WHIP, PISTOL, AND HOOD:
KU KLUX KLAN VIOLENCE IN THE CAROLINAS DURING RECONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Bradley David Proctor: Whip, Pistol, and Hood: Ku Klux Klan Violence in the Carolinas during Reconstruction
(Under the direction of W. Fitzhugh Brundage)

After the American Civil War destroyed racial slavery, the United States South was faced with the prospect of reconstructing its political, economic, and social systems. Many southerners, white as well as black, embraced the opportunity to establish a democratic biracial political system grounded in black citizenship. More conservative white southerners, however, rejected the idea that African Americans could be equal participants in the body politic. Rather than seeking to recreate slavery, they desired a new kind of racial hierarchy, one that still put white over black but which had new codes of racial behavior and mechanisms through which racial oppression operated.

To achieve this goal, thousands of conservative white southern men across the South joined the Ku Klux Klan, which had been founded in Tennessee in 1866. As Republican power increased, and as black citizenship was secured through constitutional amendments, members of the Ku Klux Klan began committing acts of vigilante violence against those people—black and white, men and women—they saw as violating the racial behavior that would define the new racial hierarchy they wanted to replace the system of slavery.

This dissertation uses the case studies of North and South Carolina to analyze the men who joined the Ku Klux Klan, the violence they committed, and the new racial order they sought to build. It asserts that membership in the Klan served as a crucible within which many conservative white southern men, of varying ages and class standing, worked out how they
wanted race to function in postemancipation America. Simultaneously, membership in the Klan acclimated those men to the use of vigilante violence as the chief means of enforcing their ideas about race. The violence they committed against hundreds of victims in the Carolinas had lasting political, economic, and social consequences, working to prefigure the system of racial oppression that would eventually come to structure the American South: Jim Crow segregation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am not unique in having a large host of people to thank for help in the completion of this project. It is almost a trope to contrast the seemingly individual endeavor of doing scholarship in the humanities with the reality that any academic undertaking is, at its heart, communal. But I would venture to say that I am unusually lucky for the friendship and support I have gotten from a wide range of wonderful people. I realize I am undoubtedly going to forget to thank all who deserve it. So to those I omit to name, I ask forgiveness—and to you, I thank.

Formal thanks must first go to Fitz Brundage, my advisor. I owe an enormous amount to his grounded, invaluable feedback on both my ideas and my writing, as well as his unflagging support when roadblocks arose. I came to him time and time again for advice large and small. Not only did he never turn me away, he always gave the right suggestion. I could not have hoped for a better advisor and mentor.

I also wish to profusely thank the members of my dissertation committee. I first encountered the testimonies of the Joint Select Committee in a seminar on the history of the South taught by Jim Leloudis in my first semester of graduate school. He has been a mentor since the first week of that course. His constant prompting to more closely interrogate what “white supremacy” meant helped shape this project in ways I cannot begin to count. I took an African American history seminar with Jerma Jackson my second semester of graduate school, and have ever since been awed by the thoughtfulness and creativity with which she approaches the past. Her enthusiasm about the project—and her faith that I could always be more penetrating
and more direct in my own analysis—have fueled me throughout the process. I have learned more about the nineteenth century from Bill Barney than anyone else. His unparalleled knowledge and sharp eye have been invaluable. Finally, Tom Holt has written the most incisive and inspiring work on how race has functioned in America that I have encountered. Getting his expertise on Reconstruction has been a privilege, and I owe a great deal to his keen interest in ensuring that I ground this project with specifics about these historical actors.

One of the benefits of working at the University of North Carolina has been the superabundance of world-class scholars I have gotten to know on the faculty. I am particularly grateful to Joseph Glatthaar, who walked me through methods of demographic analysis and tipped me to the IPUMS database, and Harry Watson, who helped me figure out the percentage of slaveholding white households in the Carolinas. Especial thanks also go to Kathleen DuVal, Jacquelyn Hall, Lisa Lindsay, John Sweet, and Heather Williams.

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There are myriad logistical barriers to the completion of a dissertation, and without financial support from the Center for the Study of the American South, the UNC Graduate School, the UNC Department of History, and the Institute for Southern Studies at the University
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It might be a truism that you learn the best through teaching, but it feels especially true for me. I have been lucky to teach great students at both UNC and Bates College, and their excitement, curiosity, and honesty about the past have energized and inspired me. I have learned
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about interracial marriage, the Republican Party, and the Fourteenth Amendment. My deep and immediate friendship with Micah Pawling, now at the University of Maine, was an unexpected highlight, and I know we will be historical partners in crime for years to come.

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Having spent so much professional time studying hatred and violence, the love of my friends and family have been beacons of hope. Laughter, music, and fellowship have reminded me that, to reverse a lesson from the television show Deadwood, we are as much in this world in our happiness as in our pain.
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INTRODUCTION

On a moonlit winter night in 1870, Essic Harris was suddenly woken by his wife Anne. Essic, Anne, and their six children lived in rural Chatham County, North Carolina. Times had not been easy. Essic had been employed in railroad construction in the winter months when there was less work to be done for the old white farmer from whom he rented land. The end of slavery had brought Essic and Anne a measure of autonomy, and five of their six children had been born after emancipation. But freedom also brought new threats. On this night, Essic had gone to bed early, tired from clearing ground for the railroad. It was a few days before Christmas—a Wednesday, he later remembered.¹

Sometime just before midnight there was a knock on the door. Before Harris was fully awake, about fifteen white men, wearing masks and white robes trimmed in red, broke through the door and entered his small house. “Have you ever seen the Ku Klux?” one of the white men asked. Harris said no, and one responded, “Here they are; we are the Ku Klux.” They demanded his gun—a shotgun with which Harris hunted small game—and took his powder and shot, then left without saying much else. Harris later heard they visited other African Americans that night,¹

¹ Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, 42d Congress, 2d Sess., House. Rept. 22., Vol. 1484-1496 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872). This thirteen-volume report of a congressional investigation into the violence of the Ku Klux Klan will be used extensively throughout this dissertation. The first volume, containing the committee’s findings and reports, will be cited as KKK; the second volume, dealing exclusively with testimony relating to North Carolina, as KKK NC; the third volume, dealing exclusively with South Carolina, as KKK SC. Quotations will be identified with the name of the individual’s testimony; quotations from supplementary trial transcripts included in the KKK NC will be identified as trial testimony. For the specifics of the attack on Essic Harris, see multiple testimonies, KKK NC, 32-35, 50, 74-77, 86-102. Demographic information about Harris’s family from U.S. Census Bureau, Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Series M593, Roll 1129, Page 133, and Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Series T9, Roll 958, Page 238.
taking their weapons too and raping a young black girl who lived nearby. Essic purchased
another shotgun and continued working at the railroad. But a week or two later, in early January
1871, Anne again woke him late at night.

His dog was barking. His dog rarely barked at strangers, but this night the Ku Klux Klan
had returned. Essic and his family were more prepared. He doused the fire, barricaded the door,
and grabbed his new gun. Anne hid under one bed, their six children under the other. Before
Essic could shoot, the Klansmen began breaking the windows of the house and firing into it.
Bullets and shot tore into the wooden walls of the cabin and rained splinters down on Anne and
the children, who miraculously remained unharmed. Essic was not so lucky; he was hit nine
times, sustaining injuries in his foot, leg, shoulder, and arm. But he still had his gun.

After shooting into the cabin for what seemed to Harris to be well over an hour, the
Klansmen assumed they had succeeded in killing the cabin’s inhabitants. The raid’s leaders
chose two younger Klansmen, Joe Clark and Barney Burgess, to enter the house and remove the
bodies. Joe Clark was twenty-four, an illiterate farm laborer and illegal whiskey distiller; Barney
Burgess was slightly older at thirty-one, but lived on his mother’s farm and also peddled bootleg
whiskey.² They began breaking down the door.

Harris’s gun was loaded with a light load for killing squirrels, but he cocked and aimed it
at the door as it split open and Clark and Burgess entered. Fear flashed through Harris’s mind.
He later recounted that “They always said in my country that a man could not kill a Ku-Klux;
they said that they could not be hit; that if they were, the ball would bounce back and kill them. I
thought though that I would try it, and see if my gun would hit one.”³ As the door opened, he

³ Testimony of Essic Harris, KK C NC, 89-90. Throughout this dissertation I have retained all spelling and
punctuation choices of the original sources and do not use “sic” to demonstrate when there are errors within quoted
pulled the trigger. “When I shot the man the fire blazed up in his face as clear as you ever saw a match blaze up,” he recalled. The squirrel-shot hit Clark in the chest and Burgess in the eye. The mob of Klansmen fled, startled by Harris’s resistance, taking the injured men with them.

In some ways the story of the Harris family was atypical of the racial violence endemic after the American Civil War. Targets of Klan violence often fought back, but Harris was more successful than most. Victims frequently survived their attacks, but rarely forced Klansmen to flee. Most Klansmen escaped prosecution, but Clark and Burgess were arrested a few days after the attack, identified by their wounds. Whereas most Klan attacks generated few accounts by their survivors, Harris traveled to Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1871 to testify to a Joint Select Committee of the U.S. Congress about the attack on his family.

But in other regards the attacks upon Essic Harris were quite typical of the violence committed by members of the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction. White southerners opposed to racial equality attacked many southerners who supported it, white and black, and the Ku Klux Klan was the largest and most infamous organization of vigilante violence. Klansmen attacked countless black families and disarmed many black men. Most attacks took place late at night. Targets were often caught unawares, in their nightclothes and in bed. Just as Harris was scarred for life by his wounds, few survivors of Klan raids escaped unscathed. Most survivors could also identify some of their attackers. Harris later attested to having “bought many a quart of whisky” from Burgess, and estimated that most of the men who attacked him lived no farther than four

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In many passages errors are prevalent enough that the use of “sic” would seem distracting and perhaps even condescending. Given that many of the words quoted within this dissertation are those of Klansmen or those sympathetic to them, I believe it important to show the range of literacy they had and the specific language choices they used. An effect of this choice is that some of the words of African Americans were recorded in dialect, particularly in interviews conducted by the Federal Writers’ Project in the 1930s. That dialect reflected at least as much how white audiences expected black voices to sound as how the people themselves spoke. Nevertheless, I consider the advantages of retaining all original language, errors or dialect included, to outweigh the disadvantages of either selectively revising or including “sic” to denote errors. Any errors in unquoted text, obviously, are mine.

4 Testimony of Essic Harris, KKK NC, 91.
miles away.\textsuperscript{5} And many Klansmen, like Clark and Burgess, were middling white farmers in their twenties or thirties; some were also bootleggers.

The American South experienced considerable political instability and widespread racist violence between the Civil War and the turn of the twentieth century. Of the numerous atrocities white southerners committed, the violence committed by members of the Ku Klux Klan remains the most infamous. But too often the larger purposes of the violence Klansmen committed during Reconstruction have remained hidden behind their hoods and masks, seemingly as inarticulate as the men who twice attacked Harris’s house. At a superficial level Klansmen seem unknowable, obscured behind masks and hoods. And yet most historical accounts depict them as single-minded and direct in their intentions—another way Klansmen desired to be seen. But their violence was anything but simple.

This dissertation analyzes the violence committed by members of the Ku Klux Klan during the period of Reconstruction in North and South Carolina. It strives to unmask Klansmen, analyzing not just what prompted them to commit violence but also the lasting effects of that violence alongside the terror experienced by its individual survivors. Members of the Ku Klux Klan were not aberrant or marginal members of white southern society; they were normal, everyday white southerners—if anything more privileged than most other southerners, white or black. And Klansmen’s goals were not mysterious, though they were more complex than historians have typically credited. Klansmen were engaged in a campaign of racial terror, but instilling fear in African Americans was just one facet of their larger project. In addition to traumatizing their victims and survivors, the violence Klansmen committed changed how white southerners thought about race at the same time that it shaped the ways southern society was

\textsuperscript{5} Testimony of Essie Harris, KKNC NC, 91.
structured around race—socially, politically, and economically—during a critical period of transition after the end of slavery.

It is well understood that race is historically constructed. Rather than being a firm biological category, race has been created and recreated through the repeated, conscious decisions of people in the past. A corollary, but one that we can be less apt to analyze, is that racism—the idea that differences in skin color do or ought to translate to differences in social, political, and personal power—is also historically constructed. No less than race, even more than race, racism has to be remade in and reconfigured to new historical contexts.6

Racism can seem to be a causative force, and some historians have used racism as an ultimate explanation for the actions of people in the past. There can be a certain utility in doing so: Klansmen were racist in their belief that black people ought to have no political, social, and economic power in the American South, and this conviction caused them to commit violence against black people and those white people who supported equality. But racism is more than just sentiment. It manifests itself in social and political power. Similarly, racism is not timeless or static. New historical contexts have forced the contours of racism to shift.

6 There is a host of writings on race’s social construction. For influential works by historians, see Barbara Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America,” New Left Review 181 (May/June 1990), 95-118; Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” in J. Morgan Kousser and James McPherson, ed., Region, Race, and Reconstruction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143-177; Thomas C. Holt, “Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History”, American Historical Review 100 (Feb 1995), 1-20; Holt, The Problem of Race in the 21st Century (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” Signs 17 (Winter 1992). My definition of racism is inspired in part by those scholars, as well as by George M. Fredrickson, who has argued that “It is when differences that might otherwise be considered ethnocultural are regarded as innate, indelible, and unchangeable that a racist attitude or ideology can be said to exist,” in contrast to more casual, personal feelings of antipathy, in Racism: A Short History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 5. Several scholars have explored the link between ideologies of race and hierarchies of power that reflect and codify them; Edward J. Blum, for example, argues that “Racial constructions, furthermore, are created in order to make, sustain, and legitimate hierarchies,” in Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 7. See also Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, & Rebecca J. Scott, Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies (Chapel Hill & London: the University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
Reconstruction, in particular, involved a radical reshaping of American racism. Before the Civil War, slavery had been the chief mechanism of racial oppression in the American South, and it had been buttressed by a racist ideology that had developed alongside it. An economic dependence upon the slave economy and growing challenges to slavery by abolitionists had both hardened white southerners’ ideological commitment to slavery to the point where they were brought up to believe, in the words of one white South Carolinian, that “slavery was ordained by God in perpetuity,” and that “that the Southern States could not prosper, if indeed they could exist, with the negroes emancipated.”

But the Civil War killed slavery. After emancipation, proslavery ideology could not be applied wholesale to a new historical context. Once slavery had been destroyed by slave resistance, war, and constitutional amendment, many white southerners still wanted a system of racial oppression to place white over black—politically, economically, and socially. But those agents of racial oppression could not use the laws, practices, and justifications that had previously supported slavery. Sustained political activism by African Americans, alongside white Republicans’ commitment to racial equality, led to African Americans gaining full citizenship and African American men gaining the right to vote. The new laws and political reality of Reconstruction forced racist white southerners to rework how inequalities would be defined and enforced. Klan violence was a testament to some white southern men’s hatred of black people, but it was more than that. Klan violence also shaped the ideas used to justify the creation of a new racial hierarchy that came to replace the dead hierarchy of slavery.

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7 Robert Wallace Shand, “Incidents In the Life of a Private Soldier in the War Waged by the United States against the Confederate States, 1861-1865,” Handwritten & Unpublished Manuscript, Columbia, S.C., 1907, 5, in Robert Wallace Shand Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina [subsequently cited as SCL]. Shand had fought for the Confederacy, but did not join the Klan despite the fact that it was very active in his home county of Union, South Carolina.
A racial hierarchy is more than just one group being privileged and another group oppressed. Hierarchies also involve the mechanisms through which power is wielded and the ideas given to justify and explain them. Their contours, boundaries, and definitions matter at least as much as which group has power and which is disfranchised, because those mechanisms and limits are what give hierarchies life. Too often we can be concerned with the static nature of who had power without investigating the many ways in which the lived experiences of the people within those hierarchies varied. To properly analyze the ways racism operated in the American South and the effects it had on the lives of people in the past, we must not only acknowledge the constancy of white people’s oppression of black people but also analyze both changes to the ideological underpinnings of that oppression and the mechanisms by which oppression operated.

The Ku Klux Klan was one of the chief organizations through which white conservative southerners figured out and enforced a new ideology of race after emancipation. There were few other groups suited to such work. White men who favored a racial hierarchy did not have complete political control in the way they had had in the antebellum period, when slavery had

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8 In this dissertation, I use the word “conservative” not as an adjective for people’s personal behavior but as a means of describing the political affiliation of white southerners during Reconstruction who opposed racial equality, principally because they used the term to describe themselves. This was a slight change from the period immediately before the Civil War when “conservative” was used to describe people committed to racial slavery but hesitant about secession. Opposition to Unionists and Republicans and the unpopularity of the Democratic Party, blamed for the Civil War, led many white southerners to collectively call themselves conservatives during Reconstruction. C. Vann Woodward has noted that “so repugnant had the marriage with their old enemies been to the [former] Whigs that it was not until eight years after the war that the very name ‘Democratic’ was avowed by the Conservative party of North Carolina,” in Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 2. In contrast, Joel Williamson, in his seminal study of racial ideologies, identified what he called three mentalities of race—distinct ideologies or attitudes southern whites held towards African Americans after emancipation: liberal, conservative, and radical. Using his rubric, members of the Ku Klux Klan might be said to have a radical ideology of race, which Williamson defines as a mentality that allowed for “no place for the Negro,” and one that was ascendant from 1889-1915, in The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 5-6 [emphasis in original]. I do not use the term radical to describe Klansmen, because it was reserved for and used by those in the Republican Party who supported racial political equality, and it held for many Democrats a highly negative connotation. For more on white southern conservatism, see W. Scott Poole, Never Surrender: Confederate Memory and Conservatism in the South Carolina Upcountry (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 2004).
been firmly buttressed by the law and political structures. During Reconstruction, southern state legislatures included Republicans who forged viable biracial political alliances between newly enfranchised black men and poorer white men who blamed the planter elite for secession and war. Newspapers and print culture reflected the racial views of white conservatives and to some extent helped to give shape and meaning to new ideas about race. But those voices said little about how their ideas were received by everyday white southerners, nor did they have nearly the effect upon people’s lives that violence did.

