at his death at age 69. He had no children. There was no mention of his Klan affiliation in his obituary. Campbell and Clark, “Thomas Lemuel Hamilton,” *The Carter-Klan Documentary Project*.

Willard Cole warranted an obituary in *The New York Times*. He died after a stroke in the early morning of May 28, 1965, a few hours after returning home at 11 p.m. from working at the desk of the newspaper he founded, the semi-weekly *Robeson County Enterprise*, located in Lumberton. Cole was survived by his wife, Mary Donnelly Cole, a son and daughter, four sisters, and four grandchildren. “Willard Cole,” *The New York Times*, May 29, 1965, 27.

Leslie Thompson died of a massive heart attack in 1959, a week after returning from Duke Hospital, where he had received a clean bill of health. He was 58. High interview, March 28, 2007.

movement, it was plainly religion that guided these journalists. The triangle was scarcely equilateral; it was heavily weighted towards religion.

There may have been murmurs of liberalism, but they were distant and probably unheeded. Race is not incidental to the discussion – the Klan was an equal opportunity thug, flogging whites and blacks alike – but it was the invisible argument, because it infiltrated every aspect of southern life and culture. It is impossible to separate race from religion in the South and in their coverage, mainly because the Klan was so obviously and violently racist and because race is the defining feature of the South. But Cole, Thompson, and Carter argued that religion, morality, and social justice equaled fairness, not race. This may have been because they were conservatives in Williamson’s model and accepted the basis of their southern way of life – and their writings lend credence to this view.

Other southern journalists may have been fired by liberalism of a kind, but not Carter, Thompson, and Cole. To them, it was a religious “crusade,” certainly a highly charged word, but one that Carter specifically used.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, their principal foe, Imperial Wizard Hamilton of the Klan, also used religion to justify his activities and the two sides grappled over the same scripture, the same savior, and the same God.

In the final analysis, why does this study matter? Why does consideration of the coverage of these two newspapers matter? It matters because three men stood up to the forces of history, tradition, and the status quo and refused to be willing handmaidens to continuing injustice. It is important because the Civil Rights era culminated in the destruction of segregation – a quasi-slavery – and the bestowal, not really the restoration, of rights to a large American constituency. And these three journalists and their two

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<sup>69</sup> Carter interview, September 28, 2002.

newspapers played a part in that. That it was a minor part in a backwards, nearly forgotten corner of the country, does not diminish the part the drama played in weaving the successful tapestry of the civil rights movement.

It is also important because it shows to everyone who reads the story something of the human spirit and the courage that makes the American system work its best when people of conscience and courage *make* it work as intended. As Edmund Burke remarked, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” If they had chosen to say so, Carter, Thompson, and Cole could have quoted scripture to justify their stands. James writes, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”<sup>70</sup> Obadiah states, “In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them” by not confronting the evil.<sup>71</sup> Carter saw it as his journalistic duty, noting in his memoirs his feelings after witnessing the first Klan parade through Tabor City. “My duty as the only newspaperman in Tabor City stared me squarely in the face. I could not compromise my conscience,” he wrote.<sup>72</sup>

One expected result of this study was that liberalism would be evident in the *Tribune* and *News-Reporter* coverage, because there was a tradition of liberal southern journalists from Cable to McGill to Daniels. Race, being central to southern life for nearly four centuries, was also anticipated to be obvious. But liberalism was scarcely in evidence, if at all. And race, while the subtext and the “Invisible Man” in the room, to borrow the title from Ralph Ellison’s book, was also not as evident as predicted. Religion figured to be present,

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<sup>70</sup> James 4:17.

<sup>71</sup> Obad. 11.

<sup>72</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 13.



but secondary; it was not. It was the overriding theme of Carter, Cole, and Thompson's campaign against the Klan and also key to much of the Klan's own justifications. Finally, reference to and reliance on the law was not forecast in advance as playing an important role, though it turned out to be a significant argument against the Klan in both newspapers studied.

Finally, the *Tribune* and *The News-Reporter* were the first small newspapers (in the *Tribune's* case tiny) and the first nondaily newspapers to receive the ultimate journalism accolade for its editorial campaign against the Klan. And it was the Public Service Pulitzer, awarded for repeated and continuing coverage, that was awarded, not a Pulitzer for an individual, even isolated, piece of journalism. *That* alone justifies an examination of the coverage of the two newspapers.



In an April 1951 editorial, in the depths of the Klan campaign and as he spoke out alone against the Klan, Carter wrote in an editorial,

We have in the south for years talked of equal opportunity for all races, but segregation. Is there a man alive who believes the Negro anywhere in this country has equal opportunity? Have you in Tabor city taken a look at the local colored school anytime in recent years? Did you know that our old condemned building for white children, of which we are ashamed, would be comparable to the Governor's mansion if located in our own colored section. Did you know that children in the "bottom" have to hold classes in the churches there in order to get in class at all. That the whole area is a quagmire of water and mud after every rain? That athletic facilities are just plain nothing?

You must also know that wages a Negro earns in this country in most instances are smaller than those earned by a white man

doing the identical job. The Negro has never had equal opportunity . . .<sup>73</sup>

Like Germany, the South carries an unavoidable mark of Cain that it can never completely erase and must constantly confront. Germans, the majority born after the atrocities of the Nazi era, bewail the country's constant obligation to history. "It is unfair," they complain. "When can our guilt be assuaged or removed?" It cannot be, not ever. So it is with the South. The legacy and reminders of slavery will scar the region far into the depths of our futures. And still it will remain. It will be more than statues in town squares and on college campuses, something other than gauzy nostalgia for a Lost Cause that was not noble, but benighted, much more than Civil War reenactments, something beyond marble tablets of honor and small Confederate battle flags next to ancient gravestones. It is in the land and the mountains. The sound of the slave auction and the smell of sweat and blood of men and women crowded together in chains, the image of human beings, one after the other being pulled off the deck of slave ships, shackled together in a daisy chain of death, plummeting into the deep to avoid detection by British men-of-war trying to stop the slave trade. The sting of the whip and the cry of the slave hunter will always be heard.

Slavery is a genocide that, oddly, has enriched this nation in countless ways, from jazz to gospel, from basketball to dancing, from humor to testing the core of our constitutional essence of justice, and from science to literature. Immigrants those black men and women were, though unwilling, just as much as the Irish and the Poles, the Italians and the Germans, the Scots and the Chinese, the Mexicans and the Brazilians

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<sup>73</sup> *Tabor City Tribune*, April 18, 1951, 2.

were later. Churchill described Russia as a “riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” He could just as easily been talking about the American South.



The years have been hard on the land and buildings a short distance from Whiteville and Tabor City, but generally good to the towns, their residents, and their newspapers. *The Whiteville News-Reporter* moved away from downtown a few years ago to more expansive quarters, while the *Tabor City Tribune* just moved into new offices on the edge of town in April 2007.

Where once KKK stickers were plastered and where men in spectral garments paraded and shocked citizenry stood, the towns are now festooned with yellow ribbons honoring American soldiers – black and white – serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Somehow, given the histories of the town, the ribbons seem cheery, not sad, uplifting not as flimsy protections against a dreaded knock on the door by someone: “The Secretary of the Army deeply regrets . . . ” is an all-together too frequent message in a North Carolina filled with bases that are sending young men and young women to the terrorist wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The dusty backroads are mostly paved. The state highway leading into and out of both towns is scattered with ramshackle structures, abandoned tobacco barns, many still scorched by bright leaf fires. Close to the road, there are decaying homes, pillars settling into termite-riddled porch floors, rust-pocked metal roofs. Gray houses crouch in the near distance, their pain all but gone. Cemeteries crowd the road as well, their ancient headstones leaning with the weight of years.

Massive brick churches and palatial brick homes of the nouveau Southern gentry spring up as Whiteville nears. The towns’ downtowns have moved. There is prosperity in

the air, the streets are swept clean of dust and the bigotry of the past. White and black children sit together in the reading room of the town's public library. It is a scene Willard Cole and Leslie Thompson and Horace could scarcely have imagined in the early 1950s, but one he helped bring about.

On a late winter's day in 2007, a line of school children, first or second graders, stood more or less orderly across from where the old *Tabor City Tribune* building was located. About a third were black, two-thirds were white, and a few were Hispanic. One white boy had his arm around a black boy's shoulder, and they were in intense and friendly conversation. Three of the five teachers were African-American. Everyone was clutching sack lunches and waiting to cross the street until traffic – a late model sedan – cleared the street. They walked past the town hall and were oblivious – and perhaps they should be, the final victory in a war of hate – of what those once unpaved streets had witnessed. The old *Tabor City Tribune* building sits next to an empty, weedy lot on Fourth Street and houses a women's clothing store. The clerk never knew the newspaper had been located there.

Squinting out the window of his old office, boxes stacked everywhere in preparation for a move to a new building, Horace Carter was certain of one thing. "We've got [Klan] sympathizers still, and we'll always have sympathizers. But we have no problem with the Klan at this time."<sup>74</sup> Outside, moving slowly on a warm spring day, a rattly pick-up truck, a Confederate battle flag in its rear window along with an empty gun rack, drove past. Carter did not see it, and it moved away out of view.

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<sup>74</sup> Carter interview, March 28, 2007. The company Carter founded "with one employee, me," now grosses over \$200 million a year, has 16 plants throughout the U.S. and Latin America, and employs over 500 people. Carter's son, Rusty, is president of the company, Atlantic Corporation. Its principal businesses are die-cutting and commercial printing. Carter interview, March 28, 2007.

Drive west of Tabor City into Horry County, South Carolina and a giant billboard ballyhoos a new gated community ready for occupancy in Loris. It is another attempt to hold at bay the social conditions and world of that part of the Deep South, to avoid the demons that still plague the region. Drive east of Tabor City, seven miles from downtown, towards Whiteville, through the vestigial towns of Vinegar Hill and Sydney, and a mile or so past Upper Loop Road, and you will come to a spot about midway between the two towns. On the north side of the road, a two-story structure is beginning to collapse upon itself. The front porch roof has sagged almost to the porch floor and the porch floor has largely disintegrated. Paint is merely a shadow on the slat walls. The tatters of a flag struggle against the nails that keep them anchored to the porch, more out of habit than strength. It is somehow obviously the Stars and Stripes. In the early 1950s, this building, half-barn/half-house, held meetings of the Klan. The building waits there grimly for its own demise, but somehow, like the racial prejudice still abiding in Columbus County, still clings desperately to life.

*“Where shall we three meet again? In thunder,  
lightning, or in rain?  
When the hurly-burly’s done, When the battle’s  
lost and won.”*

*– William Shakespeare, Macbeth, I, I, 1-4*

## APPENDIX A

### IN THE WAKE OF THE PULITZER

*"I am certainly not one of those who need to be prodded.  
In fact, if anything, I am the prod."*

– Winston Churchill

Characteristic of some of the national comment the Pulitzer generated was *Time* magazine's story on the two North Carolina publisher/editors.

Among the Pulitzer prizes, the top journalistic award is one to the U.S. newspaper that has rendered the most "meritorious public service." Ever since 1917, when the awards were first made under the will of the late great Publisher Joseph Pulitzer, the "public service" prize has always gone to a daily, usually a big one. This week for the first time in the history of the prizes, the "public service" award for 1952 went to two country weeklies . . .

The two weeklies won their prize for stopping an invasion. The invaders: the Ku Klux Klan, which swarmed into Columbus County from neighboring counties in 1950 and began to terrorize whites and Negroes alike. *News Reporter* Editor Willard Cole, 46, and *Tribune* Editor Horace Carter, 32, locked arms for a long, tough battle. Branding the Klan "a (bunch of) gangsters," Cole and Carter, both native Tarheels and longtime friends, fought month after month with front-page editorials, dug up proof of K.K.K. floggings and atrocities and kept guns in their homes for their own protection.

After other papers joined their crusades, the uproar brought the FBI and state investigators to the county . . . and the Klan was smashed.<sup>1</sup>

A number of Southern newspapers reported the Pulitzer achievement. The *Wilmington Star-News* recognized Cole and Carter "for their completely successful fight against the Ku Klux Klan . . . [They] saved the Carolinas from the Klan and through their

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<sup>1</sup> "Pulitzer Prizes," *Time*, May 11, 1953, 51.

determination helped lay the vile organization so low that it is doubtful that it will ever rise again.”<sup>2</sup>

*The New York Times* also remarked on the Pulitzer. “We are particularly glad to note that two small North Carolina weeklies . . . have received awards for their courageous fight against the Ku Klux Klan. It is one thing to be brave in print when one talks about abstract principles of right and justice; it is quite another when those principles are brought to bear against one’s neighbors. We salute the editors who led a gallant and successful battle against the forces of terror . . . ”<sup>3</sup>

CBS radio and TV legend Edward R. Murrow commented on the Pulitzer. “The Pulitzer Prizes’ gold medals have gone to two weekly newspapers in North Carolina. Their editors decided to fight and expose the Ku Klux Klan. Floggings and terror from the Klan swept the area. These two country editors fought and won the battle . . . We suggest that if the fight against intolerance, bigotry, race prejudices, hatred and fear is to be won in this country, it must be won in the towns such as Whiteville and Tabor City.”<sup>4</sup> Murrow also interviewed Carter and Cole on his CBS news show, “See It Now.”

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<sup>2</sup> *Wilmington Star-News*, quoted in Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 216. Interestingly, according to Carter, the *Star-News* routinely “routed [scratched] out the faces of Negroes who were in group pictures made at public functions.” Carter, *Only in America*, 359. The *Tribune* was the first newspaper of any size in that area of North Carolina to run front-page photographs of blacks, Carter stated. Carter interview, September 27, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> “Pulitzer Prizes,” editorial, *New York Times*, May 5, 1953, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Edward R. Murrow, quoted in Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 220.

**Honors.** In July, 1953 Horace Carter was selected one of the “Ten Most Outstanding Young Men in America” by the U. S. Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees), a distinction Carter valued “almost as much as the Pulitzer.”<sup>5</sup> He was the first North Carolinian selected for that honor.<sup>6</sup> Carter took his first-ever cross-country airplane flight to Seattle, Washington, for presentation of the honor.<sup>7</sup> To commemorate the honor, Carter received a statue of two clasped hands, representing “brotherhood, a goal of the United States Jaycees.”<sup>8</sup> Only those eligible for membership in the Jaycees, meaning under age 35, could win the award, explaining why Cole, and Thompson as well, who was notably absent from all post-Pulitzer honors, was ineligible for the honor. Carter was 32 when he won the Pulitzer.

Cole, Jake Jenkins of the *News and Observer*, and Carter were honored by the Sidney Hillman Foundation on June 9, for “their collective efforts in opposing the Ku Klux Klan in the Carolinas.”<sup>9</sup> *News and Observer* Editor Jonathan Daniels delivered the keynote address at a banquet honoring the three at the Biltmore Hotel in New York

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<sup>5</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 209. Other 1953 honorees were Billie Sol Estes, a Texas businessman and agriculture innovator, Carl T. Rowan, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the *Minneapolis (MN) Tribune*, Dr. Albert Schatz, co-discoverer of streptomycin, Sgt. Hiroshi Miyamura, a Congressional Medal of Honor winner during the Korean War, Dr. Lloyd T. Koritz, who risked his life experimenting with new artificial respiration techniques, and the Rt. Rev. William Gordon, the Episcopal Bishop of Alaska, who had devoted his life to those who lived in his Arctic see. Rev. Gordon was also a native North Carolinian. The flight, part of which was in a “driving snow storm . . . was as death-threatening as the KKK campaign had been,” Carter wrote. *Ibid.*, 212-213.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Jenkins would later become *News and Observer* editor. The Hillman Foundation is named after the long-time president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (a predecessor to the current UNITE), and a refugee from Czarist repression in Russia. He was an adviser to President Franklin Roosevelt and “instrumental in shaping the New Deal and landmark labor legislation protecting workers’ rights and living standards,” according to the foundation’s Web site. The Sidney Hillman Foundation, “Prize Awards Program,” at <http://www.hillmanfoundation.org/bio-hillman.html>, accessed March 23, 2003.



City.<sup>10</sup> According to the *Tribune* account, “like the Pulitzer Prize which Cole and Carter recently won for their newspapers, the selection of the weeklies [for the Hillman award] sets a precedent . . . The awards usually go to newsmen on big city dailies.”<sup>11</sup> The award included a plaque and \$300.<sup>12</sup>

Carter spoke briefly at the ceremony, and “paraphrased some of the memorable comments made by my mentor, Dr. Frank P. Graham,” who was present at the ceremony.<sup>13</sup>

The American dream is to make this country safe for all races and religions, where opportunity does not escape the underprivileged and the minorities. Where men are brothers in the sight of God and in their own hearts. Where children can succeed in the schools and in their homes and later in an adult society. Where even the most humble will be accepted in a noble citizenry. Where human progress is made through religion, education and voluntary cooperation in the minds and hearts of the people. And where the struggle for success and fulfillment of historical Americanism is the best answer to fascism, communism and the vigilante movement that has harassed my home community for many months.

The least of our brethren still can struggle and hope in America for freedom and know that the answer to error is not terror, respect for the past is not reactionary and the hope for the future is not revolution. Integrity remains without a price tag and the daily toil of everyday Americans is above pomp and power and it will not go unrewarded. America is a land where the majority doesn't mean tyranny and the minorities are without fear and hope is real in the minds of all people.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Cole, Jenkins And Carter Get Sidney Hillman Award,” *Tabor City Tribune*, June 10, 1953, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 196.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Whether Cole and Jenkins spoke is unclear, though presumably they did. Any comments went unreported.

In 1983, Carter was inducted into the North Carolina Journalism Hall of Fame at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the eleventh individual enshrined.<sup>15</sup> Cole was inducted posthumously in 1992.<sup>16</sup> Thompson is not a member. When the journalism school moved across campus into its new location in Carroll Hall, Carter donated the money to pay for a Halls of Fame *cum* multi-purpose room.<sup>17</sup> It is named in his honor and outside of it is displayed the actual Pulitzer Prize medallion he received for the Klan campaign.<sup>18</sup> Writing in *Virus of Fear*, Carter said that his wife “deserved to win the Pulitzer for supporting me even though constantly concerned for the safety of the children, our home and me.”<sup>19</sup> In 1991, Carter decided to donate his Pulitzer to the Journalism School to display “so that it might encourage young aspiring journalists to fight for justice and principles and thus cast a big shadow wherever their careers [lead] them.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Carter interview, March 25, 2003, and “N.C. Journalism Hall of Fame,” School of Journalism and Mass Communication Web site, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, available at <http://www.jomc.unc.edu/specialprograms/famejournalism.html#Carter>, accessed 27 August 2002. “I gave them the money to build that damn thing,” Carter said, referring to the Halls of Fame room. “I think that’s why they named it after me . . . I don’t really approve of buying honors.” Carter interview, March 25, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Carter interview, March 25, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 228.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 229-230.

Carter spoke of his crusade against the Klan, and its effect on his career and him at the February 4, 1991 presentation ceremony of the Pulitzer, attended by over 200 family members and guests, including UNC-CH Chancellor Paul Hardin.<sup>21</sup>

Once in a great while an unusual opportunity presents itself to journalists to stand up and be counted – we have a chance to cast a shadow that reflects our principles, our heart, indeed our very soul and character. We have a chance to mold attitudes and actions for what we perceive as good, right and proper for the people and the community we serve. If we are truly convinced of the integrity of our position, and if it is fashioned upon ethical, godly, biblical standards, even the smallest of newspapers can cast a big shadow. That makes it important that we forever be sure of the stand we take, and we must be willing to sacrifice time, serenity, economic security, and the physical safety of our own family. Every editorial crusade that's worth its salt will antagonize some portion of the readership or else its objective and reason for writing is trivial and ill-conceived. If you are not willing to make sacrifices and face the dangers, your crusade will fail. Facing disaster and making sacrifices for what you sincerely believe often will rally the people in your corner, enhance your position and focus greater attention on the policy direction you advocate. It's then that the opposition feels the pressure. Your newspaper campaign becomes real, and your editorials are powerful. You feel some fear with every sentence, and you need courage.

Intimidation often stops noteworthy crusades. You are threatened with physical violence, your print shop will be burned, your handful of advertisers will be boycotted, your subscription list will evaporate. You may be facing a libel suit soon. These are the threats that both large and small newspapers face when they pursue an objective that they are convinced is American and in the best interest of the citizenry; albeit, some individuals may have to cease and desist from activities that steal rights and opportunities from the less fortunate. They become your enemies. Those who oppose your policy that endangers their vested interest may threaten your very existence. The size of the shadow you then cast depends upon your courage and determination. The intensity of your crusade and dedication to your conviction measures the depth of your courage. You will feel fear, but where there is no fear, there is no courage . . .

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 208 and 226.

Winning the Pulitzer has helped me every day of my life . . .  
The months of fear [had] been rewarded both tangibly and  
intangibly.

As I have often said since that traumatic era of fighting the  
Klan resurrection and the cruel floggings that ensued, I  
didn't deserve to win such a prestigious award. I did no more  
than any other editor would have done if such lawlessness  
erupted on his own doorstep . . . Why would a little weekly  
in a town of less than two thousand people that had as  
many bill collectors as it did subscribers be so honored?  
Then a reality came to mind that I think is of great  
importance to Americans in all walks of life. It's not the  
size of the dog in the fight; it's the size of the fight in the  
dog that counts. Indeed, with our meager resources, we  
had fought like a much tougher dog, even though I was  
relatively inexperienced in editorial writing and had only  
reached my thirty-second birthday. I was on the right side  
and morally bound.<sup>22</sup>

To his "further surprise and disbelief," On August 22, 1999, the *News and Observer* named Carter one of the top 100 North Carolinians of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>23</sup> In the accompanying article, staff writer Dennis Rogers wrote that "Carter's mettle became the stuff of journalism legend" as he "stuck to his presses" despite threats of violence and an advertising boycott.<sup>24</sup> Neither Cole nor Thompson was named to the list.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 226-28.