In order to understand how racism changed in nineteenth-century America, we must understand the Ku Klux Klan. It was the preeminent organization within which conservative white southern men worked out a new ideology of racial oppression after emancipation, and through which they attempted to enforce that hierarchy. As many as twenty to thirty thousand white conservative men joined in North and South Carolina. Membership in the Klan allowed those white men a space to define and codify new rules of behavior around race and the definitions of a new, postemancipation racial hierarchy.

Klansmen then used violence to try to inscribe that new hierarchy upon the South by punishing those people, white as well as black, whose behavior somehow violated or challenged the new racial order. Violence reflects the social and cultural contexts in which it arises and thus provides us with a lens through which to see values of the time and place within which it arose—particularly those values that were in conflict. Simultaneously, violence is itself generative of meaning and shapes the context within which it takes place. By attacking, or even threatening, those people with whom they disagreed, Klansmen affected how people acted around, and consequently thought about, race and power in the postemancipation South.⁹

⁹ My understanding of violence as simultaneously reflective of and generative of meaning has been influenced by the works of many scholars, including W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia*. 
Furthermore, the Klan’s use of widespread vigilante violence to define and enact the boundaries of a racial hierarchy was something new. The Klan did not invent white southern vigilantism. Violence by white mobs, slave patrols, and vigilance committees had been scattered across the antebellum South. But those groups had existed alongside of and worked in support of slavery. The vast majority of antebellum southern violence was not committed by white vigilantes upon free citizens. Violence had been pervasive throughout slavery and was a principal method of enforcing slavery’s rules, but that violence had been legally sanctioned, being committed by slave owners and overseers against enslaved people over whom they had complete legal authority.


Stephen A. West has asserted that antebellum vigilantism, in the form of vigilance committees and slave patrols, served to unite slaveowners and nonslaveowning whites in the South Carolina upcountry by targeting suspected abolitionists, in *From Yeoman to Redneck in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1850-1915* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 46-65. Though these groups might be seen as anticipating the Klan, these groups did not practice widespread violence against enslaved African Americans, and were more likely to threaten violence than actually whip and murder. They had a greater similarity to postbellum councils of safety, as discussed in Chapter One. For more on slave patrols, see Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2001). On other forms of violence in the antebellum South, such as dueling, fighting, and mobs, see Betram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

There is a deep literature on the violence of slavery. In particular see Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South Revised Edition* (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999); Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*. Some other scholars have seen the violence that owners used to punish enslaved people as a form of extralegal violence because it did not go through the court system. Allen Trelease, for example, argued that “In slavery times planters had customarily disciplined their own slaves without recourse to the law and without attracting much public attention, … habit … encouraged a continuation of arbitrary and extralegal punishments,” in *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971), ix-x. But that neglects the extent to which the law formally sanctioned violence committed outside of the legal system by white people against
The Ku Klux Klan institutionalized vigilante violence as the principal means by which conservative white southerners would enforce racial oppression after the end of slavery. It was after the Civil War that vigilante violence became the principal method of enforcing racial oppression in the American South. In the second half of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, the chief means by which white southerners enforced their ideas about race were lynch mobs, paramilitary political groups, or, after 1915, the reborn Ku Klux Klan. The Reconstruction Klan had developed the precedence of vigilantism from which those groups would all draw. Unlike the violence of slavery, postbellum vigilante violence was not sanctioned by the state. Unlike much interpersonal violence, vigilantism was premeditated and intentionally undertaken with an eye to an audience beyond its particular victims. Vigilante violence, furthermore, could be committed upon African Americans against the wishes of their white employers, who were often their former owners. It was also used against those white southerners who supported racial equality or whose behavior challenged the social rules about race that conservative white southerners were trying to codify.  

This dissertation explores how the Ku Klux Klan helped to develop the rules of a new racial hierarchy and then naturalized white conservative southern men to the process of enforcing it through violence. It can be difficult to see the process by which Klansmen used violence to develop a new ideology of race in individual incidents like the attack upon Essic Harris. Because enslaved people. After the State of North Carolina vs. Mann decision in North Carolina in 1929, essentially no violence against a slave was illegal.

12 In some ways the story of the Ku Klux Klan challenges the model presented by Michel Foucault in Discipline and Punish, where Foucault asserted that modernizing societies shift violence that serves the state from sudden, public, and spectacular incidents of violence to more hidden and institutionalized forms like the prison system. But the violence of the slave society of the antebellum South, though not using the prison systems of an incarceral state, was in many ways significantly less intentionally spectacular or open to mass white participation than was the vigilantism of the Klan or the lynchings that succeeded it. In contrast, the postbellum South was considerably more modern than antebellum South in political, economic, and social terms. And indeed the mechanisms of racial oppression of the postbellum South—including the public vigilantism that the Klan inaugurated—were constitutive parts of what defined modernism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America.
white conservatives used a wide constellation of violence and rhetorical strategies to accomplish their goals, no single instance can illustrate the full process in action. Additionally, the ideology itself was in development and was not easily articulated. Furthermore, Klansmen shared a commitment to secrecy, and in trying to obscure their identities they desired to make their violence seem both justified and natural. But the details and textures of specific incidents of violence are critically necessary for seeing the various pieces of the larger political project white conservatives used to reconfigure racism. This dissertation therefore combines an intellectual history of the ideas Americans in the South during Reconstruction had about race with a social history of the men who joined the Ku Klux Klan and the violence they committed.

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Historians have long emphasized that Reconstruction entailed intertwined crises of politics, race, and gender.\(^{13}\) Similarly, scholars have demonstrated that a new form of racial oppression developed in the late nineteenth-century South. Though some have claimed that this system was virtually identical to the racism of slavery, more nuanced studies have shown that the spatial separation and electoral disfranchisement of Jim Crow segregation developed in the specific time and place of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American South. By 1900, a new form of racism had blossomed.\(^ {14}\)  

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\(^{13}\) Previous historians have well established that the Civil War and Reconstruction prompted intertwined crises of race and gender; see, among others, LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Laura Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*; Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997); and Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*.

But relatively few historians have connected the conflicts of Reconstruction to the later development of segregation. Fewer still have explored how the violence committed by the Ku Klux Klan shaped how white conservative southerners understood the role vigilante violence was to play in defining and enforcing the racial hierarchy that replaced slavery. Historians of the Reconstruction-era Klan have already suggested that the Klan was an alliance of white southern men who spanned the class spectrum.\(^{15}\) Though some scholars have depicted the Klan as little more than a wing of the Democratic Party that functioned to reverse Republican political power, others—particularly historians of women and gender—have been more nuanced, demonstrating that the Klan committed violence against a wide range of victims for purposes that could transcend purely partisan politics.\(^{16}\) But rather than looking at what Klansmen built with their violence, most previous studies have typically focused on the roots of the organization, exploring


\(^{16}\) Some historians who have approached the Klan as strictly instrumentalist in their violence include Allen Trelease, who argued that the Klan became “a terrorist organization aiming at the preservation of white supremacy,” in White Terror, xi, and George C. Rable, who asserted that “Frustrated at their inability to bring their states back to Democratic control, some southerners turned to the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist organizations, using terrorism to eliminate opposition leaders and to strike fear into the hearts of rank-and-file Republicans, both black and white,” in But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), xv. More recently Lisa Cardyn, in exploring the sexual violence committed by Klansmen, asserted that “the klans’ objectives were in the end mainly instrumental,” as they embarked on “their campaign to reinstate white male supremacy in its antebellum form, replacing the legal infrastructure of slavery with illicit supports of their own making,” in “Sexual Terror in the Reconstruction South,” in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, ed., Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 141. For assertions that the Klan’s goals had a wider political agenda, see in particular Hannah Rosen, Terror in the Heart of Freedom. Using an alternative model, Wolfgang Shivelbusch describes the Klan as a “belated caricature[]” of a mass movement, a terrorist group “composed of discharged soldiers… who portrayed themselves as avengers of national honor,” in The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery, translated by Jefferson Chase (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 10.
either its antebellum antecedents or how contemporary popular culture influenced its practices. Consequently, most historians of the Reconstruction-era Klan have argued that Klansmen only tried to recreate the power they held in slavery.

Similarly, historians of the Reconstruction period who do not focus upon the Klan often overlook the extent to which the violence its members committed had impacts beyond those immediately suffered by its victims. Even in some of the best political histories of Reconstruction, much of the widespread violence of the period takes place offstage, almost as a matter of secondary importance. In contrast, scholars of gender or women’s history have explored how violence played a central role in reworking how race and gender were to function in the postemancipation South. Those works have focused more on the victims and survivors of violence than on the perpetrators, thus unintentionally overlooking the extent to which the hierarchy that white conservative men built through violence was new. And though some historians have asserted that white conservative resistance to Reconstruction was a shared

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17 Rene Hayden, in “Root of Wrath,” and Elaine Frantz Parsons, in “Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan,” The Journal of American History (December 2005), 811–836, both argued that Klansmen were attempting to resurrect the authority they had during slavery. Allen Trelease also asserted that “the Ku Klux Klan… institutionalized a white vigilantism which long preceded and followed it,” in White Terror, xxii, overstating the extent to which vigilante violence was institutionalized in the antebellum South.

18 For example, Paul Escott has written that “The old, formerly established elite organized the Klan and directed its violence to accomplish one central purpose: to reestablish the hierarchy and control to which they were accustomed,” in Many Excellent People, 154. Kidada Williams, in a study of how African Americans responded to the violence committed by white southerners both within and separate from the Klan, argued that the major thing southern whites attempted to achieve with violence was “a subjugated black population,” because “some whites were reluctant to give up the control over African Americans that they enjoyed before the war,” in They Left Great Marks on Me, 38 & 48. And Allen Trelease explicitly claimed that “physical intimidation and violence… were not new to the South during Reconstruction. The Old South had emphasized individualism and self-reliance in personal relationships, but it also had demanded conformity of ideas,” White Terror, xli.

19 For example, Eric Foner writes about Klan violence in his path-breaking Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877 (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), but analyzes it as an issue essentially separate from the political struggles between Republicans and Democrats.

20 See in particular Edwards, Gendered Strife and Confusion, Rosen, Terror in the Heart of Freedom, and Williams, They Left Great Marks. Rebecca Scott has written about the ways in which “The physical and rhetorical violence of planters and their allies also helped to define groups in [racialized and gendered] way[s], radically simplifying complex social and racial categories,” in Cooper, Holt, & Scott, Beyond Slavery, 80.
counterrevolution, few have provided enough evidence of the connections and conscious efforts
Klansmen used to coordinate their attacks.\textsuperscript{21}

Thus we often assume that the Civil War shattered everything except a static desire by
white conservatives to restore or resurrect the same power they had had in slavery. Previous
accounts make it sometimes seem that a shared commitment to white supremacy was lifted
wholesale from the antebellum South through Reconstruction to the early twentieth century,
without noting the myriad ways in which white supremacy’s contours, forms, and means of
enforcement changed. The phrase “white supremacy” can often be used as if it were self-evident
or a phrase without a history.\textsuperscript{22} Consequently, the Ku Klux Klan has most often been rendered as
a short-lived but intense expression of an unchanging southern white male commitment to the
mastery they claimed before emancipation.

\textsuperscript{21} W.E.B. DuBois called the efforts to reverse Reconstruction a “counter-revolution of property,” but lacked
conclusive evidence of coordination between those counter-revolutionaries, in his foundational work \textit{Black
C. Rable made a similar assertion in \textit{But There Was No Peace}.

\textsuperscript{22} For example, Allen Trelease, in \textit{White Terror}, asserted that the Klan “was soon transformed into a terrorist
organization aiming at the preservation of white supremacy,” but did not define or analyze white supremacy. More
recently, Christopher Waldrep, in analyzing the language Klansmen used, argued that “Most whites supported white
supremacy, but a significant number preferred to maintain white control without vigilante violence,” in “The Politics
of Language,” in Winfred B. Moore, Jr., Kyle S. Sinisi, and David H. White, Jr. eds., \textit{Warm Ashes: Issues in
Southern History at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century} (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press,
2003), 141. Waldrep is correct that it is important to differentiate between white southerners who joined the Klan
and those who did not, but his assertion that most supported white supremacy takes for granted what “white
supremacy” itself meant. Similarly, Lisa Cardyn, in “Sexual Terror in the Reconstruction South,” seemed to assume
that constructing white supremacy would only entail violence against African Americans, writing “But these avowed
white supremacists did not confine themselves to molesting women of the supposedly inferior race; while victims
were predominantly black, white women also suffered their depredations,” in \textit{Battle Scars}, 145. One notable
exception is the work of George M. Fredrickson, who has attempted to define and analyze the concept of “white
supremacy.” His more nuanced definition contended that “white supremacy refers to the attitudes, ideologies, and
policies associated with the rise of blatant forms of white or European dominance over ‘nonwhite’ populations. In
other words, it involves making invidious distinctions of a socially crucial kind that are based primarily, if not
exclusively, on physical characteristics and ancestry;” in \textit{White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and
South African History} (Oxford; London; Glasgow: Oxford University Press, 1981), xi. Another significant
exception to this trend is the work of Julie Novkov, in \textit{Racial Union: Law, Intimacy, and the White State in
Alabama, 1865-1954} (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008). She has argued that “While the term
\textit{white supremacy} is used most frequently as an ahistorical description of an ideology of white superiority to other
races,” it can “be used more specifically to describe the linkage between racial ideology in politics and culture and
its concrete manifestations in state institutions in the postbellum U.S. South;” 4.
Such assertions overlook how the Ku Klux Klan was a crucible within which white southern men worked out the new ways they wanted southern society to be structured around race, and also overlook the extent to which the violence Klansmen committed served to enforce and define that new racial hierarchy. That violence did not accomplish all of their goals, and it prompted a sustained—and somewhat successful—campaign by Republicans to stop what were called Klan outrages. Alongside laws that criminalized the use of disguises and participation in secret political organizations, widespread arrests of Klansmen by federal troops broke the backbone of the Klan. In late 1871 the organization went underground, ceased committing violence, and eventually disappeared. But the effects of the violence remained. So did the work of Klansmen in figuring out the new racial hierarchy that white conservatives would use to structure southern society. Though of course nothing that happened after the end of Reconstruction was predetermined by Reconstruction’s course, the violence used by members of the Klan prefigured most, if not all, of the forms racial oppression took after Reconstruction.

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Just as racism is too often considered a sufficient explanation for people’s behaviors, too often we think that racial oppression manifests itself in identical and predictable ways. But by reviewing what happened after Reconstruction, we can better see the extent to which Klan violence reshaped American racism and the ways in which the new racial hierarchy they tried to build was different from the oppression of slavery. The period between the end of Reconstruction and the turn of the twentieth century was no less fraught and contested than Reconstruction itself. African American men retained the right to vote but voter intimidation and electoral fraud began to substantially limit black voting. Biracial political alliances arose between African Americans and white moderates in many southern states, threatening white
conservative control (with varying degrees of electoral success). White conservatives responded to those threats with a wide slate of strategies to disfranchise African American men (and to some extent those poorer white people who made common cause with African Americans) despite the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The efforts were highly successful, resulting in near total disfranchisement of African Americans in the South by 1900.

Simultaneous to their exclusion in the political sphere, African Americans were increasingly restricted in public spaces. Predicated on the false premise that separate might be equal, segregation worked to visibly inscribe a hierarchy of white over black upon the landscape of the towns and cities of the South. Segregation spawned separate schools, businesses, and public accommodations like trains and streetcars. Racist violence also flourished. Thousands of African Americans were lynched during and after the 1880s. Many were never even accused of having committed a crime, but publicly white southerners defended the practice by claiming that lynchings were necessary to prevent black men from raping white southern women. Lynchings were not the only form of racist violence. Bands of armed white men varyingly called Red Shirts,

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23 The Virginia Readjuster movement of the 1880s was one of the most successful such initiatives; see Jane Dailey, Before Jim Crow. North Carolina saw a biracial political alliance with the Fusion movement of the 1890s. South Carolina did not have a successful biracial political movement after Reconstruction, but Democrats there frequently courted the black vote until disfranchisement. See William J. Cooper, Jr., The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877-1890 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005).


25 Howard N. Rabinowitz, “From Exclusion to Segregation: Southern Race Relations, 1865-1890,” The Journal of American History Vol. 63, No. 2 (September 1976), 325-350; Williamson, The Crucible of Race; As Mark Schultz has noted in The Rural Face of White Supremacy, spatial segregation was far less common in the rural South, where white supremacy was more flexible, permissive, and interpersonal—though no less oppressive.

White Cappers, or White Liners openly terrorized African Americans, and race riots in numerous southern cities killed countless African Americans.

These phenomena—electoral disfranchisement, spatial segregation, the constant threat of violence, and public incidents of violence—constituted the mechanisms by which white southerners defined and enforced a new racial hierarchy called Jim Crow, named after a character from blackface minstrelsy. The South became a bastion of Democratic political power, known during the twentieth century as the “Solid South” because the Republican Party effectively ceased to exist. But Jim Crow required constant maintenance, and white southerners continued to use violence in response to sustained activism by African Americans.

Jim Crow was interchangeably known as “white supremacy,” also a term used to describe the ideology that buttressed it. Conservative white southerners used “white supremacy” as a political slogan as well as a reference to what they saw as a self-evident truth that white people were better than black people. The term had not been very widespread before the Civil War but was used with increasing frequency in the second half of the nineteenth century. With slavery destroyed, “white supremacy” referred to the ideas that justified a new racial hierarchy.