<sup>23</sup> Dennis Rogers, "Horace Carter, Crusading Editor who Fought the Klan," *News and Observer* archives, August 22, 1999, available at [http://archives.newsbank.com/ar-search/we/Archives?p\\_action=search&p\\_perpage=20&p\\_product=RLEC&s\\_search\\_type=keyword&p\\_widresearch=yes&p\\_text\\_base=w.+horace+carter&p\\_field\\_pseudo-sort-0=pseudo-sort&p\\_sort=\\_rank\\_%3AD&p\\_field\\_date-0=YMD\\_date&p\\_params\\_date-0=date%3A+B%2CE&p\\_text\\_date-0=&p\\_field\\_YMD\\_date-0=YMD\\_date&p\\_field\\_YMD\\_date-0=YMD\\_date&p\\_params\\_YMD\\_date-0=date%3AB%2CE&xcal\\_ranksort=4&xcal\\_useweights=yes&%5B+Search+%5D.x=73&%5B+Search+%5D.y=2](http://archives.newsbank.com/ar-search/we/Archives?p_action=search&p_perpage=20&p_product=RLEC&s_search_type=keyword&p_widresearch=yes&p_text_base=w.+horace+carter&p_field_pseudo-sort-0=pseudo-sort&p_sort=_rank_%3AD&p_field_date-0=YMD_date&p_params_date-0=date%3A+B%2CE&p_text_date-0=&p_field_YMD_date-0=YMD_date&p_field_YMD_date-0=YMD_date&p_params_YMD_date-0=date%3AB%2CE&xcal_ranksort=4&xcal_useweights=yes&%5B+Search+%5D.x=73&%5B+Search+%5D.y=2).

<sup>24</sup> Carter, *Only in America*, 388.

APPENDIX B  
SELECTED EDITORIALS AND COVERAGE IN  
*THE WHITEVILLE NEWS-REPORTER*<sup>1</sup>

*“You have enemies? Good. That means you’ve stood  
up for something, sometime in your life.”*  
– Winston Churchill

**Time For Action**<sup>2</sup>  
by Leslie Thompson (attributed)  
*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, September 21, 1950 – page 4

Unless mob violence on the part of the Ku Klux Klan is halted, it is about time for some law enforcement agency to step in and do a job similar to that which FBI Director Hoover’s boys did with the kidnapping gangs.

The latest outrage is reported at Camden, S.C. where Thomas L. Hamilton, grand dragon of the Associated Carolina Klans, is charged with inciting mob violence against a YMCA swimming instructor. Leslie L. Boney of Sumter charged that he was dragged from his car by Klansmen on a highway near Bishopville and beaten up when he came on a Klan assemblage.

The swimming instructor said he was bringing home two carloads of Sumter youth from a swimming contest at Kannapolis, North Carolina, when the incident occurred. Boney said that when he stopped his car to find out why the car behind him had been halted, he was pulled out and beaten, and then left on the road.

Sometimes there are extenuating circumstances when a man or men commit crimes of passion, but there can be no mitigating circumstances when robed hoodlums attack innocent persons on the public highway.

This is adult delinquency only in the sense that the perpetrators are mature physically. Mentally, they belong in the category of the moron.

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial authorship is attributed by analyzing the text and known examples of Leslie Thompson and Willard Cole’s work. Some of this may be simply educated guesses.

<sup>2</sup> All coverage has been transcribed with grammar, spelling, and word choice as published originally included. This is not to imply that some errors may have crept in during the retyping process, although due care has been exercised to ensure accuracy. The editorials originally were set either one-column or two-columns wide, while these transcriptions are all a standard width for consistency and ease of reading.

**The Doctrine of Love  
(An Editorial)**

by Leslie Thompson (attributed)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, August 23, 1951 – page 1

*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. – Peter 2:13*

Every Christian should be concerned – prayerfully concerned – and every citizen should be concerned with what was advocated at the KKK meeting between Whiteville and Tabor City on the night of Aug. 18, 1951. Every citizen of our country should be concerned because the very foundation of our way of life – the Christian and democratic way of life – is at issue. Are we to become a nation where class is pitted against class and race against race?

The doctrine expounded by the speakers at the meeting was, in the main, a doctrine of hate and defiance – defiance of the law and legally constituted authorities in the event certain designated things come to pass. Hatred of certain people and groups and races was fervently demonstrated. Certain conditions that exist in our midst were related in an effort to justify this doctrine of defiance of the law and legally constituted authorities in the event certain designated things came to pass. The failures, evil and immorality of some were used as some of the pitiful reasons, or excuses, to justify this group taking the law into their own hands, becoming self-appointed judges, jury and executioners. Such a philosophy is difficult of acceptance.

Jesus taught us by saying, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” “And who is my neighbor?” the lawyer asked Him. He answered with the parable about the good Samaritan, with which we are all familiar. This parable teaches us that our neighbor is anyone – red, yellow, black, white, Jew, Gentile, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, or Moslem – who needs our help or assistance. Our neighbor is anyone who doesn't need our assistance. Our neighbor is every living human being upon the face of the earth. Our neighbor is all men because God created man – all men – in His own image, and after the creation, God blessed man.

The very existence of our material world is founded upon the law and order of God, as taught in our Bible. Our social order is founded upon the laws of our land. Our country was founded upon the principles of freedom and liberty. Our laws are based on the wisdom of the ages. We, as citizens of this country, have the Christian duty, as well as the patriotic duty, to uphold and defend our country from attack, both from without and within. We have only to become acquainted with what is going on in the world today to realize that ours is the most favored nation, and we, as citizens of it, are the most favored of all peoples. We reached this position, not by defiance of authority, but by living under and in obedience to the laws which we have (or should have) a part in making. We reached this

position, not by hating one another, but by an honest effort to understand our neighbor.

Is it spiritually or morally right for us to hate any man, or group of men? Can we justify before our God the teaching of a doctrine of hatred against any man or race of men?

Two thousand years have not dimmed the light of love or the Christian doctrine of going to the aid of a man in need, even though that man be a Samaritan. "Rescue the Perishing." . . . "Love Lifted Me." " . . . Rock of Ages" " . . . "Abide with Me. . . . "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." . . . "When the Roll is Called up Yonder." . . . "Jesus is All The World To Me." "The Great Physician." . . . "Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown." . . . "The Church Is One Foundation." . . . "Nearer My Gold To Thee." . . . "Work For The Night Is Coming." . . .

Great hymns of God – all great hymns. But not one word of hate . . .

"I am the way, the truth and the life . . . " . . . "Do unto others as ye would that men should do unto you" . . . "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: . . . "Pray for them that despise you and do all manner of evil unto you . . . "

Great quotations from the Holy Bible. But not one word of hate.

The challenge that faces our nation and world today is not the hate doctrine as preached so fervently on this recent humid August night between two of Columbus County's important communities, but the doctrine of love as taught by the Blessed Messiah two thousands years as He walked in a world that was just as sinful as the one we know . . . in a world that He pleaded with to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's . . . in a world where He was to hear men who hated, not loved, so bitterly that it chose a murderer in preference to the Son of God . . . a doctrine of love, not hate, such as Christ manifested when He prayed: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

There should be no hatred – no hatred even of the Ku Klux Klan. There should be only an earnest effort to understand that Christ taught obedience to law – that he preached a doctrine of the brotherhood of man.

Ours is the task to light the lamp of love.

### **Fear Rode Along<sup>3</sup>**

by Willard G. Cole

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 19, 1951 – page 1

I saw the dark spots on the victim's thighs!

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<sup>3</sup> This was the only bylined editorial that appeared on the front page. A handful of other editorials were on the front page, though without identification of author. By using the first person in the text, the "editorial" may in fact been an opinion piece. It was set two columns wide in the same type size as all the other front-page editorials. Cole calls it an "item" in the text, not an editorial.

Through the red coloring of a common disinfectant, I saw the results of a vicious assault by masked hoodlums.

On either leg, half-way between the waistline and the knees, were visible the marks of what appeared to have been a leather strap such as might have been cut from a discarded harness for a horse.

He told me how it happened. He was at home, where all citizens, both good and bad except those convicted of crime and sentenced to jail, should be at 11 o'clock at night. The guise of an emergency was used to bring him out into the open, the details of which will be omitted from this item.

Ordered inside a waiting automobile, he sat down with burly men whose faces were hidden by masks. Let all the honest, upright, God-fearing people take this ride with him!

For a mile or so, his eyes were free to see whatever there was to see in a murky night. Others sat in the same car, but they were not the only passengers. Fear, with a capital F, rode with him. A screaming, hysterical family had seen him go. Their cries were still ringing in his ears.

Where? What? Why? These were questions which surged through his fear-stricken mind. But for the moment they went unanswered.

As the victim and Fear, and his captors rode along, other cars joined the procession. And a blindfold was put to use to blot out everything except the unreasoning dread of what might be in store for him.

Perhaps, it was less than an hour that passed before the victim came face to face with his punishment. Two men held both his arms. And the barbarism of centuries ago welled up in the men who had gathered for this resurrection of savagery and bestiality.

Swish went the instrument of torture as it slapped against human flesh on one leg. Swish went a similar instrument of torture as it struck the other leg. And alternately went the belt-type pieces of leather as a man on the left and a man on the right satisfied their lust for the sight of pain.

When these gentlemen (?) of law and order had finished with their human target, they set him free – free to go home but not free of fear.

Klansmen? Your guess is as good as that of this reporter. But they were wearing masks. And this sort of thing wasn't happening before the KKK was organized in this area.

I have seen the officers at work on this case, but everywhere there seems to be nothing but a dead end. Can they patrol every side road in the county? Can they call every citizen in for questioning and get an admission of guilt from the guilty? Hardly.

Is this an isolated case of mob violence? Many people know that it isn't. Scores of such experiences may have gone unreported.

The victim I talked to declared emphatically that he was innocent of the fault which the masked men gave as their excuse for the flogging. I don't know about the merits of the case. I just saw the results.

The bruised human flesh made one wonder how many others have been treated in the same manner. It raised the question of how many citizens



cannot go to sleep at night with a feeling of security that they will not be molested in the privacy of their homes.

Officers will never raise the curtain from this sort of lawlessness and hoodlumism. There aren't that many officers. But an aroused public can do the job.

Until this is accomplished, each citizen may well ask the question: Am I next?

### **A Court Dream**

by Willard Cole (attributed)<sup>4</sup>

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 26, 1951 – page 4

We dreamed last night of a trial in court. On the bench sat a man wearing a robe, but not the robe of a jurist. His face was mask and none could tell whether he was Judge Burney, Judge Parker, Judge Phillips, or any of the either legally-trained men who ordinarily occupy the bench in Superior Court.

Over in the jury box were 12 men, all wearing masks and robes. There was no way of knowing whether they were Klansmen or just men who happened to cloak themselves in the regalia similar to that of the Klan.

The defendant sat there beside his attorney. The solicitor was in his usual place. What was strikingly different about this court scene was the regalia of the judge and jury.

The procedure was very unusual. Counsel for the defense was denied the privilege of asking the name of any juror who was about to sit in judgment upon the guilt or innocence of his client. He could make no challenge. He had no way of determining whether one of the jurors was a neighbor of the defendant who had spite in his heart. He could not know whether there was a juror whose corn had been trampled last summer by the defendant's stray cows. He was helpless to ascertain the literacy level of the jurors who were to say whether it was to be freedom or prison for the man on trial.

Who was the man on the bench? He would not say. Was he a booze hound, a philanderer, or an honest, God-fearing citizen? Neither the attorney nor defendant could inquire.

It was a strange scene, but remarkably realistic, especially in view of the fact that it was only a dream.

When the dream was ended and full consciousness returned, we knew that this was typical of how victims of mob violence are tried. The only regret was that those who participate in terroristic activities could not

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<sup>4</sup> The style is very consistent with the known work of Cole, although, unlike the "Fear Rode Along" piece of a week earlier, the pronoun "we" is used, rather than "I." This is consistent with newspaper style where, in an editorial, the newspaper is assumed to be speaking to its reader and the newspaper has, through long tradition, been considered plural.

have a similar dream, because we know that if any of them were brought into court and asked to stand trial before a masked judge and jury, they would be the first to cry out for their rights as set forth in the Constitution. They would yell the loudest for the privilege of challenging jurors who might be prejudiced. They would shout till their lungs were sore for the knowledge that the judge on the bench was a reputable man. And they would claim that their witnesses had a legal and moral right to tell the defendant's side of the story.

The dream made it crystal clear that the honest, law-abiding citizen will never sympathize with any system of punishment which denies the defendant the right to know the jurors who are sitting in judgment, the right to know the jurist on the bench, and the right to present evidence for the accused as well as evidence for the prosecuting witness.

It was a revealing dream. May others have the same.

### **Letter To Santa**

by Willard Cole (attributed)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, December 21, 1951 – page 4

Dear Mr. Claus:

Among the great stories which made the headlines in Columbus County during 1951 were:

1. The approval of the health and agriculture program by the voters in the special election in June
2. The invasion of Columbus County in mid-August by the Ku Klux Klan.
3. The acquisition of a new industry by Whiteville in mid-December.

Of course, Santa, you had nothing to do with the second item on this list of three. Our earliest recollection of you and annual contacts for two-score years furnish positive assurance that you strive only to give the best possible for each person you visit. So, we're not blaming you for the KKK invasion or the subsequent acts of mob violence.

What we are trying to say, dear Santa, is that we are grateful for such evidences of progressiveness as the vision to go forward in health and agriculture and the foresight to work diligently for new industry. These are the beautiful sticks of candy in the Columbus stocking.

However, as the hour of your annual visit approaches, we ask you, Mr. Claus, to fill our homes with love for humanity, with a broader understanding of the meaning for Christmas, with a knowledge that the birth of Christ was God's way of showing his love for His people, and with a realization that the Messiah taught a doctrine of love rather than a doctrine of hate and terror.

If you, dear Santa, have space in your pack, will you please leave all of us enough of the capacity to think clearly to enable us to understand that

“when the people run the government, there is mob violence; and when the government runs the people, there is dictatorship.” Give us a package of common sense to maintain the balance which will preserve our liberties and free enterprise and at the same time our cherished tradition of law and order.

### **Truth Emerges**

by Leslie Thompson (attributed)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 28, 1952 – page 4

Grand Dragon Hamilton has disbanded the Fair Bluff Klavern of the Ku Klux Klan, he says in an announcement date-lined “Whiteville,” although he didn’t contact the Whiteville press to issue his statement.

The action taken, he indicated, because of “un-Klannish” activities on the part of the Klavern. “Some men have joined the Klan there who have taken the wrong attitude and want to take the law into their own hands and the Klan does not approve of this type of activity,” Hamilton was quoted as saying.

If the self-style grand dragon is sincere in his disavowal of the Fair Bluff Klavern, he will come forward with a full and complete list of the men he claims have brought disrepute to his organization. If he wants to stand up and be counted as an exponent of law and order, he will submit immediately to constituted authorities the membership roster of Klansmen in the Fair Bluff area and thus help the investigators track down the guilty parties.

The conclusion is inevitable that if the Fair Bluff Klavern became so rotten as to merit the disavowal of Grand Dragon Hamilton, it must be pretty bad. And in that case, Hamilton should want to punish those who are responsible.

If Hamilton does not produce the membership roster and help authorities in this situation, his action can be construed as nothing more than a parallel with a rat deserting a sinking ship.

His declaration that the Klavern had been disbanded does not jibe with the letter he wrote to Horace Carter, editor of the Tabor City Tribune. The letter received only two days before his announcement, had attacked Carter for his comments on the Fair Bluff situation. He said that “upon a personal investigation, there was no connection there with reference to the Klan.” At which time was he misrepresenting the facts?

Whiteville has become “Blackville” in the press of the nation during the past six months, and all of this has taken place since the Ku Klux Klan rally was held in Columbus County on August 18, 1951, when Hamilton and Hendrix spat their doctrine of hate and prejudice. Let’s see who changed “white” to “black” in the name of the county seat.

It wasn’t The News Reporter or any representative thereof who first published or sent out the stories advertising the rally between Whiteville and Tabor City. It was the Klan itself and county newspapers printed

notices only because the Klan promoters and the daily press had forced them into a position of letting their readers either get their Klan news from the daily press or printing the facts so that the citizenry might become aware of this cancerous growth upon the vitals of Columbus society.

It wasn't the county newspapers or their representatives who first told the sordid story of Klan spleen after the rally. They took note only after the daily press had publicized their doings. Even then the county newspapers tried mightily to paint the development in the vicious and brutal light that it actually was.

In only three of the dozen or so floggings have county newspaper men had a hand in substituting "black" for "white" in Whiteville. And this was for the purpose of advising the citizens of the county that clever tricks were being used to ensnare unsuspecting individuals and get them into the hands of the mob.

It wasn't the county press that broke the vicious tale of the floggings as reported two weeks ago and it wasn't any local representative who used a Whiteville date-line to announce the disbanding of the Fair Bluff Klavern. We didn't put the black in "Blackville."

The development which substituted "black" for "white" in the name of Whiteville was the hoodlumism which came out of the tirade of hate and pseudo-piety at the Klan rally. No one knows that better than Hamilton. And no one did more to incite mob violence than those "preachers" of hate.

But it does no good and serves no purpose to think upon how Whiteville became Blackville in the public mind. It cannot help the situation to blame even Grand Dragon Hamilton for bringing about the condition which has caused Columbus County to be known as a place of floggings and mob violence.

Only the extermination of this cancerous growth can restore the "white" in Whiteville. And this is the time for all honest, decent believers in the future of Columbus County to stand up and be counted. This is the time for the disbanding of all Klaverns, whether at Fair Bluff or elsewhere.

Any citizen who may have formed the impression that they were joining a worthy movement should know by now that their confidence has been abused. A score of incidents, many of them unreported in the press, should leave no doubt that the organization of the Klan exerted an unwholesome influence and should cause them to realize that the KKK and its offspring, violence, are dangerous to the freedom and liberties they cherish, or ought to cherish.

The Columbus County Ministerial Association, with a daring that characterized the spiritual leaders of old, has taken the only position that men of God can take. No one knows better than the minister that Christ taught the doctrine of love. These spiritual leaders and the forces of law and order must be protected and supported. If any pastor, who has spoken out in defense of freedom, is molested in any way, either by threats or by efforts to oust him, he must have the united backing of every God-fearing man.

The disbanding of the Fair Bluff Klavern is but a step in the right direction. It must be followed by other steps. Only the apprehension of the perpetrators of these acts of violence and the dissolution of all organizations dedicated to the cause of exciting [inciting?] such acts will restore the “white” to Whiteville and restore the good name of Columbus County.

Whiteville will become Whiteville again when the guilty are brought to justice, not when the publicity ceases.

### **They, Too, Must Suffer**

by Willard Cole (attributed)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 1, 1952 – page 4

Members of lawless mobs have spread their wave of terror in Columbus County for six months. Men and women and even teen-agers have received threats. Some of them have been seized and beaten. Others have lived through sleepless nights, never knowing when there would be a knock on the door and a summons to a frightening experience. All this in a land where every home and every individual are supposed to be inviolate, where only the law has a right to administer justice.

But members of the mob must also pay. They, too, must suffer. They, too, are suffering.

When these hoodlums go to bed at night, they are no more free than their victims. They, too, live in terror. A hundred questions surge through their minds:

“How much do members of the Sheriff’s Department know? What does the SBI know? What does the FBI know? If they come tonight and point the finger at me, what shall I answer? How much dare I tell?

“Have I been recognized? Has somebody in the gang ‘spilled the beans’ and put the finger on me? What will my children think? What will my neighbors think? What will my church think?

“Will I lose my job? Is there honor among mobsters? Will they keep my name out of it if they are caught? Have they talked already? What happened that Bill Blanks or Joe Doe didn’t complain about being beaten? Did he talk or did he keep quiet? Are officers probing the incidents in which I participated.

“Are agents of the FBI, SBI or Sheriff’s Department busy tonight while I’m trying to sleep, ready to pounce when the time is ripe? Am I already known as one of the mobsters and are they just waiting until others in the mob are pinned down with evidence?”

These and scores of other questions of like nature don’t make for restful sleep. It is a horrible penalty these people must pay for being members of the gang and participating in these atrocities. Whether all are apprehended and brought to a court of justice or not, members of these lawless bands will continue to slumber restlessly. They will not know when the blow will strike. And waiting is often as cruel as the punishment.

Those who have belonged to the organization are undergoing harrowing experiences even though they have not participated in the crimes of violence. They stand to lose heavily if their names are exposed and it is no wonder that they are scared.

But for them there is a way out. Don't they know that the only way to clear their skirts and keep their names out of the public eye is to make contact with the authorities and show cooperation? Don't they know that the agencies investigating the situation will protect them if they supply information which will be beneficial?

Wise members of the group are taking the hint and shaking the dust of this experience from their feet by getting on the side of law and order.

The News Reporter editor offers himself as an intermediary between such persons who wish to place themselves on the right side before it is too late and the agency which will protect their identity. No person need identify himself to this editor. A telephone call will obtain the required information.

### **Is An Oath Sacred?**

by Leslie Thompson (attributed)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 7, 1952 – page 4

A News Reporter representative posed the question of the sacredness of an oath to an un-Godly organization in interviews with several ministers of the Gospel. What she learned is revealing and interesting.

To us, it appears that an oath is sacred only when given in a sacred service or to a sacred cause.

Let's look at the facts. If a member of the Ku Klux Klan took the Klan oath and found that his fellow members were engaging in law violations, should he be bound by that oath? As we interpret citizenship, the citizen's first obligation is to law and order, and that obligation implies an oath of allegiance to his government. How then can a man feel morally bound to keep his oath and remain silent when his confidence was violated and when he finds that those to whom he gave the oath were involved in offenses against society?

Rather than suffering any pangs of conscience for breaking an oath made to a cause which is found to have no sacredness, the good citizen should be happy to get on the side of law and order, and to comply with his greater duty of citizenship. Actually, those who remain silent when they know of such crimes against society are compounding a felony. They are aiding and abetting in mob violence, and should welcome the opportunity to break the Klan oath, or any oath, that prevents them from telling what they know to the end that justice may be supreme in this land of religious and personal freedom.

## **Effective Demonstration**

by Leslie Thompson (attributed)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 1, 1952 – page 4

Never was there a more significant demonstration of the importance of law than the proceedings this week when 27 men were brought into court to face charges that they deprived three men and one woman of their freedom and actually used physical force in administering mob justice.

Able attorneys argued brilliantly for the accused men. These representatives of the defendants contested the consolidation of the 13 cases for the purposes of trial and were given a respectful hearing by a learned judge. Their objection was disregarded on the grounds that the 13 men are charged with the same offense, but that does not alter the fact that proper consideration was given to the contentions in behalf of the defendants.

In a matter of minutes, defense attorneys resisted the State's motion for an outside jury. The prosecution argued that the so-called Klan cases contained so many ramifications that it would be almost impossible to obtain a trial jury of men and women who had not formed or expressed an opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the accused. It was pointed out that with hundreds of Klan members still unidentified, it would be extremely difficult to determine the Klan affiliations, family connections and social ties of prospective jurors.

The defense argued, very properly and correctly, that Columbus County juries have always been found to be eminently fair and impartial in their verdicts; that since the crimes, if any, were committed in this county and the accused should be tried by men from within the county; and that the cases had been widely publicized elsewhere as well as in the county. Their position was given calm consideration with the observation that an outside jury should, in no sense, be considered a reflection on Columbus County.