Segregation was most prevalent in the American South, but its foundations were national. It first originated in the urban North after northern states abolished slavery earlier in the

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27 W. Fitzhugh Brundage has defined white supremacy as “a vague folk concept used to describe varied patterns of behavior and belief,” arguing that “it is an inadequate explanation for such a multifarious and inconsistent phenomenon as southern mob violence;” in Lynching in the New South, 12. Similarly, Stephen Kantrowitz has contended that “‘white supremacy,’ more than a slogan and less than a fact, was a social argument and a political program,” in Ben Tillman, 2.

28 George M. Fredrickson has noted how the term was adopted after the Civil War. As an example, one racist author republished a book in 1868 that had been written before the Civil War as a defense of slavery with no changes except the new title White Supremacy and Negro Subordination. See The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914 (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1971), 187.
nineteenth century. Similarly, the codification of racial hierarchies is one of the major mechanisms by which nation states are formed, matured, and maintained. The Confederate nation state had been based upon racial slavery, but its destruction was accompanied by and accomplished through the destruction of slavery. During Reconstruction, in effect, Klansmen were men at odds with their nation, especially as Republicans established laws to defend racial equality and attempted to use state power to reduce violence. But Republicans’ commitment to racial equality had limits, and after Reconstruction politicians of both parties throughout the United States legalized racial hierarchies. The Supreme Court solidified segregation through a series of important cases. By the turn of the twentieth century, most white people in the United States were committed to colonialism overseas and racial oppression at home.

It is important to emphasize the differences between the racial hierarchy of slavery from the racial hierarchy that white conservatives explicitly called “white supremacy” in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Both placed white over black; in both hierarchies, African Americans were subjected to political, social, economic, and personal oppression by white

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30 Edmund Morgan, in American Slavery and American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975) asserted that American national identity was refracted through and indeed inseparable from the system of slavery. One of the best explorations of the ways that the formation of racial categories gives coherence to the formation of nation states is Tiya Miles’s Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2005), which analyzes how “Cherokees adopted black slavery in part to demonstrate their level of ‘civilization’” and thus became both “a core feature of their national character and a key sign of their sovereign rights,” 4-5. Anthony Marx, in Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of the United States, South Africa, and Brazil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) compared the intertwined processes of the development of racial hierarchies and modern nation states in the United States, South Africa, and Brazil.


32 Foner, Reconstruction; Blum, Reforging the White Republic.
southerners. But the two systems had some critically different features. Whereas slavery had
been based upon the legal ownership of African Americans by white southerners, after
emancipation African Americans were legally recognized citizens, and white southerners had to
negotiate ways to strip them of the privileges and immunities of American citizenship. During
slavery, white and black southerners had lived and worked closely together; postbellum white
supremacy most often took the form of segregation, a supposedly strict spatial separation
between white and black. In slavery owners had had complete authority to visit violence upon
their slaves, but their profit motive gave them incentive to prevent other white southerners from
attacking their own property. In Jim Crow, no such incentives existed, and lynch mobs attacked
African Americans without restraint of social convention. However, African Americans were
citizens after the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment and thus supposedly legally protected
from violence, and police officers and state officials would occasionally try to prevent mob
violence. Whereas in slavery black workers had had no claim to that which they produced,
postbellum white supremacy emphasized keeping black wages as low as possible and ensnaring
African Americans in a system of debt peonage. During slavery, nonconsensual interracial sex
was common between white slave owners and enslaved women. But during segregation, those
rapes were rarer; instead white southerners inverted historical realities by manufacturing a shared
paranoia that black men would rape white women if not prevented by the threat of lynching.33

The differences and nuances between slavery and Jim Crow are essential for several
reasons. First, they illustrate how mechanisms of racial oppression differ. During slavery, racial
oppression had been supported by a mature and deep body of laws that had developed, with few
legal challenges, to ensure the absolute power of white owners as well as define enslaved status

33 Brundage, Lynching in the New South; Hodes, White Women, Black Men; Feimster, Southern Horrors.
by blackness. ³⁴ By contrast Jim Crow was grounded in legal decisions that twisted and sidestepped constitutional amendments and national laws that were to prevent racial oppression. ³⁵ Racial oppression had a significantly less secure legal foundation but was by no means absent between slavery and Jim Crow.

Second, the differences between these systems of racial oppression also highlight the various ways African Americans fought oppression, how some white Americans (to a lesser extent) supported some semblance of racial equality, and the myriad new opportunities that arose for more democratic and equitable politics. The enfranchisement of black men during Reconstruction and the establishment of birthright citizenship regardless of race upended a decades-long history wherein access to political power had been confined to white men and black people could only exercise political power outside of the traditional electoral sphere. ³⁶ Furthermore, southern states drafted constitutions during Reconstruction that eliminated the last vestiges of property requirements for voting and made local offices elected rather than appointed.

Additionally, focusing on the differences between slavery and Jim Crow help highlight what historian C. Vann Woodward famously termed the “forgotten alternatives” of southern history. ³⁷ Conflating the oppression of white supremacy with the oppression of slavery risks


³⁷ Woodward, Strange Career. Other scholars, such as Joel Williamson, Howard Rabinowitz, and Leon Litwack have preferred to emphasize the longstanding continuity of racial oppression and instead asserted that the dominant theme of the history of race in the nineteenth-century South is one of relatively stable oppression of African Americans. Though they persuasively asserted that Woodward overemphasized the possibility of social and political equality in the South given the strength of white conservative racial retrenchment, they tended to overcorrect in the opposite direction, sometimes depicting white racism monolithically. See John W. Cell, The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 82-102; Ritterhouse, Growing Up Jim Crow, 7-9.
overlooking the conscious decisions some white southerners made to develop a new system of racial oppression after the Civil War. Such an omission can take for granted the racism of white southerners and foster the presumption that racial oppression in the South was predestined.

That is why Reconstruction was so critical. It was then that laws guaranteeing citizenship for African Americans were passed and when sustained activism, political and personal, by black southerners enabled them to secure, if tenuously, their rights. White conservative southerners opposed to those changes did not passively wait for a new racial order to develop; they organized in opposition. The development of Jim Crow was by no means predestined after Reconstruction, and it took a national commitment to white supremacy to secure it in the South. But the violence of the Ku Klux Klan introduced conservative white southerners to the use of vigilante violence as the primary means of enforcing the boundaries of acceptable racial behavior. Klan violence also helped Democrats wrest political control of the South from Republicans. As a result, Reconstruction’s reversal was the fulcrum of the shift from emancipation to Jim Crow.

Of white conservative efforts to rework the racial landscape of the South after the Civil War, then, the Ku Klux Klan was the most organized, the most clandestine, the most violent, and in some ways the most efficacious. A central component of the racism that emerged with and through Klan violence was the definition of African Americans as outside of the category of full personhood. Klansmen would sometimes name white victims they targeted and then add that some “niggers” were also attacked. Similarly, Klansmen in some dens promised to monitor “radicals and niggers”—as if African Americans were of a category separate from white people,

38 William Gillette, Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Foner, Reconstruction; Blum, Reforging the White Republic. As scholars like Howard Rabinowitz have shown, segregation also developed in part as a compromise with African Americans, who asserted their right to public spaces when faced with the possibility of total exclusion; see “From Exclusion to Segregation.”
who were raceless. \footnote{See, for example, deposition of Wiley C. West, in J. S. M. Evans to A.T. Ackerman, November 24, 1871, Letters Received by the Department of Justice From the State of North Carolina, 1871-1884, Microfilm M1345, Roll 1, Record Group 60, General Records of the Department of Justice, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland [subsequently cited as RG 60, NARA]; and Oath of the Chester Conservative Clan, June 28, 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.} Similarly, white people who supported black equality were also excluded from full personhood—or rather were accused of having abdicated their whiteness. \footnote{For example, Klansmen in Sampson County, North Carolina were required to pledge their allegiance with one hand upon a human skull when joining the order; some claimed it was the skull of an eighteen-year-old black boy who had been killed by a member in a fight, but others said it was that of a “Yankee” soldier recently dug up from a grave. One said “as it was a Yankee’s it would answer the same purpose as a niggars.” Deposition of Wiley C. West, in J. S. M. Evans to A.T. Ackerman, November 24, 1871, M1345, RG 60, NARA.} 

The tenor of Klansmen’s delineation of black and white as inherently separate and oppositional was new in texture to the postemancipation South. \footnote{Julie Novkov has charted a similar trend in the hardening of racial categories after emancipation, but argued that southern state institutions, laws, and policies were principally responsible for it; \textit{Racial Union}.} Slavery was of course built upon and justified through white southerners’ disdain for African Americans and their conviction that African Americans were innately inferior. The laws that buttressed slavery also defined African Americans as a separate kind of people, destined for enslavement. But the lived experience of slavery put white and black in close social and personal contact, and proslavery ideology was suffused with patronizing contentions that white southerners liked and cared for the people they enslaved. Though proslavery white southerners had long believed that northern abolitionists were in some ways inferior to the white people of the South and had abdicated the privileges of their whiteness, the South had had very few white inhabitants actively advocating for political racial equality until Reconstruction.

The racism of the Ku Klux Klan lacked pretensions to close personal contact with and care for African Americans. What took root instead was a widespread conviction in the necessity for separating black and white, personally and politically. Plato Durham, a Klansman from western North Carolina and a member of the 1868 North Carolina constitutional convention,
proposed a series of resolutions early in those constitutional proceedings, declaring the intention to return North Carolina to the federal union but also stating:

… That the white and black races are distinct by nature, and that any and all efforts to abolish or abridge such distinction, and to degrade the white to the level of the black race, are crimes against the civilization of the age and against God. 
… That the Government of the United States and of the Southern States were instituted by white men, and that while the lives, liberty and property of the black race should be protected by just laws, these governments ought to be controlled by white men only.42

White conservatives accompanied this desire for a strict separation of white and black with a hopeful belief that perhaps African Americans would eventually die out without slavery. Newspaper articles in conservative white southern papers would sometimes print projections of population decline, with one South Carolina paper declaring in 1869 that “there are 10,000 more negro deaths than white deaths every year,” thus concluding that “it will take ten years to remove the present majority and make the numbers of the two races equal.”43

In part because of the new political order of Reconstruction, Klansmen and the white conservatives sympathetic to them saw black and white in binary opposition, especially when it came to political power. Though southern politics had long been structured around the oppression of African Americans through slavery, it was only in Reconstruction that a viable biracial political alternative to the slave system existed. White conservatives saw that prospect not as a new political challenge, but as a winner-take-all struggle between two inherently separate races that could not share power. White conservatives admitted that slavery was dead just as they perceived the new political landscape of Reconstruction to be one wherein any piece of political power that black men gained came at the direct expense of white men; any political


rights for African Americans meant total “Negro Domination” over white people. That conviction fueled the violence of the Ku Klux Klan.\textsuperscript{44}

In addition to inaugurating the use of vigilante violence to police racial behavior, the Ku Klux Klan also provided white southerners the ability to excuse the use of or deny the very existence of that violence.\textsuperscript{45} Though proslavery ideology had frequently denied that violence in slavery was as bad as abolitionists made it seem, no white slaveowning southerners claimed that they did not in fact own slaves. But many, perhaps most, Klansmen claimed not to have been Klan members. Their hoods and masks were intended to obscure their identity, both to avoid being prosecuted as well as to suggest that the violence they committed came from a faceless, uniform white population. Furthermore, conservative whites sympathetic to the Klan denied that they participated in—or even approved of—the violence while at the same time reaping its benefits. The ability to excuse the extent and obscure the purposes of vigilantism were essential parts of white conservative public reactions to violence after Reconstruction.

Klansmen themselves as well as those white men sympathetic to it acknowledged that the Klan’s work prefigured Jim Crow. A Mississippi Klansman, in his memoirs, gave

thanks and all praise to the Ku Klux Klan… today, after the lapse of near fifty years, socially the negro is kept aloof, and has long since learned to move in his own sphere. In the South the Ku Klux taught and convinced him that “he is not a bird of our feather.”

\textsuperscript{44} For example, Reverdy Johnson, a defense attorney in the trials of Klansmen in South Carolina, originally from Maryland, defended the actions of his clients by saying that “The black man, it is conceded, is a freeman,” but then said that “In the name of justice and humanity, in the name of those rights for which our fathers fought, you cannot subject the white man to the absolute and uncontrolled dominion of an armed force of a colored race;” Proceedings in the Ku Klux Trials at Columbia, S.C. in the United States Circuit Court, November Term, 1871 (Columbia, S.C.: Republican Printing Company, State Printers, 1872) [subsequently cited as SC Trials], 151.

\textsuperscript{45} Elaine Frantz Parsons has explored how “the persistence of skepticism about the Klan represented the success of a deliberate strategy on the part of perpetrators of Klan violence,” in “Klan Skepticism and Denial in Reconstruction-Era Public Discourse,” The Journal of Southern History Volume LXXVII, No. 1 (February 2011), 60. Her focus, however, was primarily on mainstream American newspaper audiences, not on the benefits reaped by white southern conservative deniers.
Politically, today we have the solid Democratic South. Under our state laws very few negroes are qualified voters; in fact the very fewest number even care to vote. In so doing, they further demonstrated that though Klan violence was far from being the only violence committed during Reconstruction, it especially functioned to craft Jim Crow.

This dissertation’s primary goal, then, is to explore how white conservative men, organized as members of the Ku Klux Klan, used violence to establish a new system of racial oppression to replace slavery. It analyzes the violence committed by the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction in two parts. The first, comprising the first three chapters, is an analysis of the Klan as an organization and the men who joined it. Chapter One charts out the timing and nature of the Klan’s rise, detailing the ways the Klan functioned. It highlights that the Klan was not a diffuse, scattered expression of shared cultural tropes but a coordinated, regional organization of racial violence—one strikingly new in its spread and connections. Chapter Two analyzes the men who joined the Klan, uncovering how the Klan drew from a wide range of white southern men who shared little in terms of demographic features beyond their sex and their whiteness. Chapter Three details fractures and splits that developed in the edifice of the organization of the Klan, partially as a result of the relative diversity of men who had joined the Klan. These chapters together demonstrate that the men who joined the Klan and committed violence did so in the

46 J. E. Robuck, My Own Personal Experience and Observation as a Soldier in the Confederate Army During the Civil War, 1861-1865, Also during the Reconstruction (Memphis, Tennessee: Burke’s Book Store, 1986 [1911]), 126-127.

47 Hannah Rosen has argued that it is essential to analyze both violence as well as how narratives help to shape violence’s meaning, particularly in the construction of hierarchies of race, in Terror in the Heart of Freedom, particularly 8 and 252, note 35.
service of an ideological project. Not driven by exclusively materialist causes, and not sharing many demographic similarities beyond their gender and race, the white men who joined the Klan wanted to create a new racial hierarchy and joined a clandestine, regional organization committed to violence to do so.

The newness of that postemancipation racial hierarchy, and the ways it suggested the later structure of Jim Crow, can be seen in the outlines of the specific forms of violence Klansmen committed. The second part of this dissertation analyzes the various spheres in which Klan violence operated, demonstrating the multiple intentions with which Klansmen were committing violence. Chapter Four explores the realm of electoral politics. Whereas during slavery African Americans were explicitly denied any rights of citizenship, in Reconstruction black men could vote, testify in court, serve on juries, and hold political office. In response, Klansmen attacked a range of people from everyday voters to Republican politicians in the attempt to create what they called “a white man’s government.” Chapter Five analyzes the local politics of community organizations, economics, and the legal system to show how any assertions of black freedom were perceived by white conservatives as a total campaign of “Negro Domination.” Black contract labor, education, and fair trials were all relatively unknown in the antebellum South, and Klan violence against local black activism was new—as was the narrative campaign by white conservatives to define such assertions of freedom as innately criminal. Finally, Chapter Six analyzes the politics of southern households, showing that Klansmen were working to redefine gender roles no less than race after the abolition of slavery. Klansmen raped black women, as slave owners had before emancipation. But Klansmen also would sexually mutilate white women who would sleep with black men. Klansmen were working to establish a new form of white male control of southern households after emancipation by crafting a new
kind of white masculinity through the organization of the Klan. And white conservative southern women, though they did not themselves join the Klan or commit violence, worked to support the work of Klansmen in building a new form of white patriarchal masculine power.

Together these two halves show how Klansmen were conscious in their choices to participate in Klan violence and did so with a complex variety of goals. The result of that violence was not only a terrorized, destabilized South, but the outline of a new structure of racial oppression. Though they did not create segregation, Klansmen helped to reshape what became known as white supremacy during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Though they were to a large extent successful in undermining Republican power and changing how race was perceived to function, a sustained investigation into the Klan resulted in it being disbanded throughout the South, as the conclusion details.

Throughout this dissertation is an analysis of the activism of African Americans, who seized the opportunity of Reconstruction to rebuild their families and shape the course of the politics of Reconstruction. With new citizenship rights as well as an economy remade after the abolition of slavery, black southerners asserted a new autonomy and independence. Some scholars have posited that the Klan arose as a reaction to this political and social activism by African Americans. The argument that the Klan was purely reactionary is interesting but ultimately insufficient. Klansmen were using violence not merely to put down black assertions of autonomy, but to define something new, as evidenced by the widespread violence used against white southerners who also violated Klansmen’s standards of behavior. Telling this story necessitates telling the story of how African Americans tried to assert new citizenship rights after

48 Most notably, Steven Hahn argued that the Klan arose directly as a response to the Union League, in A Nation Under Our Feet, 266.
emancipation, and thus this dissertation is at its heart also an account of the actions of African Americans to build a more equal South.