As the court proceeded with preparations for the trial, additional hours were devoted to the protection of the rights of the accused. There was no effort to brush aside the contentions of the defense that the indictments had been brought by a grand jury which had been constituted illegally. Rather, it was the clear intent of the court to guarantee, insofar as possible, that no right of the defendants be denied.

As we predicted months ago, all of the accused have enjoyed the privilege of employing brilliant counsel, the right of trial by jurors who can be seen and questioned, the opportunity to identify the jurist who sits in judgment, and all the other protections of our system of justice, including the presumption of innocence which surrounds any man or woman brought to trial in America.

To say that this is in sharp contrast to the treatment accorded the county's 13 victims of mob violence is an understatement. And yet this is the kind of consideration that every law-abiding citizen insists should be given the defendants. It is the only procedure which right-thinking people

would advocate, regardless of the time it takes or the amount of money it costs.

Whatever the outcome of these cases, this demonstration of the orderly and protective processes of law should not be lost to public consciousness. It is conclusive evidence that even those who are accused of denying such rights and privileges to other human beings are not themselves denied the protection of the law.

It must ever be thus if freedom is to survive in America.

### **Just Like the Average John Doe**

by Willard Cole (attributed)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 29, 1952 – page 4

Stripped of the colorful robe he wears as Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan of the Carolinas, Thomas L. Hamilton looks like the average John Doe when called to account for alleged wrong-doings.

Without the “Imperial Guard” which usually surrounds him at rallies, the Klan chieftain excites no more curiosity than a grease-encrusted dishrag. He is simply a man under suspicion of violating the code of society.

Before 5,000 Klan associates, sympathizers and curious, he was an orator who ranted loud and long about his personal prejudices and spat a doctrine of hate. When called to a citadel of justice, he was silent in the proverbial thousand languages.

Surrounded by the show props of a great rally, it was difficult to imagine him in the role of an accused lawbreaker – that is, it was difficult for anybody who did not immediately realize that any organization which hides its face and its membership is dangerous. But in the cold reality of a May morning, it was not difficult to see him cast in the part of an ordinary citizen called to accountability for alleged misdeeds.

It is in the role of an average John Doe that he must be considered when he comes to trial. If and when probable cause is found in his case. The law has an obligation to see that he is not tried for the position he holds in what has come to appear as an undesirable organization, but to arrive at a fair verdict and pass judgment for any crimes he may have committed.

Some people, seeking an excuse for the error of their own ways, may seek to place all the blame on Hamilton for their night-riding activities. But nobody can be sold a bill of goods who isn't in the mood to buy. No con game ever worked unless there was a second party with larceny in his heart. There wouldn't be any bootlegger if there were no consumer.

Hence it behooves the law to recognize that Hamilton was a purveyor of hate and prejudice, which ultimately led to violence, the like of which has never before been experienced in our midst. But it is also important to the future of justice that he receive the same fair treatment as is accorded the ordinary citizen, which in reality he is.



He should be tried as an ordinary John Doe and, if convicted, punished like an ordinary John Doe.

Meanwhile, plaudits go to Solicitor Clifton L. Moore and agents of the State Bureau of Investigation for their perseverance in tracking down the evidence which they believe will prove the Klan chieftain set in motion the two floggings that were among the dozen that brought shame to the county during five months of night-riding terror.

### **Where Their Allegiance Lies**

by Leslie Thompson (attributed)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 21, 1952 – page 4

There is still talk among some former Klan members that they gave an oath when they joined the organization and that members should be reluctant to break faith with their associates. It is an extremely silly conception of the whole business, but its prevalence justifies dealing with it in a frank and open manner.

Despite declarations of intention to uphold the law, who received mail regarding unwholesome situations? When they were received, where were those letters sent? Were they forwarded to the Sheriff's Department with a request for its consideration and attention? Did these leaders of the Klan ever give such facts to an officer of the law and ask for his assistance?

These people who wrote the letters, did they ever notify the sheriff that unwholesome conditions were present and should be attended to in a legal manner? Or did they hide in anonymity and ask the Klan to do it?

Who broke the faith? Former Klansmen know the answer to that one. They know that after they had taken an oath to even sacrifice their lives in the interest of their organization, not one shilling was forthcoming to defend them when they were charged with violating the law.

Those who think calmly will realize that their allegiance is to their wives and their children rather than to an organization which offers them nothing in return for the oath they gave. They will come to accept the fact that the law is supreme and that no threats from across the border will deter the courts from their duty.

### **A Symbol of Heartaches**

by Leslie Thompson (probably) or Willard Cole (possibly)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 28, 1952 – page 4

When Thomas L. Hamilton renounced his previous declarations of innocence and admitted his guilt in the plotting of Columbus floggings, he was a pitiful figure. No longer arrogant and abusive, no longer defiant and denunciatory, no longer shouting hate while uttering pious and hypocritical prayers, the Klan leader appeared to have come to the end of his rope.

Whatever had motivated him, whether money or fanaticism, the ex-grocer had risen to notoriety, if not fames, as the chieftain of a group which defies law and order and sets itself up as the arbiter of community morals. His was a forlorn appearance as he sat in court with his organization disintegrating before his very eyes and with his own liberty at stake.

But Mr. Hamilton was more than a lonely, pathetic figure. He was a symbol of dissipated hate – a symbol of heartaches. He was almost friendless, or nearly so, and he knew it. He had brought grief to unsuspecting and misguided followers, and he had brought more heartaches to the people of Columbus County than any man within the memory of the oldest citizen alive today.

If no fines, suspended sentences and prison terms were imposed at all in any case against Columbus County's former Klansmen, all of them will have paid a heavy price for listening to the preaching of this disciple of hate. The scars will remain, even after the wound has healed. It is ever thus when a cancerous growth is removed.

The presence on the bench of very able and conscientious Judge Clawson L. Williams is almost a guarantee that tempered justice will be meted out to all, even to the broken and confessed Imperial Wizard. But Thomas L. Hamilton will never be a martyr to the people of Columbus County. Rather will he be a symbol of a thousand heartaches and scars – scars for the victims of his plotting and heartaches for the defendants, their wives, their children, and their friends and relatives.

Now that the end is in sight, with an autopsy in the past, it behooves an enlightened citizenry to bund up the wounds, forget the barbs which can only hurt when spoken, eliminate as much of the cause of this tragic experience as possible, and spread the doctrine that Christ taught when he commanded that men should do unto others as they would have others do unto them.

### **Grand Jury Recommendation**

by Leslie Thompson (attributed)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, July 28, 1952 – page 4

The grand jury, which sat last week to hear evidence in support of bills of indictment against former members of the Ku Klux Klan, arrived at the conclusion that there is a substantial weakness in law enforcement in Columbus County.

The 18-man investigative body, taking cognizance of the case with which a man was seized in the county during the hours when officers had retired for the night, recommended that a radio-equipped prowler car be kept on duty at all hours of the night and that provision be made for instant contact with this car through full-time operation of the law enforcement radio communications center. What the grand jury recognized in that such a prowler car, if it had been in use in early January, might well have been the

means of apprehending the perpetrators of the Dick Best flogging immediately.

The true facts are that a city of some 40,000 people would not think of hiring only enough policemen to protect the interest of the public during only the daylight hours. And, yet, that is the situation in this county. Of course, sheriff's deputies cannot be expected to work 24 hours a day for seven days a week. Hence there must be an increase in personnel and a redistribution of that personnel if the grand jury's recommendation is to be carried out.

The advantages of having at least a couple of deputies who can be reached at a moment's notice when an emergency arises at any hour of the night are obvious. By the time an officer, if one is found available, can be aroused from sleep by public telephone service, don his clothes and reach the scene of an emergency, law offenders may have made their escape, leaving no clues. Then begins a long, tedious search for persons who might have been caught red-handed. Before the case is ultimately solved, other crimes may be committed by the same offenders.

How many heartaches would have been prevented if the first flogging crime had been solved! How much better that a few should have been brought to justice promptly than to have seen the day come when so many of our friends and neighbors were engulfed!

The primary responsibility for following through on the recommendations of the grand jury rests with the Board of Commissioners. If "a minimum of one more man" with a radio-equipped prowl car is allowed and the a competent radio operator for all-night duty is employed, it will then be the obligation of Sheriff Nance to arrange the hours of his deputies so that there will, at least, be the absolute minimum of protection for the county's citizenry.

If the recommendations of this grand jury are accepted, ti will mark an important step forward in public safety.

### **The Klan Rides Again**

by Willard Cole (attributed)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 2, 1952 – page B3

The Klan rides again!

Shortly after the first arrests in February in the mob violence crack-down, members of the Klan organization busied themselves placing stickers on store windows and tossing handbills in automobiles. These carried the message that the Klan rides again.

Earlier, men who were too cowardly to proclaim their Klan membership had covered themselves in robes of sheet cloth and flogged unsuspecting members of both races and both sex. In January of 1951, a Negro woman was the victim. In October, they got a woman and two men. Three men and one woman were the November victims. Four men were

treated to the Klan conception of justice in December. Finally, two men were the victims in January of 1952.

Some of the men who rode under the banner of the Klan were honestly misguided. They got into the organization for various reasons. A few carried a Bible in one hand and a pistol in the other. Some sought political power. Others hoped for business gain. Some wanted to control the courts. Others felt they were “lifting” up erring humanity. Some entered for adventure, getting a couple of “shots” under their belts and sallying forth to a dangerous experience. Others sought to unite for the purpose of preventing the consolidation of Negro children with white children.

Back of it all, however, was a grasping hand, linked to a man whose mind was filled with beastly thoughts of brutality. “Do a good job or you’ll have to do it all over again” was one view he took of the flogging of Mrs. Evergreen Flowers. “If it isn’t done right you’ll only make them mad and they’ll talk” was another way of expressing his thoughts.

Yesterday, the Klan rode again. This time the brains of the Ku Klux Klan, minus his satin-looking robe, went on a ride to the prison road gang where he will have four years to form new Klaverns and perhaps elevate himself anew to Imperial Wizard.

Most of the people in Columbus County prefer that he ride there instead of in their midst. They serve notice also that they oppose any reduction of the time that Judge Clawson L. Williams set aside for his organization effort in the State Institution.

### **Wise Action of Parole Board**

by Leslie Thompson (attributed)

*The Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 25, 1954 – page B3

The parole of Thomas L. Hamilton, one-time Klan leader in the Carolinas, will draw criticism in some quarters and receive praise in others. However, if the facts are clearly understood, all sound-thinking citizens will recognize the wisdom of the Parole Board’s action.

Whether Mr. Hamilton’s repentance is sincere and complete is debatable. Only time can tell whether he has seen the light and cleansed his heart of the intolerance, bigotry and prejudice which led him to lead others in a campaign of hate against Jews, Negroes, Catholics and others.

But this was not the issue which the Parole Board had to decide. If the ex-Klan leader had been kept in prison he would have walked out in November of this year without a single string attached to him. He could have gone back to South Carolina and renewed his preachment of hate and North Carolina couldn’t have moved a finger to stop him. That would have been the situation if a parole had been denied.

As it is, Mr. Hamilton is out on parole, subject to supervision. The remainder of his prison term will be hanging over his head. If he violates the conditions of parole, he can be required to pay the full penalty.

It is our opinion that Mr. Hamilton is sincere in his break with the Klan. There is sound reasoning back of this opinion. Whatever else one might say of him, Tom Hamilton is no fool. If he had any thought of returning to his bedsheet activities, he would have remained meek as a mouse and served eight more months so he could walk out a free man. Instead, he chose to obtain his freedom on parole, leaving himself tied to the conditions of good behavior.

This, in effect, writes the final chapter to North Carolina's share in the Klan uprising. It should not, however, mark the end of Mr. Hamilton as a public figure. As a man with considerable intelligence and ability, he should strive to undo the harm he has done and make himself a useful citizen.

Mr. Hamilton carries with him the best wishes of most citizens for complete success in building a new life based upon the sound doctrine that Christ taught – the doctrine of love.

### **A Personal Valedictory**

By Willard G. Cole

*The Whiteville News-Reporter* • February 25, 1954, page B3

Dear Readers and Friends:

A newspaper editor writes for years and somehow the words keep rolling from the typewriter. Sometimes the product is good enough to receive, and may even merit, an expression of praise. That, however, is when times are normal.

But it is different when a moment such as this arrives. The finality of the decision is almost appalling. There are tugs at the heart-strings.

Memories come flooding . . . a surging, roaring river.

The image of all the hopes, dreams and enthusiasms stalks past.

Hours when this or that project was uppermost in one's life stand guard as sentinels of memory.

Here is the picture of human suffering that demanded relief. There is a scene when a community's sense of decency was outraged. Then, there is the time when one's senses responded so throbbingly to the expectancy of accomplishment in the field of developing better men and better women.

Or perhaps there is the image of an indelible moment when the flames of duty leaped madly into action. Not always could one be certain that justice and right and humanity would triumph. But always there was the burning desire that the best interest of all would be served.

Sometimes the picture is unreal . . . incredible . . . bizarre . . . like the time defeat seemed certain . . . when hope appeared to disappear. Couldn't they know, one asks, that no one sought to hurt and or crucify? Couldn't they understand that only right was the goal?

Then, there is the scene of those days when everybody seemed to come together in a common cause – good government, human rights, better living for all. Joyous, happy days were these!

Time . . . life are relentless. Memory is but the afterglow and however brilliant the light, it scatters before the winds of realism.

Nothing much is left except imperfect words . . . words that hardly could express the deep affection one feels for the people of Whiteville and Columbus County . . . words that can be read but cannot be felt.

Perhaps the creed of this editor, paraphrased from John W. Davis' definition of a democrat, will partially explain the mistakes, the aims, hopes and ambition of the editorship now coming to an end. Such was our goal, however imperfectly were our efforts in that direction. It goes something like this:

“He only deserves to be called an editor who cannot see a wrong persist without an effort to redress it, or a right denied without an effort to protect it; who feels a deep concern for the economic welfare of all the people, but realizes that the making of better men and women is a matter greater still; who thinks of every policy bearing upon human rights rather than upon material things; who believes profoundly in human equality and detests privilege in whatever form or in what every disguise, and who finds the true test of success in the welfare of the many and not in the prosperity and comfort of the few. The civic unit of America is not the dollar, but the individual man. All that goes to make better and happier and freer men and women is progress, all else is reaction,”

In our first issue as an editor on May 26, 1947, we said: “Your newspaper is more than a builder of cities and more than a medium through which the economic life of a community may be developed. It is, and must continue to be, the lamp which lights the pathway of humanity to higher cultural values, to better living, and to God.”

We hope that this has been the result, at least to a limited degree, of this editorship. Likewise we trust that such will be the goal of those who follow.

In conclusion, may we repeat something we have said previously: We have never worked with a finer publisher or among finer people.

God bless one and all.

Willard G. Cole

APPENDIX C  
SELECTED EDITORIALS AND  
COVERAGE IN THE *TABOR CITY TRIBUNE*

*“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak . . .”*  
— Winston Churchill

**Greetings from *The Tribune***<sup>1</sup>  
*Tabor City Tribune*, July 5, 1946 – page 2

“In the beginning, God created---” and so goes the Bible.

And here is the beginning of a newspaper designed to live and served the peoples of all races and colors living in the area surrounding Tabor City with special emphasis upon Clumbus county, N.C. and Horry county, S.C.

Here is a newspaper for you and your family. A newspaper planned for the whole age group making up our society, from the grammar grade student to the community’s oldest mother.

A newspaper with no political obligations, no pledges to any pressure groups, no motives other than honorable, and no plans contrary to the general wishes of the people it serves.

A newspaper pledge to do its utmost for the betterment of the churches, the schools, the communities and all organizations aimed at raising our living standard and our civilization.

Yes, this is a little newspaper point out big objectives. Perhaps our sights are on the stars and we will hit only the chimney tops but we are on the way up.

We will not lie dormant while a timely editorial might preempt some official into community action for the betterment of all. Perhaps we will make an enemy of a few individuals in doing so but at the same time, perhaps many others will be served.

We say again, this is your newspaper. Make it just that. Call on its editor when you are in town. Write it the news when you know it. And know the paper as a person, a friend, a servant—your friend, your servfant, yes, your helper. Your efforts will be appreciated.

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<sup>1</sup> All coverage has been transcribed with grammar, spelling, and word choice as published originally included. This is not to imply that some errors may have crept in during the retyping process, although due care has been exercised to ensure accuracy. The editorials originally were set either one-column or two-columns wide, while these transcriptions are all a standard width for consistency and ease of reading.

## **No Excuse for KKK**

*Tabor City Tribune*, July 26, 1950 – page 1

This is the newspaper's first editorial opposing the Klan

In this democratic country, there's no place for an organization of the calibre of the Ku Klux Klan which make a scheduled parade through our streets last Saturday night. Any organization that has to work outside the law is unfit for recognition in a country of free men. Saturday's episode, although without violence, is deplorable, a black eye to our area and an admission that our law enforcement is inadequate.

Sanctioning of their methods of operation is practically as bad as if you rode in their midst. It takes a united front to combat lawlessness. It takes all the law abiding people as a unit to discourage and combat a Ku Klux Klan that is totally without law. The Klan, despite its Americanism pleas, is the personification of Fascism and Nazism. It is just such out side-the-law operations that lead to dictatorships through fear and insecurity.

The Klan bases its power on fear and hate of ones fellowman and not through love, understanding and the principles upon which God would have us live together. We have some racial problem in this country. That cannot be denied. However, we do not have open warfare which we will have if the primitive methods of the KKK are applied. In every sense of the word, they are endeavoring to force their domination upon those whom they consider worthy of punishment. It is not for a band of hoodlums to decide whether you or I need chastising. We grant you that there are cases in which it would seem individuals need punishment when none comes through the regular channels. In which case it is not up to a hooded gang to do the punishing. These cases must, like all others, keep within the bounds of the laws which you and I have made and have the power to enlarge upon should we deem the present ones inadequate.

The recent democratic primary in both North and South Carolina did much to stir up trouble and build the KKK. Both states staged mud-slinging and abominable campaigns based on racial hate, perhaps the most un Godly campaigns ever waged in the Carolinas.

The racial issue in the South has been overstressed. There is little tangible evidence of any struggle between races. There's no basic truth to a federal government forcing us to mingle together. A law of this nature would get no further than the record, and you know it would not and could not be enforced. Any non-segregation that ever comes about in the South will have to be a natural movement, through many generations of people, through education and the practice of God's teaching.

The Klan also is a big talker for Protestantism, thereby being anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish. Yet, America was founded by persons seeking a country of religious freedom where they could worship God in their own way without fear. Would you have us resort to a nation of people wishing there was another America to discover so we could leave this one?



With the Klan's frequent reference to Jesus, God and religion they are being highly sacrilegious because their very being is in contrast to God and the Bible. If you had the names of those persons appearing here Saturday night and if you had church attendance slips for those persons, it's our opinion that not five percent of them entered any church of any denomination on Sunday morning.

### **An Open Letter From Me To You On This Week's Ku Klux Klan Developments**

*Tabor City Tribune*, August 2, 1950 – page 1

There has been a great deal of discussion during the past week since our editorial appeared condemning the Ku Klux Klan. Many christian people have welcomed the opportunity of congratulating us for saying what every righteous individual felt following the klan's infamous so-journ down our streets. Written comment has also appeared here and elsewhere echoing the needless existance of organization and portraying their wretchedness.

We even received one letter either by mistake or as a practical joke, which was unsigned scribbled almost unreadably and which was putting out the call to KKK for assistance in the Pireway section. The letter even went so far as to name the names of persons there who for one reason or another were deemed worthy of klan action. That letter has been turned over to the proper law enforcement authorities for investigation of the alleged lawlessness, as should all such cases of law breaking. The letter was dated July 26, postmarked Tabor City, addressed to the postmaster, Tabor City, N.C. and carried a route 3 address at the top. Just to further complicate matter a local kid, not yet dry behind the ears, saw the letter and started the wild and viscious rumor that the editor of The Tribune was in reality the 'headman of the Ku Klux Klan.' To which we have only this to say, he's a liar first class and should take top honors in a contest among the leading liars in the land. We would call the name but in that he is fairly young and has a chance of still becoming at least a mediocre citizen and possible gentleman we are holding his name in hope of helping him therefrom. As we told on Tabor City man who called to ask specifically if your editor was as Klansman, the answer is now as always "No we had rather be in jail with our back broke than to be associated in any way with such a gang."

Also in circulatgion is the story that many local colored persons have talked of leaving Tabor City because of the KKK threat. To which we have just this to say to them. Don't let this band of hoodlums scare you. If you are a righteous man and living within the law, law enforcement officers or no one else is going to give you any trouble. And although we despise every phase of lawlessness and crime, the klan isn't going to bother you in Tabor City. It's our belief that they have too many enemies here to attempt any action against anyone. And this much is a promise, should they come to Tabor City again and if it is anything other than a "sneak attack," they will

be openly opposed. There are enough prominent local persons to push the prosecution of any klansmen apprehended while taking any action whatever against a citizen of Tabor City. We cannot and do not wish to encourage rioting. However, the klan in any form is so obnoxious enough to turn the stomach of lawabiding people and should be dealt with as if they were an outlaw band which they are.

In actual number, there are probably something like 50 policemen, sheriff's deputies, highway patrolmen, constables in Columbus County, all pledge to fight lawlessness. All would be available to protect the rights of individuals in this county. But add to that number 90 percent of the population of the county who hate the very guts of the klan and you have about the right percentage of people who would go all the way in opposing klan activities in Tabor City.

Reports say that a Horry county man was threatened by the klan last weekend. They say he lived between here and Greer Sea, an area where people live that call Tabor City home. A section of good farmers, many good christians and law abiding people. It seems to us that our first responsibility is our own town but that the people of that area should condemn the action as vehemently as they know how and take the proper steps toward curbing the KKK lawbreaking. The rightness or wrongness of the way of life being led by the person attacked, has nothing to do with whether the klan is right or wrong in doing the flogging. They are wrong in either case and as previously stated, it's not for them to decide. Let righteous citizens file their grievance with proper authorities and don't condone this band of hooded fly-by-night boys.

There were even reports this week of some of our good farmers saying they didn't want to bring tobacco to Tabor City because of the KKK. Let me plead with you in as sincere a way as I know how, not to let this little demonstration scare you. The klan breeds on fear but you are not going to be bothered by them. The outfit that paraded here came from a long distance away. You have practically no KKK men in Tabor City although there are a few. Yet, they are so few in number that they could all be put inside a medium sized phone booth. Their following here is not inconsequential while on the other hand you have the backing and protection of 99 11 one hundreds percent of the population. Bring your tobacco on in to Tabor City and don't give this band a second thought. They simply made a so-journ down our streets and it is sincerely believed that they will live to regret that.