This dissertation is not a chronological account of the rise and fall of the Klan, nor does it strive to depict a complete accounting of every known incident of violence. Though it contains significant quantitative research, this study primarily focuses upon certain episodes of violence to highlight the various components of the ideological work being done by Klansmen during Reconstruction.

Because broad questions about race require close focus, this dissertation uses the particular case studies of violence within North and South Carolina. North and South Carolina are idea subjects for such a study because of their geographic proximity, their political differences, and the plethora of sources that Klan activity in the two states generated. Though they are contiguous, the two states were politically and demographically distinct. South Carolina, long a bastion of radical conservatism, had been the first to secede in 1860 while North Carolina, which prided itself on having a moderate political culture, was the last state to join the Confederacy. North Carolina had a far larger population of middling white farmers, while South Carolina had a larger and more politically powerful gentry as well as a significantly larger black population. But the course of Klan violence, and the demographics of Klan membership, differed little between the two states. Both states are considered in consort throughout this dissertation, because at its center, Klan violence is best understood through its political and ideological roots. Furthermore, though the Klan was active in numerous states, including its birthplace of Tennessee, the United States Congress and the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant decided to send federal troops especially into the Carolinas to arrest Klansmen and stop the
organization. That investigation and the resulting arrests generated numerous trial transcripts and arrest records from which my dissertation draws heavily.

A central tension in this dissertation is that it argues that Klansmen were trying to build a new hierarchy of race even though Klansmen themselves did not precisely articulate such a goal in individual instances like the attack on Essic Harris. It was never recorded exactly why Harris was attacked a second time. Perhaps Klansmen knew that he had purchased another gun after they had taken his first. Klansmen’s larger political project has to be pieced together and uncovered in a variety of ways.

In the pages that follow are many voices of Klansmen as well as many of their actions. Together they suggest how Klan violence was more than the sum of its parts. Not just attacks on individuals, Klan violence was a coordinated campaign to restructure southern society and rework notions of how race ought to function. Faced with the destruction of the old racial regime after the abolition of slavery, some white southerners responded not with an acceptance of a more equitable and democratic world, but by restructuring society around a new racial hierarchy, using vigilante violence to outline its boundaries. The members of the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction were the vanguard of a new racial order, one that over time became codified and clarified into what was known as Jim Crow.
CHAPTER ONE: “A PERFECT MILITARY ORGANIZATION”: THE RISE, SPREAD, AND METHODS OF THE KU KLUX KLAN

On June 14, 1871, David T. Corbin settled into his chair to testify in front of the Joint Select Committee. Congress had established the committee of senators and house members, Democrats and Republicans, in order to formally investigate the violence tearing apart the South. Violence against African Americans and white Republicans was seeming to get worse, despite previous investigative efforts by the U.S. Army, the Senate, and many southern governors. The committee invited a wide slate of witnesses to Washington, D.C.: conservative politicians, suspected members of the Ku Klux Klan, Republican politicians and officials fighting it, even victims of Klan attacks. Some witnesses gave contradictory accounts. It was clear that many in the South lived in terror for their lives, but stories differed wildly as to the supposed purpose of the violence, the best ways to stop it, and even the victims most at risk.

Born in New York and raised in Vermont, Corbin had moved with his family to Charleston, South Carolina after the Civil War. He served as the U.S. District Attorney for South Carolina, and with his wife had befriended prominent local white Republicans. Tragedy had struck the family in 1870 when Corbin’s son died, but Corbin continued in his work, trying to secure prosecutions of men who violated revenue laws and committed acts of racial terror.49 His position in Charleston had familiarized him with both how the Klan engaged in violence and

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49 Biographical information from David T. Corbin to Attorney General A. T. Ackerman, June 26, 1871, Microfilm Publication M947, Letters Received by the Department of Justice, From South Carolina, 1871-1884, Roll 1, RG 60, NARA, and William Stone to Erastus W. Everson, March 4, 1870, Erastus W. Everson Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, S.C [subsequently cited as SCHS].
what had been effective—or in most cases, ineffective—in combating it. Corbin did not have good news for the committee. Most members of the secret organization had evaded prosecution despite his best efforts. When asked to describe how effectively the law could be enforced, Corbin declared that “most perfect organization exists in Chester, Union, and York Counties for the purpose, as they say, of cleaning out the carpet-baggers and negroes holding office.” Asked if he had meant “relatively or positively,” Corbin reiterated “A perfect military organization.”

Corbin was a strong critic of the Klan, but some Klan defenders went even further, exaggerating the Klan’s spread in order to make it appear as powerful as possible. In April 1868, near the beginning of the Klan’s expansion into the Carolinas, the New York Herald published a letter to the editor, reprinted in South Carolina, that claimed the Klan had spread into the former border states and even New York. “There is not a department of the Federal Government, of the army or navy, that has not a potent membership,” the writer said, crowing that “the Ku-Klux-Klan is neither sectional nor partisan, but eminently Conservative and national in its organization and purposes.”

But interestingly, many conservative apologists took a different approach. One South Carolina conservative claimed that “I have never believed that there was an organized system of Ku-Klux; I believe that they are simply local in their action.” Most white conservatives similarly claimed that Klan violence was committed by “rabble” or “bushwhackers,” uncoordinated in their movements and unsophisticated in their goals.

Though the claims of the letter writer to the New York Herald were pure fabrications, the truth lay closer to David T. Corbin’s assessment than the other conservative deniers. The Ku Klux Klan was a regional organization with connections between local groups, though it

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50 Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 74.


52 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 97.
operated in a very localized manner and sometimes had schisms. The debates about Klan violence spilled out of the congressional hearings into popular understandings of the Klan and also into the early histories of Reconstruction. In fact, historians continue to disagree on the extent to which the Ku Klux Klan was a constellation of localized groups of white southern men committing violence entirely on their own terms or an organized campaign against Republican political control.

Scholars who have made the assertion that white conservative southerners worked in concert to reverse Reconstruction have often lacked compelling evidence of those connections. W.E.B. Du Bois, in his foundational work *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, called the efforts to reverse Reconstruction a “counter-revolution of property.” “Industrial freebooters and bandits,” Du Bois wrote, “now as lone and picturesque masked highwayman, now hunting in packs and mercenary armies, gripped and guided the efforts of a vast nation to get rich after the indiscriminate murder and destruction of four years’ war.” But Du Bois lacked conclusive evidence of coordination between those counter-revolutionaries. Like Du Bois, most later historians who have seen the violence of white conservative southerners as linked have often had to resort to generalizations about the seeming coincidences of Klan violence.

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54 He argued, incisively, that the biracial efforts of Republicans in the South “failed because the military dictatorship behind labor did not function successfully in the face of the Ku Klux Klan and especially because the appeal of property in the South got the ear of property in the North,” Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 581.

55 George Rable, many years later, in analyzing violence’s role in the reversal of Reconstruction, also called the efforts of white conservatives a “counterrevolution,” but one that manifested itself more in individual attacks against African Americans in different times and in different places than a coordinated, concerted effort. Arguing that the actions of the Klan were to some extent “inevitable” given a shared white southern desire for political and economic hegemony, Rable concluded that “The nature and scope of the violence varied with the political climate of each state or locality,” in *But There Was No Peace*, 95, 86.
Consequently, scholarly consensus has coalesced around the interpretation that the Klan arose organically without coordinated effort.\textsuperscript{56} Hannah Rosen, in her invaluable study of Reconstruction violence across the South, summed up most scholars’ understanding of the regional structure of the Ku Klux Klan by arguing that despite similarities between forms of violence that vigilantes throughout the South committed, “they rarely, if ever, communicated directly.”\textsuperscript{57} This interpretation of the Klan as overwhelmingly local and unconnected misses numerous important aspects of the Ku Klux Klan’s rise, spread, and activities. Previous scholars are correct that to be called a “Ku Klux” during Reconstruction, all white conservative southerners needed to do was don robe and hood. There were accounts of groups that called themselves or were called by outsider observers “Ku Klux” with few ties to other groups, let alone coordination from a regional umbrella organization.

David T. Corbin’s articulation was to some extent an overstatement, as the organization had operated in a localized manner, had a relatively diverse white male membership, and sometimes had fractures and schisms. But, importantly, the Klan had roots in military culture, was spread through an orchestrated campaign by elite white southerners, and shared numerous tactics and trappings across state lines. This chapter explores the Klan’s expansion, commitment to secrecy, patterns of violence, and antecedent or contemporary organizations that influenced or

\textsuperscript{56} Allen Trelease, in what is still the definitional account of the Reconstruction Klan, described the spread and organization of the Klan as a balance between locally organized, informal, and ad hoc Klan dens and others “operating from the top downward,” with former elite Confederate officers conferring personally to “undertake the formation of county and local units in their jurisdictions,” in \textit{White Terror}, 50-51. Yet Trelease emphasizes the fragments and fissures of the Klan’s scattered organization rather than its regional coordination. Eric Foner has argued that “One should not think of the Klan, even in its heyday, as possessing a well-organized structure or clearly defined regional leadership,” in \textit{Reconstruction}, 425.

\textsuperscript{57} Rosen, \textit{Terror in the Heart of Freedom}, 182. Rene Hayden, in “The Root of Wrath,” further stressed the localism of the Klan, arguing that “the Klan was locally derived and locally constituted,” 5. Elaine Parsons has written that rather than spreading through the conscious “organizational efforts of Tennessee elites who saw the Klan’s potential as a political force by 1867, it was the Klan’s successful appropriation of free-floating popular cultural tropes that made [its] rapid proliferation possible.” Parsons argued that white southern men “were identifying themselves as Klansmen,” rather than joining because of an active, coordinated expansion. See “Midnight Rangers,” 815.
paralleled the Klan in order to analyze the forms and functions of the Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan. The Klan was significantly more organized and coordinated in its rise and spread than has been argued either by some conservative apologists or many later historians. Rather than an amorphous and unthinking constellation of white southern conservatives, Reconstruction was fought by a coordinated, clandestine counterinsurgency that spanned several southern states.

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The American Civil War ended in 1865, crushing the hopes of conservative white southerners to establish an independent nation based upon slavery. But for many southerners, white and black, the time after the Civil War held great promise. President Andrew Johnson, who took office after Abraham Lincoln’s assassination, was a Tennessee Unionist who had blamed the southern slaveholding aristocracy for the slaughter of the war. The Republican Party, a coalition of former abolitionists, white northern capitalists, white northern middle-class farmers, and Union veterans, controlled the reins of national political power and grew in organization in the South. But Johnson never favored the interests of African Americans and had little taste for policies that might give political power and economic relief to black southerners. He quickly pardoned many former Confederates and opposed the policies of both the Republican-controlled Congress and the members of his cabinet whom Lincoln had appointed. Southern state legislatures were still dominated by former Confederates, and Johnson’s lenient Reconstruction policy returned southern states to the Congress with delegations dominated by conservatives.58

Struggles at both the state and national level escalated. White Democrats opposed to black political participation sought to limit black freedom at state and local levels by passing a

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host of laws known as Black Codes that criminalized black autonomy. Many white conservatives responded to black independence with isolated acts of individual violence as well as large race riots in several cities, most infamously in Memphis and New Orleans. National Republicans responded to the local violence, conservative political control of southern states, and Johnson’s intransigence by enfranchising black men and passing civil rights legislation over Johnson’s vetoes, thereby strengthening Republican power in the South. In 1867, what had been known as Presidential Reconstruction became Congressional Reconstruction. White conservatives across the South began to mount a sustained campaign against Republican efforts to secure political racial equality. In addition to race riots and spontaneous attacks by individual white southerners against African Americans, white conservatives formed paramilitary organizations and began committing organized violence. Of these groups, the Ku Klux Klan quickly emerged as the most prominent and notorious.59

The story of the Klan’s founding is generally well known. In 1866, a handful of young white men, the sons of prominent white elites, met in a law office in Pulaski, Tennessee and formed their own imitation of antebellum university fraternities. The name came from the Greek word “kyklos,” meaning circle. The group was mostly intended for bonding with friends and playing pranks, and members wore strange and humorous costumes.60 Members soon developed their own rituals, rules, and secret passwords. But the political conflict of early Reconstruction in Tennessee helped to morph the organization, and its members increasingly began terrorizing

59 On racial violence during Reconstruction not necessarily committed by the Klan, see Rable, But There Was No Peace; Richard Zuczek, State of Rebellion: Reconstruction in South Carolina (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996); Gilles Vandal, Rethinking Southern Violence: Homicides in Post-Civil War Louisiana, 1866-1884 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000); and Rosen, Terror in the Heart of Freedom.

60 Nearly every account of the first days of the Klan in Pulaski describe it as a group of young men playing harmless pranks and games of dress up; see for example W. T. Richardson, Historic Pulaski, Birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan, Scene of the Execution of Sam Davis (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1913), & Mr. & Mrs. W. B. Romine, A Story of the Original Ku Klux Klan (Pulaski, Tenn.: The Pulaski Citizen, 1934).
African Americans. One early history of the Klan claimed the change “came about by accident,” but more likely the secrecy of the order aided its transition to an organization of racial and political terror aimed at unseating Republican political power.61 It soon spread across Tennessee and into neighboring states. In 1867 a Klan “convention” was held with delegates from other southern states, and members established a command structure. It around this time that the name “Invisible Empire” might have been adopted to describe the area in which it was active.62

Some vigilante violence against African Americans predated the Ku Klux Klan, arising during the Civil War with Confederate and guerilla raids against freed slaves. Widespread violence continued after the war’s end, ranging from personal conflicts to attacks perpetrated by loosely organized groups of white “bush-whackers” or “night-riders” that prefigured the Klan. In 1866 the Freedmen’s Bureau compiled a report of violence white southerners perpetrated upon African Americans, forwarding it to the Department of Justice. Between 1865 and 1866, the report recorded seventeen African Americans murdered and eighty-one whipped, beaten, or shot in North Carolina, and forty-two African Americans murdered and thirty-three whipped, beaten, or shot in South Carolina.63 Klan apologists would frequently cite the existence of violence like this that predated the Klan in order to suggest that there was nothing particularly new about Klan violence.64 But the Klan’s very structure and organization made its violence different than the attacks of bushwhackers or assaults and murders by individual white southerners.

61 Romine, A Story of the Original Ku Klux Klan, 9-10.

62 Richardson, Historic Pulaski, 38. Though the name was widely used in the western portions of North and South Carolina, there is little evidence of its use in the eastern portions of North Carolina.

63 “List of Murders Perpetrated by Whites upon Freedmen, since April 1 ‘66 in the Southern States. As reported by Officers and Agents of the Freedmen’s Bureau,” Entry #A1 9: Letters Received, 1809-1870, Container #28, “1/1869-8/1869 War Department THRU War Department,” Folder “Jan-Mar 1869,” RG 60, NARA.

64 See, for example, testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 94.
Klan dens arose through a combination of an orchestrated regional campaign and also occasionally organically in local places. Klan groups were known as “dens” or “camps,” and there were multiple dens within each county. They were often centered around small towns or outposts and sometimes named for those landmarks. Sometimes dens operated independently from others within their same county. Occasional conflicts erupted between and among Klan groups, and when federal forces began investigating and arresting Klansmen in the fall of 1871 those schisms were magnified. But the very fact that multiple dens operated within a county reflected a diffuse but not unconnected network.65

Its arrival in various counties in the Carolinas varied. Charting out that precise chronology is made more difficult because of the paucity of hard evidence about its spread and organization. Much of that which survives about its expansion came from reports by outside observers, which were filled with as much rumor and supposition as hard evidence. But piecing these accounts together reveals the outline of an orchestrated campaign, especially as no member of the Klan claimed that their den was formed locally without ties to other Klan groups. Instead each story of a group’s founding involved an outsider helping to form and organize one.

A report compiled from a U.S. Senate investigation into the Klan in North Carolina in early 1871 reported that it arrived in the fall of 1867 in Stokes County in the upper piedmont along the Virginia border, brought by “tobacco traders and distillers,” and “that the whipping of negroes, and threats of violence to prominent men, because of their political opinions, soon after commenced.”66 Indeed Stokes County might have had many victims of Klan violence, but little

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65 See for example, testimony of J. B. Carpenter, KKK NC, 25 Another North Carolina Republican testified that in Rutherford County, in the west of the state, the Broad River divided Klan groups, and one den “had nothing to do with anything over that [other] side of the river that I have heard of;” testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 157.

of it was subsequently documented by federal investigations, and the majority of known Klan activity was concentrated elsewhere in the state.

The first violence that can conclusively be attributed to groups with ties to the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina arose in the eastern coastal counties of Jones and Lenoir, around the towns of Kinston and New Bern, in January 1869. There it was called the Constitutional Union Guard, but was described both by outside observers and often its own members as part of the Ku Klux Klan. As with other instances of Klan violence, specific attacks in eastern North Carolina were committed because of particular local circumstances—such as a jail raid to kill black prisoners suspected of barn burning, raids to free their comrades who had been arrested, and the assassination of a local sheriff.67

Within North Carolina Klan violence next erupted in the central piedmont counties of Caswell, Orange, Chatham, and Alamance, also in early 1869. It escalated until the fall, when Governor William Woods Holden declared those counties (along with Jones and Lenoir) to be in a state of insurrection, suspended the writ of habeas corpus, and dispatched state militia troops to suppress the Klan. Holden’s effort led to a conservative backlash that resulted in his impeachment and removal from office in March 1871. But the violence continued, spreading westward into 1870 and the spring of 1871, where it arose in the western piedmont counties of Lincoln, Cleveland, and Rutherford. A white Republican testified to the Joint Select Committee that “it had had the same complexion everywhere, from the sea-coast, where it had begun, or in that direction, up gradually as it moved west,” so that “when it came into Rutherford it was no new thing to us; it was new to us as individuals, but the thing itself was not new to us.”68


68 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 161.
But alongside the story of the spontaneous westward growth of Klan violence in North Carolina—from coastal plain to piedmont to mountains—is evidence that the organization spread itself in a different pattern. In Jones and Lenoir counties, the Constitutional Union Guard was aided in its formation by outside organizers. One resident of Lenoir County testified that a man named Ruth Temple came to Lenoir County from Raleigh in early 1869 to organize the group there.\(^69\) In the central piedmont, in October 1868, Johnston Jones, a resident of Hillsboro, wrote a ciphered letter to his brother Iredell in South Carolina asking for a copy of a Klan “constitution” to help establish a Klan den in Orange County, North Carolina. That letter used a ciphered alphabet, which it called the “K.K. alphabet,” which was also used by the original Klan in Pulaski, Tennessee. The letter strongly suggests that the organization was brought to the Carolinas from Tennessee and operated across southern state lines.\(^70\)

In South Carolina violence had arisen earlier. It was mostly concentrated in the upcountry counties of York, Union, Chester, Laurens, and Spartanburg, though some also arose in scattered places like Sumter County, a black-majority county on the edge of the lowcountry, or Abbeville and Edgefield on the western border of the state. Newspapers began printing stories of the Klan’s arrival in South Carolina in late spring of 1868, and most whites probably heard of its activities outside of the state before they were approached to join (or sought out their own membership).\(^71\) Violence escalated in 1868 around the fall election, including the assassinations of three state legislators, and then arose again in earnest in winter and spring of 1871—though there were scattered attacks between the two periods of the most intense violence. That pattern led some

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\(^69\) Testimony of George Tillon, NC Report, ci.

\(^70\) Ciphered letter, October 23, 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL. For evidence that the cipher comes from the Pulaski Klan, see Richardson, Historic Pulaski, 81, 97.

\(^71\) For example, “The KuKlux—What Is It?,” Yorkville Enquirer, April 9, 1868.
contemporary observers to suggest that the organization grew gradually, arising sporadically from local causes until a widespread campaign in 1871 caused dens to act in coordination.\textsuperscript{72} But as with its spread in North Carolina, outside organizers introduced the Klan to the South Carolina upcountry from the outset, and its later campaign of coordinated violence likely was influenced by those earlier connections.

Klan groups relied heavily upon interpersonal connections to aid in the spread and organization of new dens. Allen Trelease has documented a connection between personal visits by former Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest and the formation of Klan dens in Atlanta and Columbus, Georgia in March 1868, suggesting his strong personal role in the spread of the Klan to that state.\textsuperscript{73} There is no evidence of Forrest organizing the Klan in the Carolinas, but it seems clear that the Klan spread to South Carolina from Tennessee in the spring or summer of 1868. R.J. Brunson, a Klansman from Tennessee, recounted in an early Klan history that

In July, 1868, I was going on a visit to South Carolina and Gen. George W. Gordon requested me to take some of our rituals and organize the K. K. K. in South Carolina, which I did. From the original head den here at Pulaski, I was the sole organizer or starter of the K. K. K. in South Carolina. I stayed in South Carolina about three months, and several dens were organized during the three months that I was there.\textsuperscript{74}

Brunson had joined a Klan den in Pulaski in July 1867, and served as secretary for “the fourth den of the original K.K.K. that was organized.”\textsuperscript{75} Confederate General George W. Gordon was a central figure in the Tennessee Klan, and likely would have had the authority to order its spread to other states. One Mississippi Klansman wrote in his memoir that Gordon helped write the first series of oaths the Klan used during an 1866 meeting in Nashville. Those included pledging to

\textsuperscript{72} See, for example, testimony of D. H. Chamberlain, \textit{KKK SC}, 50.

\textsuperscript{73} Trelease, \textit{White Terror}, 50.

\textsuperscript{74} Richardson, \textit{Historic Pulaski}, 7-8.

\textsuperscript{75} Richardson, \textit{Historic Pulaski}, 7.
support the Klan, denying that members were ever a member of the Republican Party, the Loyal League, or the Grand Army of the Republic, opposing “negro equality, both social and political,” and favoring “a white man’s government in this country.”\textsuperscript{76} Another early history of the Klan also claimed that there was one “messenger who took the organization to South Carolina.”\textsuperscript{77}

Thus scattered but compelling evidence indicates that the Klan spread to the Carolinas from a coordinated regional campaign to establish local groups, perhaps centered in Tennessee, rather than from purely indigenous local organizing.

On June 28, 1868, the “Head Quarters 6\textsuperscript{th} Division” of the Chester Conservative Clan—C.C.C. instead of K.K.K.—sent Iredell Jones, a conservative in Rock Hill, South Carolina, a series of orders and oaths by which “to organize a Division in the vicinity of Rock Hill, to be known as Division No 13.” The June orders sent to Jones included an oath every member took swearing secrecy, fealty to elected officers of the order, and to

\begin{quote}
  do all in our power to counteract the evil influences exerted by a certain secret Radical organization known as the Union League. We do furthermore swear that we will Protect and Defend any member of this organization should his life or property be endangered by the Union League, or any other Radical organization.
\end{quote}

The directive was signed by J. K. Chambers, the declared “Chief 6\textsuperscript{th} Div CCC.” Ten local white men signed their names as the first members of the Rock Hill Division. Chief among the signers were Iredell and two of his brothers. Apparently, like the Constitutional Union Guard of eastern North Carolina, the C.C.C. was large enough to span several counties, as Rock Hill was not in Chester County, but instead in the neighboring county of York and used the name Ku Klux

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\textsuperscript{76} Robuck, \textit{My Own Personal Experience}, 120.
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\textsuperscript{77} Romine, \textit{A Story of the Original Ku Klux Klan}, 11.
\end{flushright}
interchangeably with its own.\textsuperscript{78} Five of the ten signatories had been delegates to a county-wide meeting of the Democratic Party in March 1868.\textsuperscript{79}

Iredell Jones was also the recipient of a ciphered letter that October from his brother Johnston that used the code from the original Klan in Pulaski and asked for help organizing a Klan in Hillsboro, North Carolina.\textsuperscript{80} That month further orders from the C.C.C.’s “Head Quarters” were sent to Iredell, this time by the “Grand Cyclops,” who only signed his initials “J.W.A.” These included directives to keep each Klan “cautious discreet and moderate and to act strictly on the defensive.” In keeping with the organization’s oaths to watch over Republican groups, the second order was “All meetings or purposed meetings by niggers and Radicals with all the information that can be obtained concerning them, their object, place of meeting, & c.”\textsuperscript{81} J.W.A. was almost certainly former Confederate Major J. W. Avery, who was known as the County Chief.\textsuperscript{82} He was later indicted for murder and conspiracy in the federal trials of Klansmen held in Columbia in December 1871.\textsuperscript{83} Several witnesses in those trials testified that Avery wanted to see members lay the “ground work” for the organization in the summer of 1868, and that he was elected the “Chief of the County.”\textsuperscript{84}

Other historians have discounted the stories of regional coordination for the formation of the Klan in the South Carolina upcountry as fragmentary, anecdotal, or exceptions to the general

\textsuperscript{78} Oath of the Chester Conservative Clan, June 28, 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.
\textsuperscript{79} “Rock Hill Responds,” Yorkville Enquirer, March 26, 1868.
\textsuperscript{80} Ciphered letter, October 23, 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.
\textsuperscript{81} General Orders of the Chester Conservative Clan, October 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.
\textsuperscript{83} See SC Trials, especially 144, 187, 250.
\textsuperscript{84} SC Trials, 377-378.
rule. Jerry L. West, in a local study of the Reconstruction Klan in York County, described a story from local oral tradition that one white conservative, “Dr. Charles Clawson purportedly brought the Klan to York County.” According to his descendents “Clawson heard about the group, went to Tennessee to learn about it, and organized the first area Klan upon his return.” West also referenced the Chester Conservative Clan orders, but asserted that in the end “it is unlikely the initial York County group was tied with the larger organization headquartered in Tennessee.” Perhaps these fragments argue against each other; the varying stories might point to no single origin of the Klan within the South Carolina upcountry. But the surviving evidence consistently—and perhaps definitively—shows the Klan coming to the South Carolina upcountry in the summer of 1868 from Tennessee, and perhaps spreading from there to North Carolina.

Klan groups not only coordinated with one another, but also had strong internal coordination. Klan dens had strict ranks, with a “chief” usually in charge. Most groups had a “scribe,” and sentries or guards were called “night-hawks.” The ranks usually had spectral or mythological roots, with the leader of multiple dens sometimes called a “Cyclops” or “Mogul.” Those ranks could be amended with “Great” or “Grand,” signifying a higher rank for those in charge of several dens across a county. Information was to be passed up the chain of command to local leaders and eventually regional leaders, especially in regards to Republican activities. Members of the Chester Conservative Clan were ordered that “all information of any circumstance that by any probability might be of interest to this Klan will be promptly forwarded

85 While citing both the Chester Conservative Clan orders in the Iredell Jones Papers and R. J. Brunson’s account in Historic Pulaski in describing how the Klan came to South Carolina, Allen Trelease ultimately concluded that “[m]ost of this activity [in the South Carolina upcountry] was locally inspired,” in White Terror, 72.

86 West, The Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan in York County, 38.

87 John Thomas Gaston was titled “Grand Mogul;” undated anonymous biographical sketch, John Thomas Gaston Papers, SCL. Hugh M. Farley was the Cyclops of Laurens, South Carolina; scrapbook, Erastus W. Everson Papers, SCHS.
to these Hd Qrs.” Groups in North Carolina had similar orders; a member of the Constitutional Union Guard in eastern North Carolina reported that at one meeting “It was understood at… that every member was bound to report to Kenady the name of every radical and negro who said anything about the order. If any member failed to do this he was to be punished.”

Outside observers knew that there was an organizational hierarchy to the Ku Klux Klan in the Carolinas, but were sometimes mistaken about its specifics. North Carolina Governor William Woods Holden wrote to the president in July 1870 reporting that he “Believed, from evidence, that Ex-President Johnson is at the head of the order, and General Forrest engaged with it, &c.” Holden was largely right about Forrest’s role, but wrong about Andrew Johnson. Nathan Bedford Forrest was known to be in charge of the Klan throughout the South, but whether he, or another man, commanded every southern state is unknown. William L. Saunders and Ham C. Jones were separately accused of being the chiefs of the state of North Carolina. Though there was a coordinated Klan structure, the precise command hierarchy of the Klan remains unclear—and could have been to Klansmen at the time.

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Klan dens shared many similar features in addition to clandestine communication and hierarchical structures. One early sympathetic historian wrote that as it spread beyond Pulaski,

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88 General Orders of the Chester Conservative Clan, October 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.

89 Confession of Thomas F. Williford, NC Report, lx.

90 NC Report, xlv.

91 For Saunders, see his testimony, KKK NC, 354-361, wherein he declined to say anything about his involvement in the Klan “on the grounds that I am not obliged to testify in a case wherein I may criminate myself,” on 354. The evidence is fairly conclusive that Saunders was head of the Klan, given the number of later sources that have named him as such. For Jones, see testimony of J. B. Eaves, KKK NC, 174-175. J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton listed Jones as the chief of Mecklenburg County in Reconstruction in North Carolina (New York: Columbia University, 1914), 462.
Tennessee, “The essential features of mystery, secrecy, and grotesqueness were retained.”\(^\text{92}\) Some of these were mostly functional, ways to keep meetings and plans secret, while others clearly exceeded any functional purpose. Alongside a commitment to violence, the Klan shared things that set them apart from groups that were either previous to or contemporary with it.

One of the Klan’s unique features was that all Klan groups had a set of written orders or by-laws by which they were run and to which members swore fealty. Some were referred to as a “prescript.” One titled a “constitution” was included in the final report of the Joint Select Committee that led the congressional investigation into the Klan in the summer of 1871.\(^\text{93}\) Those that have survived all shared essential features. Most began with an acknowledgement of the divinity of the Christian god, “the Immaculate Judge of Heaven and Earth” according to one oath used both in York County, South Carolina and Lincoln County, North Carolina, or “the Divine Being” in the case of the prescript of the original Klan in Pulaski.\(^\text{94}\)

All detailed a hierarchical organization, with a well-established structure with various ranks and roles for members. Members would swear to obey the orders of their superiors or the “Prescript and Edicts,” which in the case of the “prescript” from the original Klan in Pulaski, Tennessee ran some fifteen pages and included twelve articles. Members of the Chester Conservative Clan swore that they would “render true and faithful obedience to the constituted authorities of this organization and to the best of our abilities carry out and perform all orders emanating from said authorities.”\(^\text{95}\) In a later set of orders from their headquarters, members were

\(^{92}\) Richardson, \textit{Historic Pulaski}, 43.

\(^{93}\) KKK, 25; also appended to testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 399.

\(^{94}\) Richardson, \textit{Historic Pulaski}, 81-95. That prescript is included in this analysis because, though it did not originate in the Carolinas, it appears that it might have been used there, especially because the “cipher” used in the letter between Johnston and Iredell Jones came from the original Pulaski prescript.

\(^{95}\) Oath of the Chester Conservative Clan, June 28, 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.
reminded that “No Klan or members of this organization (unless in very urgent cases not admitting of delay) will undertake to redress grievances of a general character or act in any many calculated to produce a breach of the peace without orders from these Hd Qrs.”

Another of the Klan’s defining features was a shared commitment to absolute secrecy. All known oaths or constitutions of Klan groups included a pledge to secrecy, and the one used in both York County, South Carolina and Lincoln County, North Carolina included a promise of death to members who would break the oath of secrecy. Both the Pulaski prescript and the orders of the C.C.C. from South Carolina ended their oaths with “So help me God.”

Klan oaths also asserted that the organization was essentially legal. When Chester Conservative Clan members swore to obey all the orders from their superiors, they amended it with the disclaimer “provided said orders do not require of us such action as will render us amenable to the Laws of the land.” The original orders from Pulaski, Tennessee asserted “We recognize our relations to the United States Government, and acknowledge the supremacy of its laws.” But in their articulation of their essential lawfulness, Klan groups also demonstrated their political opposition to Reconstruction. The first tenet of the oath used in Lincoln County, North Carolina asserted that “I am on the side of justice and humanity and constitutional liberty, as bequeathed to us by our forefathers in its original purity,” intimating that Klansmen believed the Reconstruction Amendments that expanded citizenship to African Americans were

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96 General Orders of the Chester Conservative Clan, October 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SLC.
97 KKK 25; also appended to testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 399. For the Constitutional Union Guard swearing secrecy, see testimony of George W. Tillon, NC Report, ci.
98 Richardson, Historic Pulaski, 92; oath of the Chester Conservative Clan, June 28, 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.
99 Oath of the Chester Conservative Clan, June 28, 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.
100 Richardson, Historic Pulaski, 82.
illegitimate and impure.\textsuperscript{101} The Chester Conservative Clan was even more politically assertive, swearing that “we will do all in our power to counteract the evil influences exerted by a certain secret Radical organization known as the Union League.”\textsuperscript{102} And before members of the Constitutional Union Guard in eastern North Carolina were allowed to take the oath, they had to promise “to labor faithfully for the overthrow of the [Republican] party.” They would even swear “to resist by force of arms, if necessary, any aggression upon our legal rights.”\textsuperscript{103} Another member later testified that he could “not recollect all the by-laws, but was under the impression that the order was committed to the overthrow of the radical party, and to hostility to the colored people, and that any means whatever were to be used to effect the object of the order.”\textsuperscript{104}

Recruits would be blindfolded and swear these oaths when initiated by a current member.\textsuperscript{105} Multiple initiates could be sworn in at once. When Klansmen in Sampson County, North Carolina, swore to join the Klan, they placed one hand on a Bible and the other on what was said to be a human skull in order to guarantee their allegiance and secrecy.\textsuperscript{106} Some Klan dens even required membership dues at the time of initiation, including one dollar per person for the original Klan in Pulaski.\textsuperscript{107}

Initiations were often part of normal meetings, which were sometimes called by a whistle. One North Carolina Klansman recalled that the night he was initiated, he had been out hunting with friends. Klansmen “came for me and we went up to a hill, and Mr. McIntire had a
blowing concern—I didn’t know what it was—some kind of a whistle; and he blowed it, and some person answered him.”

He was then sworn into the order. A Confederate veteran from South Carolina testified that ten Klansmen tried to initiate him when he was “Going home one night from church, between 10 and 11 o’clock, I saw them encamped on one side of a by-road running through a plantation. They met there, and as they saw anybody riding by they would whistle.” He did not join, remarking “Not for Joe,” and telling them “I do not propose to get out of my bed on cold nights and go around for any such fun.” The Klan later raided him because he traded unginned cotton with African Americans.

Meetings were sometimes held in secluded fields, but more often were held at the homes or out-buildings and barns owned by members. Occasionally a store or shop was used. In Sampson County, North Carolina, members sometimes met at a schoolhouse. Though raids were nearly always conducted at night, meetings were often held during the daytime.