As a parting thought, don't scare, report any activities of the klan to your local law enforcement officers, be a law abiding citizen and openly talk against the gang's very being every time you have the opportunity.

### **True or False?**

*Tabor City Tribune*, August 2, 1950 – page 1

The Ku Klux Klan's precedent-setting public meeting in Horry county Saturday night brought forth dozens of charges and criticisms designed to recruit additional members into that organizations foal.

Some of the charges leveled by the two Grand Dragons are true. Some of the reforms the KKK advocates are needed. But we want to emphasize that The Tribune is now as always opposed to this secret, fear-based method as are most of the Christian people throughout Horry county and throughout the nation.

In these charges the Klan's views and statements made at the meeting, we agree:

(1).—Communism in this country should be nipped in the bud.

(2).—There is a definite need for investigation of the law enforcement officers in Horry county. Proper execution of the laws of South Carolina along with the weeding out of the muchdiscussed and alleged graft by persons holding public office, would do much toward eradicating the Klan in Horry county.

(3).—Alger Hiss was a traitor and Communist and as a result the United Nations charter is not all that it should be.

(4).—We believe in the Constitution of the United States.

(5).—We believe in the Bible.

In these charges made by the Klan spokesmen and in these implications and statements made at the meeting we disagree:

(1).—Klansmen on the whole are not fine, Christian, God-fearing Americans. We believe that there are many such good people who have become members and that the old organization of decades ago was madeup of Christian people. But we do not believe the Klansmen of today are largely Christian people. Although this organization is secret, many people know several members. Are they Christian people? Some of you Klansmen who will read this, are you a Christian, God-fearing American who doesn't drink, goes to church, helps his fellowman, and does everything possible for his family and community?

(2).— No race of people should be condemned. Persons are good or bad as individuals and not as a race or as a religious group. To say that a Jewish sect, composing 9,000,000 people in the United States, is communistic and evil, is condemning a block without regard to individuals. Perhaps there are a great number of these persons who are Communists. But the ratio of Communist Jews to the ratio of Communists of any other race is no greater.

(3). Newspapers in this country are not controlled. They do not suppress the news. To question the integrity of your leading dailies that circulate in this are, The Charlotte Observer, Charleston News and Courier, The State, Raleigh News and Observer, Wilmington Star-News and others

is sheer foolishness. They print the truth as the righteous people see it. Our little newspaper has never been accused of suppressing anything or being controlled. Its columns are open to every person, everywhere and they need only to sign their names to get their message before the people.

(4). We do not believe that the churches and schools are being led toward communism. We believe that these charges by the Klan have come as a result of their organization having been opposed by ministers and educators because of the mystic and backhanded methods by which they seek to reform the world.

There is only one other organization that we can think of that keeps its membership a secret. That's the Communist Party. If the Ku Klux Klan is good and pure, if it is made up of good people, and if they do not work outside the law as stated at the meeting, then why doesn't it charter its organization like all other groups and not hide its membership and carry on its activities in the dead of the night in this mystic fashion.

Any and all Klansmen are invited to use these columns to say anything you like about this newspaper, this editor, or to defend any statement that is made here. If you do not choose to have your name mentioned, we will be glad to withhold it.

### **Right is Right and Vice Versa**

*Tabor City Tribune*, January 24, 1951 – page 3

Recently we had an instance in Tabor City in which a Negro girl who teaches school in our community was slapped by a white man, one of our local residents. This assault took place following advances made toward her that would seem rather uncalled for and without provocation.

Now you think about it a moment. Suppose the situation had been reversed. Suppose the Negro man had slapped a white woman after making the same advances. What would have been the reaction in Tabor City, and what might have been the possible legal consequences? There's little doubt that it would have been made into a big thing fast and the assaulting party might well have served a long road or prison sentence, possibly even something more radical.

Yet, not much is said or done about it legally or otherwise when the situation did occur in reverse. Is it right? Is it Christian? Is it democratic the way we see things in the light in which we want to see them? Is it so much worse one way that it is the other? In the eyes of God there is no difference in the offense, and as we see it, there's still right and there's still wrong. Some say alcohol caused it all. That, too may be true but drunkenness is no excuse for crime, and the law should deal with drunken law breakers exactly as they do sober ones except make the penalty worse.

## **The KKK, Another Step . . . Breakdown in Government**

*Tabor City Tribune*, May 23, 1951 – page 1

All over the world, governments are growing weaker. In our own country, never before have so many people loss confidence in the men they elected to high office. Graft and subversion has crept stealthily into almost every phase of American public life.

Taking advantage of this weakness, the obviously unAmerican and subversive Ku Klux Klan has rapidly grown among the disgruntled, the dissatisfied, the trouble makers and the prejudiced.

Choosing now to voice their sentiments in open and truly American ways, this organization instead chooses to hide in the blackness of night. To carry on its cowardly deeds in a backhanded, illegal, crafty manner indicative of big city mobsters in the days of prohibition.

If this group of mystics have wholesome deforms which they advocate, why, oh why, can't they shed their cloaks of secretness, and as private citizens carry those sentiments to the poles and vote the changes they deem necessary. That has long been the American way.

Only the Communists in this country are ashamed of their membership cards. They and the Ku Klux are the two groups who don't want people to know whom they are. If their motives are honorable, why, may we ask, are they opposed to the public knowing their identities.

We never knew a church member who purposely kept his membership a secret. We never knew a Mason who was ashamed to admit his membership. Nor a member of the Grange, the Farm Bureau, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Civitans, the Rotary, The Lions or any of the other countless hundreds of other organizations whose members had anything to hide.

The truth of the matter lies in the fact that the disgruntled take a fanatical pride in doing something fringing on the illegal. It is among just such groups the eventual internal growth of antagonism toward our government and our way of life is springing up. It is through just such groups that freedom of every kind may perish and Americans could find themselves being ruled through fear.

## **A Measure of Success**

*Tabor City Tribune*, February 20, 1952 – page 1

Thank God, there is still law, courts and justice in Columbus county.

It took a great investigation stretched out over many weeks and of a highly tedious nature but despite impatience that some of us might have voiced at times, law enforcement officers stuck to the task and have succeeded in filing charges against ten alleged night floggers and Ku Klux Klansmen.

They have yet to be proven guilty. But they will have that opportunity, unlike those many persons brutally beaten by night riders in Columbus during the several months that violence headlined the news from this area.

In a court of law with defense attorneys seeking by hook or crook to clear them of charges, these men will present their cases. Most likely there will be wholesale denials of any part in the specific flogging for which they have been arrested. But officers of the law will also have an opportunity to submit the evidence which they have so painstakingly sought out. Then a jury will have an opportunity to decide their fate.

We make no bones about it, if these men are guilty, and the FBI has every reason to believe that they are, we have no sympathy for them. They brought the predicament upon themselves without rhyme or reason.

Our biggest hope is that those individuals who have taken part in the other floggings also feel the strong arm of the law reaching out for them, wherever they are. We want to see each of them ferreted out from behind his mask of cowardness to face the world and pay for the crimes he has committed against his neighbors.

Every night flogger is due a severe punishment and the law enforcement officers will not rest on past laurels. Every effort will continue to be made to flush the Klansmen from their hiding place and out in the world for the public to see.

### **Bring The Charges To Court**

*Tabor City Tribune, February 7, 1951 – page 1*

This week the Ku Klux Klan circulated in Tabor City and elsewhere a small manila card headed “KKK NEWS” in which charges of embezzlement and graft against Horry County Sheriff Ernest Sasser were intimated throughout. This mysterious little mimeographed bulletin flung around many blind charges and went so far as to suggest that what Horry county needs is a Kefauver investigation. It charged that the sheriff has sold out to the gambling interest in a kind of subtle sort of way. Yet, this guided missile that found its way into Tabor City carried no signature and can be regarded entirely as just another piece of trash.

Now we have no complimentary remarks to make in regard to Sheriff Sasser. But, if this band of hooded mystery men have one shred of evidence to support their claims against the sheriff, why don't they bring these charges to the attention of South Carolina Governor Jimmy Byrnes. The Governor has made no bones about it. He wants to and will take every necessary action to enforce the laws of the State and nation, and if there is graft and illegitimate things going on in the law enforcement department, he can and would do something about it.

If this band of hoodlums called the KKK is afraid to bring these charges up against the sheriff in the name of the Klan, and if they are

righteous citizens with nothing to hide, they can bring these charges to the attention of the Governor as private citizens. As citizens of Horry county, they have the right to complain if they have any reason to believe that irregularities are going on. But so long as the persons claiming to have the goods on the sheriff persist in trying to accomplish something by themselves in a backhanded and illegal manner, they are going to continue to meet with nothing but trouble.

As publishers of two newspapers in Horry county and this one on the line with many subscribers in South Carolina, we have made extensive efforts to track down some of the charges against Sheriff Sasser. It has been our belief that it would be to the advantage of the populace of Horry to establish the truth in the circulating rumors. Now we are in no way wish to create the impression that these rumors are all false. Nor do we wish to insinuate they are true. But we do know that getting facts to back the charges is all but impossible.

Now there are those who say the Ku Klux Klan has the definite proof that Sasser is guilty of irregular business. If this is true, now is the time for them to do something about it and to do it in a legitimate and before-the-public manner.

### **Justice-As Prescribed By Law**

*Tabor City Tribune, May 14, 1952 – page 1*

When the ex-Ku Klux Klansmen who heard their sentences pronounced in Whiteville Saturday night used their leather strap on handpicked citizens, they administered their outlaw justice as they saw fit. But there was nothing illegal about the justice as doled out by Judge Clawson Williams in Superior Court—the floggers got their justice in a manner prescribed by law. That's the only kind that we believe in.

We find no room for sympathy for these night riders who are now saddled with two year road sentences or heavy fines. They committed these criminal acts with their eyes open and deserve no more consideration than a chicken thief or a bank robber.

In Judge Williams' court, these refugees from hoods and robes put their case before 12 good men, they had the benefit of an array of legal talent and could tell their story in its most favorable light. Yet they could not escape the gravity of their deeds, and now must pay the penalty. In applying their Klan interpretation of justice, Woodrow Johnson had no such opportunity to hear his case tried. He had not opportunity to secure legal aid, nor did he have the opportunity to select a jury from 250 men who were unbiased and without prejudice in the case.

Many of the men who now face stiff sentences in the Johnson case, are also charged in several others, including the Federal case now in progress. Some of them are going to spend a great part of their remaining lives looking through bars at the outside. Like criminals of all descriptions,

most of them are repentant now. But it took a court of law to unseat them from their pedestal from which they administered arrogant justice with a grudge.

From the first, we have had no compliments for the people who the floggers whipped. There's no doubt that some were involved in affairs bordering on the illegal. Yet, we still maintain that the courts, and the law alone has the American right to punish its citizenry. Our only compliments to most of these flogged persons is on their courage to tell their story to the law. In that respect, they have not failed us, and in doing so have made our county a better place in which to live. The virtual eradication of the night-riding Klan is an accomplishment for Columbus County and North Carolina and it is our belief that it will never rise again.

### **Some Never Learn**

*Tabor City Tribune*, December 31, 1952 – page 1

Obviously, some people never learn.

When the Ku Klux Klan was riding high in Columbus and Horry counties a few short months ago, law-abiding citizens rose to the occasion to speak their piece and vote their convictions from the jury and grand jury boxes. These juries put many night riders on the prison gangs of North Carolina and even the Imperial Wizard himself is now laboring for the State with four years of such effort staring him in the face.

You would think that other adventurous souls who see a phony glamour in wearing a bedsheet and watching a cross burn would learn something from their predecessors who are paying the price for lawlessness now. But apparently such is not the case.

Goretown, in Horry county, last night was the scene of another of the Klan's public speakings. This was the first such meeting in Horry since the infamous collapse of the night riders in Columbus county.

This meeting was called by the hooded mob's leaders on the eve of a change in the law enforcement staff in Horry county. Present law enforcement in Horry has failed to convict Klansmen of any consequential crime although major crimes have been committed by hooded night riders for two years—even one murder. As a new sheriff and a new corps of deputies take office on January 5, it is going to be interesting to see just how the Klan will operate, and if it will resume its lawless prosecution of those persons to whom it seeks to reform.

John Henry, the new sheriff, has a task facing him. If the night riders do go back into action, Henry will be under oath to do everything in his power to bring them to justice. We have faith in the new sheriff's force even though many have said that the Klan would be worse than ever.

Long ago we were convinced that no sincere effort was being made to convict Klansmen in Horry county. Many arrests were made but the evidence in most cases was lacking. That's a job for the law, and if local and



State agencies cannot secure that evidence even after repeated crimes are committed, then Federal assistance should be sought, and quick.

If night riders resume their practice of beating up Horry citizens, we believe that John Henry will: First, try to solve those crimes and bring the criminals to justice, and; Second, if he cannot solve them, that he will take the necessary steps to bring in outside assistance that can and will eradicate this menace to freedom in a great South Carolina county.

There are many situations in Horry that need a lot of investigating. We have long believed that many powers-that-be fear such a move by outside authorities. but, as we see it, if local agencies can not root out these evils, then every honest, Christian citizen is compelled to let his voice be heard and bring pressure to bear for assistance that will drive fear from the door of Americans.

John Henry knows that he can expect no support from us if he fails to make a sincere effort to enforce the law regardless of how big or how little the persons involved may be. He knows and we know that he received a lot of votes from members and ex-members of the Ku Klux Klan but election support should have no bearing on law enforcement. Every honorable citizen expects criminals to be brought to justice and failure to do so undermines the very essence of democratic government.

### **The Job Needs Completing**

*Tabor City Tribune*, February 4, 1953 – page 1

The operations of the night riders in Columbus County have been stamped out by combined law enforcement efforts of the county, state and nation, and those persons responsible are paying the price of crime.

But to get the job done in Columbus County was long, hard and painstaking with officers facing a task of making arrests where inadequate laws were provided. Except for the fact that the night riders carried some of the victims across state lines, thus breaking Federal laws, none of the floggings might ever have been solved.

North Carolina law makers should follow up the job that has been accomplished by enforcement officers by passing an anti-mask law that would prohibit persons from wearing robes, hoods and masks on public property within the State. Many states in the Union now have such a law on the books, and North Carolina certainly should act at this session of the General Assembly to adopt similar principles.

We think the North Carolina bill should also include a clause that would make it a crime for a member of any city, county, or state police force to be affiliated with a terrorist band of the calibre of the Ku Klux Klan.

If the proper law were put into force now in North Carolina, the Tar Heel citizenry could rest assured that night riding would forever be reduced to a minimum in our State.

Laws are made for the people, to protect and guide them. An iron-clad anti-mask law would leave no doubts in the minds of the masses that to take part in Klan activities is illegal and punishable in a court of law.



**Letters to the Editor: Hamilton Writes Editor;  
Tribune Rebuttal Given**  
*The Tabor City Tribune*, June 27, 1951 – page 2

Office of Grand Dragon Thomas Hamilton  
To: Editor, Tabor City Tribune

Dear sir:

Recently in an issue of your paper, you carried quite an editorial stating your opinions and your warped ideas with reference to the Klan. You stated in this editorial that the Ku Klux Klan was obviously un-American and subversive. Now sir, this statement, by you in this editorial was an untruth because nowhere can you find in the recent list – released in Washington D.C. where the Ku Klux Klan is subversive or un-American, but I do find that the Newspaper Guild is Communist to the core – I think that for you to be a real HE man that you would sweep before your own door and clean your own back-yard before you brand an Organization by an untruth. I dare you Sir, to check the records in Washington D. C. and you will find that the Klan is listed as an ANTI-CIVIL RIGHTS Organization; and I thank God that I can belong to an organization that believes in keeping the race of mmen PURE and SPOTLESS. Such men as you believe in mongrelizing America and by the recent talk that I had with you in your office, I summed up in my mind that you are biased and leaning towards the group of people in America who are advocating the downfall of this great land of ours.

The Association of Carolina Klans has never been listed on any list from Washington D.C. as a subversive Organization. You cannot make the statement that the Masons of Tabor City are wide open because the Masonic Lodge is a secret organization and its membership is held secret together with all its workings and Sir, you cannot class the Klan and the Masonic Lodge in he same category because they are two distinct organizations carrying out their separate missions.<sup>2</sup> No Klansman is ashamed to be a Klansman nor to claim membership in the Ku Klux Klan, every man that I known in the Klan is PROUD of the fact that he hold something in his heart

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<sup>2</sup> Hamilton was a member of three separate Masonic orders; as a Knight Templar, Scottish Rite Mason, and Royal Arch Mason.

and that he is a part of an organization that is fighting for the traditions of America. My integrity is worth more to me than all the Newspapers in the World. I'd rather be a Klansman and know it than to be a Left-Winger and not know it.

The Klan does not have a membership of disgruntle men and women, but instead it has as its membership a group of REAL HONEST-TO-GOODNESS LOYAL AMERICANS who have awakened to the fact that a minority group in America is trying to overthrow their government. The Klan does not advocate or preach a doctrine of fear but instead we have people outside of the Klan who fear the Klan because they are doing a number of un-moral and illegal, nasty, unchristian things and they are afraid that someone will get after them. I do not advocate taking the Law into my own hands nor will I be a part of an organization that advocates taking the Law into its own hands. But Sir, I do advocate digging into every locality into its local government and into the State Government and expose those men who are trying to use their office for greed and perversion. Then when the time comes to cast our ballots at the polls, we will be found not wanting.

The Freedom of America Will perish and go down into oblivion unless every TRUE American awakens and joins in the fight to help SAVE AMERICA.

The greatest medium in America to keep America American is controlled and is being suppressed by a minority group which has been able to remove from the American people that part of the Constitution that is so vitally needed at the present time. You could use your Newspaper, acting under the authority of the Freedom of the Press, to a great advantage.

I trust that you have found that no man on the earth can supplant or take the place of the Lowly Nazarene our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in Him is our Being. In Him we MUST depend for guidance through the Holy Spirit. He is the one that will act as an intercessor with God Almighty for us in forgiving our sins and short-comings while we are journeying through this life. A life which He requires us, as individuals, to do our utmost for Him and in His behalf. I would recommend Him to you.

Yours truly,  
Thomas L. Hamilton

### **Our Rebuttal**

Dear Mr. Hamilton

In your letter of June 21 you have taken exception to a good many statements made in our recent editorial "Breakdown in Government. "First, let me thank you for your letter and let me take this opportunity to again emphasize that the columns of this newspaper are open to you and to everyone alike to voice your opinion. Though your letter is raked with false charges, you, like I, are entitled to your opinion and entitled to make them known through the sacred freedom of the press.

But by the same token, we can't sit idly by and let you make vague statements unchallenged.

You make reference to the Newspaper Guild that "is communist to the core." Mr. Hamilton, we have never in any way been associated with the Newspaper Guild. I dare say that there aren't a half dozen newspaper men and women in North or South Carolina that has ever been connected with it or for that matter even knows what it does, who its officers are or why it even exists. If it is a red organization, you can rest assured it has never had any following by Carolinas newspapers, large or small, and it never will. You have snapped up an opportunity to hit at the newspapers because some practically unknown and obscure organization has red affiliations. To me, this seems only natural for you to do because practically all newspapers, everywhere, North and South, East and West, oppose your organization openly. We have yet to read one item in any newspaper that complimented your KKK's. Do you honestly feel that all the newspapers are wrong and that you stand on an exalted pedestal as an example of the right?

You even take exception to being called "un-American." If such incidents as the Myrtle Beach episode is American, we have drifted a long way. Only Al Capone and some other big time gangsters practiced "Americanism" in this way. In the early pioneer days, the Indians did make raids on settlers' homes and perhaps practiced this form of "Americanism." Now to say that your Myrtle Beach raid had only peaceable intentions, is causing some stretching of the imagination. Your cohorts were armed to the teeth as evidenced by the severe shooting that took place at Myrtle Beach. There are not many peaceable motorcades that find it necessary to carry fire arms.

You say that you thank God for belonging to an organization that believes in keeping the race of men PURE and SPOTLESS. Mr. Hamilton, Hitler also believed that theory and took drastic steps to eradicate thousands of jews.

As for the Masonic order being secret, there's no denial. But not as to membership. We have never known one to be afraid to wear his pen or his ring. We haven't heard of any shooting escapades attributed to them or any arrests for concerned action by the organization. To compare them is ridiculous.

Mr. Hamilton, your most contradictory statements is the one in which you say "the Klan does not advocate or preach a doctrine of fear but instead we have people outside the Klan who fear the Klan because they are doing un-moral and illegal, nasty, unchristian things and are afraid some one will get after them." If you and your organization do not make raids on these people for illegal and unchristian conduct, why should they have any fear? Why should they think some one is going to "get after them." No, Mr. Hamilton, I'm sure the statement still stands that the organization is like the Soviet secret police and the German Gestapo, is one which seeks to curb freedom of action through fear.

Your statement regarding the digging into local and State governments and exposing those men who are using their office for greed and perversion is a noteworthy one. We have long advocated a greater participation in voting by the general public and it should be every individual's duty to study his elected officers and vote for those men who seek to keep America free. Not just the KKK, but all better Americans believe in that. We have no argument there.

Here and elsewhere you have indicated that you believed newspapers were controlled. Mr. Hamilton, there may be some big ones somewhere that are. That most certainly does not apply to the little ones like us. These columns are just as free and just as open as you are when you mount the rostrum to make a speech.

In speeches, in your letter and at other times, you have made reference to Jesus Christ and referred to the Bible. You have this time recommended Him to me. Mr. Hamilton, I do not deny I need more of Him even though presently I am a church member and Sunday school teacher. But it stymies me to understand how you and your organization can profess to be followers of the Bible. We have yet to find one minister of high repute who advocates the principles of the KKK. Suppose the great Biblical missionary Paul had preached only to his Jewish brethren? You a Gentile Mr. Hamilton would have never got the word. No, Jesus Christ was not for one people alone. He was, in all his humility, for All the peoples everywhere.

Only one other statement. When you summed up your mind that we advocate the downfall of this great land of ours you did some might false summation. During my life time thus far this is the first such clumsy charge. We challenge you, Mr. Hamilton, to find us three people in Tabor City who are acquainted with this newspaper, who are civic workers and active church workers who will bear out your belief. Just three people who will say so among the people who know us best. On the contrary, we have always advocated a better and stronger American and the perpetuation of our Democracy as founded. There's nothing we despise more than communism, left wingers and organizations seeking to breakdown our order and government.

Yours very truly,  
W. Horace Carter

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