Klansmen used passwords and secret handshakes to keep the meetings secret. One Klansman from Lincoln County, North Carolina swore in a deposition to federal authorities that members would demonstrate their participation by “stroking the side of the head above the right ear with the ends of the fingers of the right hand, which was answered in like manner with the left.” He continued, “If I met a person and wished to ascertain whether he belonged to the order I would say I, S, A, Y.; the answer to this was N, O, T, H, I, N, G.” Meetings were guarded by “night-hawks,” who demanded other passwords and countersigns. Another Klansmen from Yorkville,

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108 Trial testimony of Jason H. Wethrow, KKK NC, 446.
110 Depositions of Wiley C. West & Simon Williford, J. S. M. Evans to A.T. Ackerman, November 24, 1871, M1345, RG 60, NARA.
111 See, for example, testimony of George W. Tillon, NC Report, ci.
112 Deposition of T. A. Hope, read into testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 399.
South Carolina, testified that “The sign of recognition was three strokes with the left hand against the ear,” which was to be responded with by putting the right hand on or in the right pocket. Both of these Klansmen—one from North Carolina, the other from South Carolina—told that the secret handshake was to interlace the little fingers and press the forefinger to the wrist or forearm while shaking another member’s hand.113

In a biographical sketch by a Federal Writers Project author about a South Carolina doctor from Chester County, J. W. Babcock, the author told the story of Babcock’s being taught a secret handshake by local Klansmen when he was fourteen in 1870. Told by a Klan leader that he was too young to join the order, he was taught a secret handshake (though he did not say what that handshake was) and given a note to give another local Klansman, “Captain Cousar.” He delivered the note, used the handshake, and brought back a message in response. Several years later, as the young man attended college at Harvard University, he joined the crew team. The story continued:

On the evening after a boat race he and others were initiated into a college Greek letter society and its grip was imparted to him by a young lawyer who had come from New York to participate in the ceremonies. Instantly Babcock recognized the grip that he had received that day in Chester. It will be remembered that the old Ku Klux had its origin in Pulaski, Tennessee, among a group of college boys or youngsters fresh from college and that its secret work was in part based on that of a college “frat.”

The author concluded: “Twice in seven years, once in an Upcountry village of South Carolina and once in the heart of Yankeedom, Babcock had privately been taught the Ku Klux grip.”114

113 Testimony of William K. Owens, KKK SC, 1363, and deposition of T. A. Hope, read into testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 399.

In addition to keeping meetings clandestine, Klansmen took care to keep their own membership in the Klan secret. Members across the South wore ornate robes of red or white with masks that were sometimes adorned with elaborate horns and false faces.\textsuperscript{115} One South Carolina Klansmen testified that it “was the rule of the order, for me to disguise.”\textsuperscript{116} Those robes were often made by conservative white women, sometimes out of women’s clothing including calico dresses.\textsuperscript{117} But their costumes were at least as much intended to frighten their victims as they were to conceal the identities of members. Victims were frequently able to recognize their attackers, either from seeing them through their masks or recognizing voices and body-sizes. And on several raids, some Klansmen wore their robes while others were not disguised.\textsuperscript{118}

Klansmen also used their robes and costumes to assume an otherworldly identity. In several early Klan histories, authors contended that the original purpose of the organization was for its members to disguise themselves for their own entertainment, but found the “ghostly” claims that they were “spirits” of Confederate dead effective in intimidating African Americans. One wrote, “These stories were repeated with such embellishments as the imagination of the

\textsuperscript{115} See, for example, testimony of John J. Neason, KKK SC, 42; testimony of Margaret Blackwell, KKK SC, 375; testimony of Charlotte Fowler, KKK SC, 388. Though Klansmen at the time wore both red and white robes, depending on local preferences, early historians of the Klan took extra effort to assert that red robes were only worn by groups of criminals who attempted to emulate the Klan but were “bogus.” After claiming that “The original Klan was organized to protect the homes and liberties of the South,” the author of one early history declared that the original Klan only wore white robes because it was “the symbol of purity;” Richardson, \textit{Historic Pulaski}, 76-77. Another early twentieth-century Klan chronicler used identical language, perhaps borrowing it verbatim from Richardson. She wrote that that “the original Klan” which was “organized to protect the homes and liberties of the South” wore white robes, “the symbol of purity.” In contrast, “red, always the badge of bloodshed, anarchy, and disorder, was most fitting for the bogus Klan, whose deeds were disgraceful and villainous;” Mrs. S. E. F. Rose, \textit{The Ku Klux Klan or Invisible Empire} (New Orleans, La.: L. Graham Co., Ltd., 1914), 35.

\textsuperscript{116} Trial testimony of Sherod Childers, \textit{SC Trials}, 134.

\textsuperscript{117} For claims that white southern women sewed Klan robes, see Chapter Five; Romine, \textit{A Story of the Original Ku Klux Klan}, 15; also Elmer Turnage, from interviews with Mrs. L.A. Layton of Union County, March 24, 1936, Federal Writer’s Project Papers, Cabinet F, Drawer 2, Folder 20a, SCL. For examples of Klansmen who made robes out of women’s clothes, see Robuck, \textit{My Own Personal Experience}, 15; testimony of Essic Harris, KKK NC, 87. Lisa Cardyn’s “Sexualized Racism/Gendered Violence,” \textit{Michigan Law Review} 100 (February 2002), discusses Klansmen wearing women’s garments, 829-831.

\textsuperscript{118} For example, trial testimony of Margaret Biggerstaff, KKK NC, 457.
narrator suggested, till the feeling of the negroes and of many of the white people, at mention of the Ku Klux, was one of awe and terror.”

Some were said to perform a trick called the “Donkey Devil,” where Klansmen would “take the skin of a donkey and get inside of it and run after the pore Negroes.”

Many Klansmen even disguised their horses—again both to complete their spectral imitations as well as to prevent their neighbors from identifying them based on their horse’s size or coloring.

Klansmen and their later apologists claimed that their disguises had success in frightening their victims, especially African Americans, whom they perceived to be especially gullible and superstitious. Essic Harris reported that he had been afraid to shoot his attackers because “They always said in my country that a man could not kill a Ku-Klux; they said that they could not be hit; that if they were, the ball would bounce back and kill them,” but there is little evidence that African Americans were any more susceptible to Klan costumes than were white victims.

Many of the claims that Klan costumes were effective came from later historians rather than contemporary accounts. Early histories invariably contained an anecdote that Klansmen used a rubber hose and fake bladder to pretend to drink entire bucketfuls of water at once in order to persuade “the ignorant black people that the Ku Klux were the ‘spirits of the dead.’”

Adeline Crump, an African American from Chatham County, North Carolina, told a similar story, but

119 Richardson, Historic Pulaski, 29.
122 Testimony of Essic Harris, KKK NC, 89-90.
123 See, for example, Richardson, Historic Pulaski, 29. Elaine Parsons has written that even “Some contemporaries vocally doubted that whites honestly believed their own claims of black gullibility,” Midnight Rangers, 813.
explained the trick, as Klansmen “carried rubber things under their clothes and a rubber pipe leadin’ to a bucket o’ water. The water bag helt the water they did not drink it.” She also knew the story was widespread, as she told her Federal Writers Project interviewer, “Guess you have heard people tell ‘bout they drinking so much water.” But white conservatives still said African Americans were fooled by the Klan. One amateur white historian of the early twentieth century claimed that the political conditions of the South “soon gave a tremendous importance to the Klan’s inevitable discovery that mystery and fear have over the African mind twice the power they have over the mind of a white man.”

In contrast, the most vivid description of someone being terrified of Klan costumes comes from the story of a conservative white woman, who saw her older cousin in full regalia with mask inside her home when she was a little girl. “I screamed and he caught me,” she later recounted:

I closed my eyes and he spoke kindly to me. His arms felt friendly, and imagine my surprise when I opened my eyes and looked up to see his face and the mask hanging around his shoulders. He told me that they did not bother little girls or people who were loyal to the high principles and ideals of loyal Southerners.

She said that she did not fully understand the political component of his “kindly” words until she was older.

Some white southerners thought that the very name of the Ku Klux Klan could have a spectral power. Though the name had originated as a modification of the Greek word “kyklos,”

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125 Interview with Adeline Crump, *Born in Slavery*, Volume XI, Part 1, 205. Alex Woods, a former slave from Orange County, North Carolina, also related the story, telling that Klansmen “could make you think dey could drink a whole bucket of water,” again not actually believing that Klansmen actually were spirits; interview with Alex Woods, *Born in Slavery*, Volume XI, Part 2, 419.


127 Mary Sanders of Spartanburg, S.C., interviewed by Elmer Turnage, February 4, 1938, Cabinet D, Drawer 4, Folder 18, Federal Writer’s Project Papers, SCL.
some contemporaries attempted to obscure its roots—or were honestly ignorant of it. In 1868 a
South Carolina newspaper reported that a Memphis paper, familiar with the organization,
reported that “Ku Klux Klan is a Hebrew term,” meaning “the ‘Straw Club,’ which is supposed
to allude to the fact that Pharaoh required the hod-carriers to furnish their own straw; and also to
the proverb, known to be of ancient Hebrew origin, ‘Straws show which way the wind
blows.”128 Thus the allusion was an attempt to claim that the Klan reflected the prevailing
political winds, as well as having ancient and even spiritual roots. An early sympathetic
chronicler, describing its name as “meaningless and mysterious—mysterious because
meaningless” also claimed that “in this case there was a weird potency in the very name Ku Klux Klan.” Asking the reader to “pronounce it aloud,” he declared “The sound of it is suggestive of
bones rattling together!”129

The name clearly had some of the “potency” to which the writer ascribed it and for which
its members hoped (and which it continues to this day to have). The name very quickly entered
the common lexicon. “Ku Klux” was even sometimes used as a verb meaning to commit
violence while disguised.130 Contemporaries both sympathetic or opposed to the Klan used “Ku
Klux” to describe groups with varying connections with the original group. A Senate report
prepared about violence in North Carolina noted that various secret organizations in North
Carolina called themselves different names in secret but used the name “‘Ku-Klux Klan’… to
deceive the public, and to enable them to deny connection with it when asked upon the witness
stand whether they were members of that organization.”131

129 Richardson, Historic Pulaski, 16.
130 See, for example, testimony of William Howle, KKK NC, 62.
131 NC Report, iv.
Klansmen often used other mysterious or spectral language in its written communications. In Yorkville, South Carolina, the local newspaper printed an ad it claimed was taken out anonymously by members of the “singularly secret and doubly mysterious and hideous organization known as the ‘Ku-Klux-Klan,’” which had just arrived in the county. The paper claimed to believe “no good can come from such organizations,” but printed the ad, which was signed “Suleyman,” the “Great Grand Centuar”—a rank contained in the Pulaski prescript.

The ad was titled “General Order, No. 1,” and read:

REMEMBER the hour appointed by our Most Excellent Grand Captain-General. The dismal hour draws nigh for the meeting of our mystic Circle. The Shrouded-Knight will come with pick and spade; the Grand Chaplain will come with the ritual of the dead. The grave yawneth, the lightnings flash athwart the heavens, the thunders roll, but the Past Grand Knight of the Sepulcher will recoil not.

Perhaps the language was purely fantastical, or even farcical. The Pulaski prescript contained a code where certain words stood for specific numbers. “Dismal” was to mean one, so perhaps the ad was declaring that its meeting time was to be one at night. But the other names and references in the ad appear to have no hidden meanings, and “Grand Chaplain” and “Grand Knight of the Sepulcher” were not ranks in the original Pulaski Klan. The ad’s intentionally secret and morbid language was likely intended to intimidate bystanders as well as inspire members no less than to keep its activities clandestine. The newspaper printed no other similar messages, so it is unlikely that the particular paper was a means by which information was passed between dens.

Sometimes Klansmen used Biblical allusions. After a raid on a jail in South Carolina, a local newspaper reported that the Klansmen handed the jailer a note that included the declaration “We want and will have justice; but this cannot be till the bleeding fight of freedom is fought;

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132 “Local Items,” Yorkville Enquirer, April 2, 1868.
133 “Advertisement,” Yorkville Enquirer, April 2, 1868.
until then, the Moloch of iniquity will have his victims, even if the Michael of justice must have his martyrs."\textsuperscript{134} Moloch was a deity mentioned in the Old Testament to whom child sacrifices were made; by referencing Moloch, Klansmen admitted that their activities were essentially sinful, but were undertaken for the greater good. The same note claimed that Klansmen essentially had no control over the violence they committed, as “We yield to the inevitable and inexorable, and account this the best.”\textsuperscript{135}

In addition to violence and political organizing, the Klan also served social functions for its members. Some members would play music and have dances along with their other activities. Young members of the first Klan den in Pulaski, Tennessee would play the fiddle and the guitar and would sometimes “go serenading.”\textsuperscript{136} Members in the Carolinas would as well. Essic Harris testified that on the raid in which Klansmen stole his gun, and the guns of four other of his neighbors, they took a break to eat at one of their victim’s homes—probably stealing the food—and “Some of them played a fiddle and danced a while.”\textsuperscript{137} Margaret Blackwell, a white victim of a Klan raid from Spartanburg, South Carolina, testified that one of her attackers was “a rude, drinking boy,” and that some Klansmen she knew would go to a neighbor’s house “to play the fiddle and frolic right smart… They would dance some and play around.”\textsuperscript{138}

Consumption of alcohol was a highly popular activity for most Klan dens, despite some supposed restrictions to the contrary. The Prescript for the Pulaski Klan had as its second “edict” that “No member shall be allowed to take any intoxicating spirits to any meeting of the *”. Nor

\textsuperscript{134} “Taken by Habeas Corpus,” \textit{The Newberry Herald}, February 22, 1871.

\textsuperscript{135} “Taken by Habeas Corpus,” \textit{The Newberry Herald}, February 22, 1871.

\textsuperscript{136} Parsons, “Midnight Rangers,” 811.

\textsuperscript{137} Testimony of Essic Harris, \textit{KKK NC}, 88.

\textsuperscript{138} Testimony of Margaret Blackwell, \textit{KKK SC}, 375 and 378.
shall any member be allowed to attend a meeting when intoxicated.” Were a member to appear drunk, he was to be fined between one and five dollars. But many Klan members in the Carolinas engaged in bootlegging, and many also drank heavily at their meetings or on their raids. The owner of a North Carolina railroad raided by the Klan testified that the Klansmen were “Talking to themselves. They seemed to me to be intoxicated. I do not think sane men would have carried on in that way—yelling, firing pistols and guns.” One North Carolina Klansman testified that on one raid the leader of his den “was very much under the influence of liquor,” but not so much to not know what he was doing. And a member of the same den testified that he and his fellow Klansmen gathered at their meeting place in part for idyllic relaxation. These men, bootleggers as well as Klansmen, met in North Carolina at a place called “Cherry Mountain,” where “There were many cherries there, and we used to go there and eat them often.” But eating, drinking, and dancing were secondary to the more deadly purposes of the Ku Klux Klan.

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Because of the paucity of clear reporting, it is impossible to record each incident of Klan violence and accurately quantify all attacks. A plethora of contemporary reports from federal officials, army officers, Freedmen Bureau's agents, and state level Republicans detailed an epidemic of violence that cannot be tabulated. One report the War Department forwarded to a U.S. Senate committee on the violence in North Carolina recorded dozens:

139 Richardson, Historic Pulaski, 94-95.
140 Testimony of William R. Howle, KKK NC, 59.
141 Trial testimony of Julius Fortune, KKK NC, 443.
142 Trial testimony of John Harrill, KKK NC, 445. See also trial testimony of Robert Portenbury, KKK NC, 461.
Up to the 27th of October, 1870, twenty-one cases of whipping and shooting are reported as having occurred in Lincoln County. From the 1st of December, 1868, to the 22d of December, 1870, a list of thirty-eight cases is furnished, as having occurred in Alamance County, embracing two of murder, one of mutilation, many of whipping, threats of violence, &c.¹⁴³

Most of those detailed reports no longer exist, but victims, witnesses, and opponents of Klan violence made a special point to record and describe their attacks. From such testimonies, a representative picture emerges of the kind of violence Klansmen committed.

Contemporaries used the word “outrage” to describe an act of violence committed by the Klan. They were not isolated, discrete incidents. Klansmen frequently attacked multiple victims on what were called raids. One white Republican explained, “What is called a raid is a night’s trip; an outrage committed at A’s house, and another at B’s house, & c.” He believed that over one hundred outrages had occurred in his county, and “that there are a great many that have never told of it.”¹⁴⁴ A chief feature of Klan violence was that it took place near the homes of victims—victims would often be pulled forcibly from their homes and attacked either in their own yards or taken a short distance away.

The following numbers almost certainly significantly undercount Klan violence in the Carolinas. Given both the sporadic nature of extant sources as well as the diffusive, episodic, and traumatic nature of Klan violence that quantification obscures or elides, a complete reckoning of the violence committed by members of the Klan in North and South Carolina would be impossible. Neither these statistics, nor this dissertation’s analysis of what that violence built, can fully account for the physical, emotional, and psychic trauma carried by the victims of and

¹⁴³ NC Report, xviii.
¹⁴⁴ Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 136.
witnesses to Klan violence. But the following analysis demonstrates important patterns of the violence of Reconstruction.

There were more than 227 victims of Klan violence in the Carolinas. Of known victims, 55% were black men, 7% were black women, 21% were white men, 6% were white women (8% were men and 1% women who were not identified by race). Table 1.1 charts out known incidents by gender and race. These numbers represent what was undoubtedly a serious under-reporting of incidents of violence (particularly on the part of female victims). Some victims are counted twice in the following table because they suffered multiple raids, or multiple forms of violence the same raid (being whipped as well as disarmed, for example), with the exception of the category of verbal harassment or intimidation; because Klansmen berated and insulted nearly all of their victims, only those who reported just being threatened without being severely beaten or shot are included in those numbers.

Klansmen used wooden scourges, whips, and pistols alongside knives, shotguns, and repeating rifles. 110 victims were whipped while another eight were recorded as having been beaten by hand. Two victims were whipped then sexually mutilated, and more than three were raped. Though the majority of victims survived their attacks, scarred and mutilated, Klan violence was often deadly. At least 46 people were killed by Klansmen in the Carolinas during Reconstruction. Physical beatings comprised the majority of Klan violence, but gun violence

145 J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, who used a more liberal criteria for counting victims, tabulated 260 victims of Klan violence in North Carolina alone; Reconstruction in North Carolina, 477.

146 The numbers and details of these attacks come from a variety of sources, including the federal testimonies and trials in 1871. Incidents are included either when victims’ names are known or when particular identifying information about an incident of violence exists. Victims would not be counted if a witness would testify that “they whipped some white men,” as a hypothetical example. Similarly, the numbers cited above from the report from the War Department are not included because many of those counted might have already been included in other accounts of victims. More specific accounts that omitted victims’ names, however, were counted if they were clearly not previously named incidents. As another hypothetical example, if a source recounted that “two of my neighbors were shot,” those would be included. See Appendix A for more details.
made up the majority of fatal attacks. At minimum 61 victims were shot, of whom 39 died. Six
victims died from hanging.

Table 1.1 – Known Klan violence in the Carolinas by gender and race of victim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Black Men</th>
<th>White Men</th>
<th>Black Women</th>
<th>White Women</th>
<th>Men, Race Unknown</th>
<th>Women, Race Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shot</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whipped</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaten (not whipped)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stabbed or Cut</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually Mutilated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raped</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disarmed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Burned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened or Verbally Abused</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Klan violence had shared purposes as well as shared forms. Whipping was predominant
perhaps because of its associations with slavery.\(^{147}\) During slavery there was no limit on the
violence an owner could commit against his or her slave (and white women both ordered and
committed violence against slaves, despite longstanding myths about the innocence and purity of
southern white womanhood).\(^{148}\) But Klansmen did not only whip African Americans. Almost
one-third of the victims whom Klansmen whipped were white, nine of whom were women. And
Klan whippings were not done in the same way slaves had been punished on plantations. Instead

\(^{147}\) There is an interesting connection to the defeat of the Confederacy, as Wolfgang Shivelbusch has noted that
white southerners preferred to use the term “whipped” to mean defeat in battle or a personal fight, concluding that
the term “was the perfect mechanism to ironize and trivialize defeat,” in The Culture of Defeat, 62-63. In whipping,
Klansmen rhetorically were simultaneously reasserting the punishments of slavery and reversing the outcome of the
Civil War.

\(^{148}\) Glymph, Out of the House of Bondage.
of leather whips, Klansmen often used tree branches. They would blindfold victims and take them away from their homes to beat them. Joseph Miller, a black farmer from Spartanburg, South Carolina, testified that Klansmen first debated whether to whip him or not. When the raid’s leader decided to whip him, “he turned around and gave me about twenty or twenty-five lashes, I reckon, on the bare skin, and then took me by the arm, with a pillow-case over my head, and turned me around to go to the house at a pretty fast walk.”

Often different members would administer the beating. One white Republican dryly explained the process by which most victims were whipped: “They were done with sprouts of trees – limbs of trees… It was just to raise up the hand and bring it down.” He testified that he had heard that in most cases “there was one who seemed to stand off and dictate somewhat, and tell them to lay it on; or, if he saw they were becoming exhausted, he would tell them to stop and rest awhile.” One white South Carolina Republican related that in a typical attack, Klansmen would stand in a row, and the leader would call out “Number one!” when “number one” would step up and strike the victim one blow; then “number two” would be called, and so on. In one instance, it went as high as a hundred, I believe. Each man steps up and strikes the victim. I suppose the object is to implicate them all alike.

In addition to introducing all the members to the practice of punishing its victims, involving each member in a whipping could prevent victims from singling out an individual perpetrator. Victims could be hit with the branches at least twenty or thirty times, sometimes up to one hundred. The injuries victims sustained were substantial. Aaron Biggerstaff, of western North Carolina, was so badly injured by a beating by Klansmen that five weeks later he had to sleep in the wagon

149 Testimony of Joseph Miller, KKK SC, 601.
150 Testimony of Joseph Hester, KKK NC, 19.
151 Testimony Samuel T. Poinier, KKK SC, 36.
152 See also trial testimony of John Harrill, KKK NC, 443.
transporting him to testify to state authorities because he could not physically get out of it to sleep inside. Klansmen found him one night on the journey and attacked him a second time, breaking his arm and dragging him by the neck with a rope over one hundred yards before eventually sparing his life.\textsuperscript{153}

Though gun violence certainly was prevalent in the South before the Civil War—dueling, in particular, was popular among elite white men—the widespread shooting of Klan victims, black and white, was another aspect of Klan violence that was different from much antebellum vigilante violence. Shootings were the deadliest form of Klan violence. Of 61 known gunshot victims, 51 (over 80\%), were black and 9 were white. At least 39 of the gunshot victims died.

Klansmen most often used shotguns and pistols, as repeating rifles (at the time a cutting edge military weapon) were apparently less common. State-sanctioned militias during Reconstruction were armed with repeating rifles, and many southern Republicans testified that white conservatives were importing repeating rifles, but James L. Orr, a Republican provisional governor of South Carolina, testified to the Joint Select Committee that “Nearly all of the young men of the country, when the war ended, had pistols, and most of them, I suppose, have them yet. If there has been any unusual arming, it has not come within my knowledge.”\textsuperscript{154} A white victim of a Klan attack in North Carolina also testified that he did “not know of any” conservatives who carried repeating rifles, but had seen many young Klansmen armed “With pistols; they wore belts around the waist with pistol holsters, and pistols in them.”\textsuperscript{155} One Klansmen from eastern North Carolina testified that at one meeting the members were “all armed

\textsuperscript{153} Trial testimony of Aaron Biggerstaff, KKK NC, 453.

\textsuperscript{154} Testimony of James L. Orr, KKK SC, 13.

\textsuperscript{155} Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, KKK SC, 36.
with pistols and guns; very few guns.” In contrast, a white South Carolinian threatened by the Klan testified that the men who attacked him “were all armed with double-barreled shot-guns, except the spokesman, who had a revolver.” Confederate officers had been allowed to keep their sidearms, including pistols, as part of the terms of surrender, likely contributing to the prevalence of handguns in Klan violence.

Klansmen also committed sexualized violence, though details about those attacks are even more scarce than other forms of violence because of poor reporting and the stigma carried by survivors. Sexualized violence was intended as a means of not only shaming victims but also asserting white male patriarchal control. Only five victims are currently known as having suffered sexual attacks. Two black men in Alamance County, Caswell Holt and Nathan Trollinger, were castrated; Trollinger was forced to mutilate himself. Two women from Chatham County, North Carolina, both by happenstance named Frances Gilmore, were sexually mutilated. Many more women were rumored to have been raped, but witnesses were reluctant to name victims, and victims were reluctant to report rapes to authorities.

At least two white men, James M. Justice of North Carolina and John J. Neason of South Carolina, claimed that they were able to talk their attackers out of more serious violence by reasoning with Klansmen. More frequently, victims were berated and insulted by their attackers, who would curse and swear at their victims and berate them with the purported causes for the attacks they suffered. Klansmen would also tell witnesses and bystanders why they attacked their victims. The threat of further violence always accompanied physical attacks.

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156 Testimony of George W. Tillon, NC Report, ci.
157 Testimony of John J. Neason, KKK SC, 43.
158 See Chapter Six for an extended discussion of rape and its reporting.
Victims often knew their attackers well. Even newcomers to North Carolina knew many of their attackers personally, with one telling the Joint Select Committee, “Your strongest friends in the day-time are your enemies at night; they will drink toddy with you in the day-time, and Ku-Klux you at night.” Victims, black and white alike, could almost always identify several of their attackers despite robed disguises. Essic Harris testified that he had grown up with two of his attackers. “We were all boys together,” he told Congress, and most lived within a couple of miles at most from him. Many Klansmen were planters or farmers with black tenants or boarders. Joe Rutherford, interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project, remembered “When de Ku Klux was in dat country… I lived wid a man who was one of them.” While making a trip to the local mill he was thrown by his mule, “and down de road I went to running and met a Ku Klux. It was him”—the white man with whom he lived.

Sometimes the connections were even stronger. The Klan could pit white brothers against each other. James M. Justice testified that Layafette and Spencer Eaves, of high standing in Rutherford, were also divided; Layafette was a “respectable” merchant reputed to be a local Klan chief, and Spencer was a “very decided” Republican “in great terror of his life” because of his politics. And in one raid in western North Carolina, a white Unionist helped lead a posse of sympathetic Republicans against the home of his half-brother, who was a Klansmen, in retaliation for a Klan attack upon a local neighbor.

159 Testimony of William Howle, KKK NC, 62.
160 Testimony of Essic Harris, KKK NC, 91.
161 Interview with Joe Rutherford, 92, Newberry SC, May 29, 1937, Cabinet D, Drawer 4, Folder 18, Federal Writers’ Project, SCL.
162 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 147-148.
163 Chapter Four explores the story of Aaron Biggerstaff and his half-brother Samuel in further detail.
Many suspected Klansmen would deny that they joined to commit violence. One testified that “three-fourths of the order have never committed any violence at all, and perhaps one-fourth have committed violence.”\textsuperscript{164} Observers frequently would differentiate between those responsible for the majority of violence and others who had merely joined the organization but did not participate enthusiastically. One South Carolina Republican said that the majority of whippings were committed by “Little squads of men—I do not believe they are the regular Ku-Klux organization” who would “get together to the number of eight or ten, disguise themselves, go to some negro’s house, and whip him. It seems to be an amusement with them. Every Saturday night they go to somebody’s house, take him out, and whip him.”\textsuperscript{165} Undoubtedly some white conservative men joined the Klan in order to fit into their communities and might have been discomfited by the violence, as even some contemporary Republicans would admit.\textsuperscript{166}

The vast majority of Klansmen, however, knew what they were joining and knew that violence was the point of the organization. No substantial evidence exists that any men strenuously argued against violence within the organization. Contemporaries would often parse out differences between white conservative men who were enthusiastically violent or those reluctant in order to place blame for the violence on younger and poorer southerners while exonerating older, more respectable elite men. One Klansman testified that “reckless men,” or “young men who wanted fun” committed most of the violence, and that “it was often done upon their own hook.”\textsuperscript{167} The idea that “reckless” men committed violence is unsupported by the nature of Klan raids. It is clear that Klan violence was almost never a spontaneous occurrence—

\textsuperscript{164} Testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 408.

\textsuperscript{165} Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, KKK SC, 28.

\textsuperscript{166} Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 148.

\textsuperscript{167} Trial testimony of J. R. Depriest, KKK NC, 427.
attacks were specifically ordered by Klan leaders against specific targets. There are only a few known examples of raids where Klansmen did not intend to commit violence but it broke out—often because the intended targets fired first. One North Carolina Klansman testified that “force was the general manner” of getting men into the organization, but members obeyed all orders “as a general thing.” When asked if Klansmen would “go on your own hook as a general thing?” he replied, “No, sir; we would have to go by orders from the chief.”

Others testified that it was always “the chief” who gave the orders, and sometimes rank and file Klansmen weren’t even entirely certain why raids were ordered. One Klansman who participated in a raid against a white North Carolina state representative participated in the raid “Because he [the victim] was a radical.” When asked “Did not your chief tell you the reason?” he responded “No, sir.” When asked again why he participated in the raid, he swore, “I was ordered to go.” He knew that the victim “had made a speech about the Ku-Klux,” and so knew the political purposes of the raid, but explicitly participated in a violent raid because a superior had ordered the violence. In eastern North Carolina, in meetings of the Constitutional Union Guard, members would put forward the names of people to be killed and would volunteer to participate, but at other meetings members were ordered to go on raids. In one case a member

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168 One conservative apologist testified that in a raid against a white South Carolina Republican, Klansmen went merely to talk to him, as “they had nothing against him,” but he began firing and they fired back; testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 99. But even that might be suspect, as a Republican testified that in fact the Klansmen “called him out of his house and fired a volley upon him, shooting him in seven different places;” testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, KKK SC, 30.

169 Trial testimony of John Harrill, KKK NC, 446.

170 Trial testimony of Jason H. Wethrow, KKK NC, 447.

171 Trial testimony of M. M. Jolly, KKK NC, 430.
tried to avoid going on a raid because “his child was sick, but Kenady and Jim Perry [two chiefs] said he should go.”

Klansmen would fire a pistol into the air the evening or night a raid was to occur, to organize the attack and to intimidate those in the vicinity. Attacks would frequently begin at midnight. Klansmen would don disguises and ride horses through the countryside, sometimes taking secret routes or other times publicly in order to terrify bystanders. A South Carolina Republican, when asked if Klansmen parading “the neighborhood in disguise at night” would frighten everyday citizens, replied “I suppose that a band of from fifty to five hundred men, armed and in disguise, appearing in that way, would be very well calculated to terrify them.”

Horses provided mobility that was a critical feature of raids. One North Carolina Klansman bowed out of a raid because his mule was too young, even though other members had offered to lend him a horse. A white South Carolina targeted by the Klan, himself a Confederate veteran himself, recalled, “they surrounded my place with a sort of half-moon circle, and I judge there were about forty of them. They had a detachment with their horses, and a vidette [mounted sentry] thrown out on each side of the road. There were at least forty present.” When asked if “their motions [were] governed by military command?” he replied “Yes, sir; everything was done by signals and signs; and but one man was allowed to say a word; he was the spokesman of the party.”

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172 Confession of Thomas F. Williford, NC Report, lx.
173 Testimony of J. B. Eaves, KKK NC, 177.
175 Trial testimony of Jason H. Wethrow, KKK NC, 448.
176 Testimony of John J. Neason, KKK SC, 43.
177 Testimony of John J. Neason, KKK SC, 44.
Similar discipline and secrecy were features of other Klan attacks. David T. Corbin testified that precision was used in a raid on black militiamen held in a jail in Union, South Carolina. In breaking into the jail itself, Klansmen

formed into line, and the officer in command called out, ‘Number one, number two, number three, ten paces to the front.’ They came to the front, and he then said, ‘Number one and number two will open the jail.’ He told off the men by numbers; no names were called. They stepped up to the front and demanded the keys of the jail.\(^{178}\)

The prisoners were taken to a nearby field, called “The Hanging Grounds” because it served as the site for many executions in the town. The prisoners were lined up and shot one by one, as the order was given, “Ready; aim; fire;” and a prisoner fell. They went on through the whole five or six in the same way; they were all shot precisely as we in the Army would shoot persons sentenced to be shot; with the same commands and with the same precision.\(^{179}\)

His knowledge of the raid came from the account of a victim who fled and ran after the fourth or fifth victim was killed. Though shot by Klansmen while fleeing, the witness managed to get to safety. Ten of the other militiamen were not so lucky and were summarily executed.\(^{180}\)

Raids like the Union jail raid were so large that they required considerable coordination among different Klan dens. Each den could have between fifteen and fifty members, but some large-scale raids were reputed to have involved two to three hundred Klansmen. Contemporaries would record that white conservative men from neighboring counties would respond to summons to participate in violence. Another white Republican testified that “the general organization, whatever it is” was able to coordinate up to five hundred men in just two days for the raid on the Union jail.\(^{181}\) But smaller raids, or “minor outrages,” he believed were not nearly as coordinated.

\(^{178}\) Testimony of David T. Corbin, _KKK SC_, 74.

\(^{179}\) Testimony of David T. Corbin, _KKK SC_, 74.

\(^{180}\) See Chapter Five for an extended discussion of the raid on the Union jail.

\(^{181}\) Testimony of Samuel Poinier, _KKK SC_, 28.
In another instance of coordinated violence, some two hundred Klansmen from both North and South Carolina descended upon Rutherfordton, North Carolina to attack a white Republican state legislator and former Union League organizer named James M. Justice. Justice was hit on his head, dragged into the street, and interrogated by the raid’s leader, whom Justice believed came from South Carolina.\textsuperscript{182} He later testified to the Joint Select Committee that in Rutherford, “when raids are committed [Klansmen] usually state that they are from South Carolina,” especially Spartanburg.\textsuperscript{183} Though some such claims might have been to conceal the identities of North Carolina Klansmen, Justice related several incidents where men from South Carolina were seen fording the Broad River into Rutherford, including one aborted raid of nearly five hundred Klansmen who hoped to release North Carolina Klansmen arrested and jailed by federal troops.\textsuperscript{184}

Communication and coordination between Klan dens across southern state lines occurred throughout the years of Klan violence. The western counties of North Carolina that bordered South Carolina—particularly Lincoln, Cleveland, and Rutherford counties—saw incidents of violence that brought Klansmen from the neighboring South Carolina counties of York, Union, and Spartanburg.\textsuperscript{185} Many Klansmen in both North and South Carolina also engaged in bootlegging, and Klansmen from both states would frequently cross the state border to traffic in the illegal alcohol trade.\textsuperscript{186}

\textsuperscript{182} Trial testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 419-420.
\textsuperscript{183} Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 163.
\textsuperscript{184} Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 164.
\textsuperscript{185} Cherokee County, South Carolina, which today borders Cleveland and Rutherford in North Carolina, was not formed until 1897.
\textsuperscript{186} See, for example, testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 80.
The *Newberry Herald*, a staunchly Democratic paper in the South Carolina upcountry, frequently published sarcastic or satirical accounts that made fun of Klan victims and Republicans, downplaying the causes and effects of Klan violence. In December 1870 it related the story of a skirmish between Klansmen and federal troops, the principal point of which was to insult a white Republican who commanded several black militia companies around Laurens. In a section explaining why the Klansmen, called “the N. C. Cavalry, aided by those 20 bushwhackers,” could not actually have made the attack for which they were accused, was the argument that “No such order had been given by the commander of the ku klux,” and in fact “The two regiments of klux, in the town of Newberry, had not even received the ku (cue).” Many conservative southern newspaper editors published facetious or satiric stories about the Klan, so by punning on the Klan’s name saying that each needed a “cue” to act the article might have been this editor’s idea of humor rather than an accurate window into the workings of the Klan. But given the existence of coded communication across state lines, the emphasis of written constitutions and oaths, and the coordination required to gather large numbers of Klansmen, written orders were almost certainly used for similar large-scale raids.

Corbin’s articulation that the Klan was a “perfect military organization” was in some ways an overstatement. Other contemporaries provided perhaps a better analogy. Locals in York County, South Carolina, would sometimes refer to Klansmen as “Missouri soldiers.” Such a term might have been intended as a reference to the Confederate guerillas active in Missouri during the Civil War, or even proslavery Missourians from Bloody Kansas in the 1850s. Similarly, when asked by the Joint Select Committee if the violence amounted “to predatory or

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guerrilla warfare?” James L. Orr, former provisional governor of South Carolina did not directly answer, but seemed to agree as he said ruefully “It will have to cure itself. I am very nervous, occasionally, about its leading to retaliation and violence.”

* * * * *

There were several organizations or rituals in southern white society that anticipated the Klan and shaped its structure and practices, though in general those roots have been overemphasized by previous scholars. The existing literature has heavily emphasized the influence of slave patrols before and during the Civil War in introducing non-slaveholding whites to racial violence and control over African Americans. Many scholars asserted that the slave patrols were one of the most important organizations that prefigured the Klan. Many contemporary African Americans also seemed to connect the two. But Klansmen did not identify such connections, rarely mentioning the importance of slave patrols when discussing their membership, and there seem to be no explicit organizational connections between slave patrols before Reconstruction and the Klan. Slave patrols might have introduced a handful of future Klansmen to night riding and violence against African Americans during slavery, but these were not the only unique features of the Klan. Slave patrols did not incorporate disguises, initiation rituals, or secrecy—all critical components of the Klan. And it is possible that the Klan drew from a different group of white men. One African American, interviewed by the Federal

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189 Testimony of James L. Orr, KKK SC, 11.
190 For example, Hadden, Slave Patrols.
191 Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 270.
192 For example, Rene Hayden, in “The Root of Wrath,” argues that the slave patrols were an essential precursor to the Klan, but Hayden only identified some seventy Klansmen from the central piedmont of North Carolina who served or had family members serve as “patrollers,” out of one thousand known Klansmen; he did not find substantial data about patrollers in the east or west of the state; 231.
Writers’ Project, even remembered that “I neber seed but one Ku Klux an’ he wuz sceered” of the only two “patterrollers” he knew, whom he said “wuz called po’ white trash.”

One early twentieth-century conservative white historian, writing of his fascination with the Klan, made explicit the connection between “patterrollers” and the Klan by citing the refrain from a minstrel song “Run, nigger, run! De patterrollers ketch you!” to describe his “dim association of these Ku Klux stories with other stories of the older negroes.” But interestingly, the author wrote that it was not until he “went to college and joined a society that had initiations, the mystery and horror of the Ku Klux stories waned.” Rather than the slave patrols, southern college fraternities seemed to have played a stronger role in prefiguring the Klan’s emphasis upon disguises and rituals that made the Klan unique.

Admission to colleges and universities in the South was confined mostly to elite white southern men before the Civil War, so it is unlikely that many Klansmen had been members of college fraternities. But nearly every early history of the Klan mentioned that the first young men that formed the first Klan in Pulaski, Tennessee had been in fraternities and adopted the rituals, pranks, and emphasis upon secrecy that dominated college fraternal life. The very name had been split into two words from “kyklos” to imitate college Greek letter fraternities, with “Klan” added for alliteration. And several prominent Klansmen in the Carolinas had been members of fraternities. Iredell Jones, a Klansman from Rock Hill, South Carolina, attended South Carolina College (which later became the University of South Carolina), where he was a

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195 Timothy J. Williams, “Intellectual Manhood: Becoming Men Of The Republic At A Southern University, 1795-1861” (PhD Dissertation, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010).
member of the Euphradian Society, a literary club, and belonged to a fraternity, Delta Psi.\textsuperscript{196}

Other members were still in college during Reconstruction, such as Plato Durham, who attended college in Tennessee and later became a member of the 1868 North Carolina constitutional convention. William Pegram of Harnett County, North Carolina, had just finished his freshman year at Trinity College (which later became Duke University) when he was arrested for participating in a Klan raid. Though he claimed he was wrongly arrested and had never participated in the raid in question, he did not deny his membership in the organization.\textsuperscript{197}

The Klan also seems to have had some roots in Freemason groups. Given the secretive nature of both organizations, it is difficult to assess how many men participated in both. John Thomas Gaston, a prominent and high-ranking Klansmen from Edgefield, South Carolina, was remembered as “a Knight of Honor and a Mason.”\textsuperscript{198} The Freemason’s organizational commitment to secrecy did influence Klan groups. A North Carolina Klansmen testified to the Joint Select Committee that part of the Klan oath that promised death to anyone who would divulge secrets of the organization “was evidently written by a Mason.”\textsuperscript{199} And a Klan den in Union County, South Carolina, used a Masonic lodge as its headquarters.\textsuperscript{200}

Though Confederate military service did not stress strange rituals or an insistence upon secrecy, it was a very strong precursor to Klan service among individual white southern men. Other historians have noted the links between the Confederate army and the Klan to emphasize

\begin{footnotes}
\item[198] Undated anonymous biographical sketch, John Thomas Gaston Papers, SCL.
\item[199] Testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 384.
\item[200] “Historic Homes,” from undated interview with J. D. Epps by of Caldwell Sims, Federal Writers Project Papers, Cabinet C, Drawer 3, Folder T12-b, SCL.
\end{footnotes}
both the Klan’s paramilitary purpose and the importance of its antecedents for understanding
it. Detailed research in Confederate service will could allow for a quantitative link between
Klansmen and service in the Confederate military. Roughly one-third of Klansmen were too
young to have served in the Confederate military (younger than 14 in 1860, 24 in 1870, and/or
34 in 1880), but a clear majority of Klansmen were of draftable age during the Civil War. Klan violence also was heavily influenced by the forms and tactics of the military violence many
Klansmen learned in the Confederate army. David T. Corbin’s assertion that the Klan was “a
perfect military organization” reflected the truth that it often operated with a clear hierarchy and
coordination between groups. The widespread use of pistols in attacks and coordinated
movements on horseback (including some pitched battles against militias) are just some of
several of the ways Klan violence had direct antecedents in military service.

Beyond mere military training, many Klansmen had had experience with violence against
African Americans from the war. Iredell Jones had seen action against the most famous black
unit in the Civil War. He was stationed as a lieutenant at Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor in the
summer of 1863, and the cannons he commanded provided supporting fire on Battery Wagner
when it was attacked by the 54th Massachusetts. On July 20, 1863, he wrote his father after
having visited the battery in its aftermath. He described how

Numbers of both whites and blacks were killed on top our breastworks, as well as inside.
The negroes fought gallantly, and were headed by as brave a Colonel as ever lived. He

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201 Steve Hahn writes of “the very associations between the Klan and the Confederate army” to assert that “A martial spirit and military presence thus suffused the community life of the antebellum South” because “Confederate mobilization itself was enabled by longstanding and locally based paramilitary institutions,” in A Nation Under Our Feet, 269.

202 See Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion of the ages of Klansmen.

mounted the breastworks, waving his sword, and at the head of his regiment, and he and a negro orderly sergeant fell dead over the inner crest of the works.  

His words might initially suggest he felt respect for the black soldiers who charged Battery Wagner, and have often been cited to suggest that the sacrifice of the men of the 54th impressed even the Confederate soldiers who gunned them down.  

But he also described the black soldiers with paternalism and prejudice, writing

The negroes were as fine looking set as I ever saw — large, strong, muscular fellows. They were splendidly uniformed; but they do not know what they are fighting for. They say they were forced into it. I learned from prisoners that they are held in contempt by the white soldiers, and not only so, but that the white officers who command them are despised also. They are made to do all the drudgery of the army.

Jones did not see the soldiers’ complaints that they were forced into battle as they likely were: strategies to avoid enslavement or execution by Confederate authorities for taking up arms against the slave power. He also did not pick up on the irony of black soldiers complaining about only doing “drudgery”—instead of the frontline battlefield service they desired, fighting (and killing) Confederate troops.  

Three of Jones’s five brothers also served in the Confederate army, and at least two of them were active Klan members; his fourth brother, Johnston Jones, had been too young to serve during the war but joined the Klan in 1868.

Klansmen often made explicit links to the Confederacy on their raids, though sometimes in ways that were not quite literal. One white Republican testified to the Joint Select Committee

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205 Jones’s words were even quoted in a documentary “The True Story of Glory Continues,” narrated by Morgan Freeman; directed by Ben Burtt (Burbank, CA: Tri-Star Pictures, 1991), included on the Special Edition DVD of the feature film Glory, directed by Edward Zwick (1989; Culver City, CA: Columbia Tristar Home Video, 2000).


207 Contrasting Jones’s contention of black passivity, the captured soldiers advocated for better conditions in their imprisonment. Astute listeners heard some of the prisoners sing “When at Wagner I was captured, then my courage failed; / Now I’m lousy, hungry, naked, here in the Charleston jail.” The chorus declared that they were “Praying for a good square meal;” Christian McWhirter, Battle Hymns: The Power and Popularity of Music in the Civil War (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 162.
that “They themselves say… that they are not human beings; that they come from the bone-yards of Richmond; that they have been seven years in the bone-yards of Richmond, and have come for vengeance.”  

But others linked their political work to the Confederacy in more concrete terms. Klansmen disarmed an African American farmer in North Carolina, telling him “We want all the guns; we are going into another war.” Opponents of the Klan made similar connections. Even Ulysses S. Grant, after his victory in the 1868 presidential election, was said to be very concerted with “the diabolical course of the Kuklux Klan, composed as it is almost wholly of paroled rebels.”

There were also organizations during Reconstruction that either served as precursors to or had links with the Klan. As with its antebellum antecedents, these organizations had different goals and different features, and consequently too much can be made of their similarities. But connections between Reconstruction-era white militias, Democratic or conservative political clubs, so-called “councils of safety,” and the Ku Klux Klan are worth exploring.

Many Confederate soldiers, in the immediate aftermath of the Confederacy’s surrender, formed militia groups. Iredell and Johnston Jones were the first and third signers of a list of about fifty men who “constitute[d] themselves a military organization for the protection of this section of country in which we live against any domestic violence,” likely formed in 1865. At least six of the signers of that statement also joined the Ku Klux Klan when it was formed in their town three years later. Willie Jones, one of Iredell Jones’s brothers, served in the South

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208 Testimony of Joseph Hester, KKK NC, 17. Members of the first Klan in Pulaski claimed to the ghosts of men killed at Chickamauga; Richardson, Historic Pulaski, 29.

209 Testimony of Essic Harris, KKK NC, 92.

210 “Grant Speaks,” Yorkville Enquirer, November 26, 1868.

211 The document was undated, but was prefaced as being “In accordance with orders from the Prov. Gov. of S.C.;” undated militia list, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.
Carolina state militia after the war, eventually attaining the rank of brigadier general.\textsuperscript{212} Another brother helped to organize a militia in South Carolina in 1865 and 1866, contacting several prominent conservatives and commanding the South Battalion of the 46th Regiment of what they called the South Carolina Militia.\textsuperscript{213} In March 1866, he offered a “captaincy” to John S. Bratton, who later led a Klan raid that assassinated a black South Carolina militia captain named Jim Williams, but Bratton turned down the offer.\textsuperscript{214}

These white (and conservative) militias were likely, at best, only partially sanctioned. By 1868 the governor of South Carolina had disbanded all militia groups, and the units that eventually were formed under his sanction were exclusively black. North Carolina’s governor William Woods Holden similarly ensured that all of his militia troops supported Republican interests; he employed both white and black troops, though they rarely served in units together.

Reconstruction-era “conservative clubs” and Democratic political organizations also flourished both before and alongside the rise of the Klan.\textsuperscript{215} In early 1868, right before the Klan’s arrival in his town, Iredell Jones was among the nominating committee of the Conservative Union Club of Yorkville, and his brother Allen, a fellow Klansman and former Confederate soldier, was selected secretary of the Rock Hill Conservative Club in April.\textsuperscript{216} These groups arose largely after the restoration of civil control after the Military Reconstruction Acts in early 1868, and in anticipation of that year’s fall presidential election. That was not the extent of their


\textsuperscript{213}J. C. Winsmith to Cadwallader Jones, Jr., February 23, 1866, Cadwallader Jones Papers, Southern Historical Collection [subsequently cited as SHC].

\textsuperscript{214}J. S. Bratton to Cadwallader Jones, Jr., March 8, 1866, Cadwallader Jones Papers, SHC.

\textsuperscript{215}West, The Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan in York County, 38.

\textsuperscript{216}“Rock Hill Responds,” Yorkville Enquirer, March 26, 1868; Yorkville Enquirer, April 30, 1868; “Rock Hill Conservative Meeting,” Yorkville Enquirer, May 7, 1868.
political activities, however; the next year Jones and a fellow Klansman were chosen as Selectmen for their township’s government, and his brother Allen was chosen as Clerk.217

The conservative political clubs’ absence of secrecy, elaborate rituals, or an explicit commitment to violence set them apart from the Klan in several key respects, though their political goals were consonant. Benjamin Franklin Perry, the former provisional governor of South Carolina and a staunchly conservative Democrat, wrote an editorial in the Charleston Mercury in the spring of 1868 calling for the establishment of local Democratic groups “in every district, town, village and neighborhood” so that “the conservative Democracy may act in concert all over the State, and in harmony with the National Conservative Democracy throughout the United States. Such an organization is absolutely necessary in the coming Presidential election.” Concerted effort was necessary, he claimed, to “strengthen” and “encourage” Democrats “in their noble and patriotic resistance to the tyranny of a reckless Congress, whose sole purpose seems to be, to destroy the liberties of their country, and to establish a negro despotism in the South.” Such clubs were additionally necessary for “self-defense and protection,” he wrote, asserting that crimes by African Americans against white southerners had increased to the point that

It may be said that we are in the midst of a savage war, and the savage within our own possessions, believing himself protected by the Government. It does seem that the day is not far distant when the white race will have to work hard to support the grown negroes in our jails and penitentiaries, and their children in free schools and poor houses.218

Perry’s claims to an impending race war and widespread black crime were fictitious, narrative constructions that worked to justify disfranchisement and Klan violence. But his charges

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217 “Catawba Township,” Yorkville Enquirer, April 22, 1869.

218 Benjamin Franklin Perry. “Letter to the Editors of the Mercury,” reprinted in Yorkville Enquirer, March 5, 1868. Perry had been a Unionist before the Civil War, opposing secession, but his postwar politics and general antipathy to African Americans placed him in the conservative camp in postwar South Carolina politics.
presaged and perhaps aided the development of local Klan groups that functioned to aid the electoral success of the Democratic Party.

Across the state of South Carolina, white conservatives also formed what they called “councils of safety,” which more closely resembled Klan groups in that they relied upon oaths of secrecy and a “constitution” of rules and orders. One such oath closely resembled the language used in many Klan oaths, as initiates would pledge:

In the presence of Almighty God, and these gentlemen, I renew my pledge of secrecy to this council and its associates; and further promise and affirm that I will be true and faithful to the council of safety, its subordinates and counselors, and obey all its rules and regulations, orders and edicts, coming to my knowledge, and consistent with the articles of the constitution (II and III) as read in my hearing, while I continue a member thereof: so help me Almighty God.\textsuperscript{219}

That council of safety document also outlined the collection of membership dues to “be regulated and disposed of by the general councils.”\textsuperscript{220}

A conservative from Columbia who testified to the Joint Select Committee provided a different portrait of the councils of safety, swearing that “It has nothing in the world to do with any secret political organization.” But in language similar to that which Benjamin Franklin Perry used to call for conservative clubs, he said that “the arming of the colored people, the insolent manner in which they conducted themselves at the election” had inspired many white southerners to fear that “a war of races was very probable.”\textsuperscript{221} He denied links between the Klan and such councils, and evasively denied knowledge of certain aspects of their oaths. He insisted that only “leading men, representative men” had prompted the formation of such groups.\textsuperscript{222}

\textsuperscript{219} Council of Safety document appended to testimony of James L. Orr, KKK SC, 23.

\textsuperscript{220} Council of Safety document appended to testimony of James L. Orr, KKK SC, 25.

\textsuperscript{221} Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 102-103.

\textsuperscript{222} Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 103.
Republican members of the Joint Select Committee pressed him about the language in the oaths, and in particular clashed over their classification as a political organization. He claimed that they were not interested in electoral politics, only in preventing a “war of the races.” Republican members suggested that because their oaths explicitly confined the organization to white men, it was primarily political. He demurred, saying “Every one has a right to form his own conclusion in regard to that,” but that “It is not political.”

These groups, either antecedents of the Klan or contemporaries to it, were composed of white conservative men who sometimes were themselves members of the Ku Klux Klan. They also frequently shared certain organization similarities, political goals, and even some similar strategies for accomplishing those goals. But historians have sometimes overlook the critical differences—either the commitment to ritualistic secrecy or the necessity of vigilante violence—between the Klan’s antecedents and the Klan itself. Furthermore, too much emphasis upon the antecedents of the Klan in search for an explanation for the rise of Klan violence obscures the fact that Klansmen intended for their violence to serve to restructure southern society.

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It is maybe possible to overemphasize the connections between Klan dens. The fact that many Klan dens used secret handshakes does not mean that they were the same handshake, nor that those handshakes were ordered by regional chiefs. But many historians have overstated in the opposite direction, attributing the similarities in the methods and symbolism of Klan groups not to a regional network but to a shared white southern culture with roots in minstrel performances and an affinity for mysterious spectral signs and symbols. But the existence of

223 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 104.

224 Elaine Parsons has gone so far as to argue that rather than demonstrating connections, “The handwritten notices and warnings, the meetings called by whistles, the galloping messengers on horseback that became emblematic of
written orders between Klan groups across state lines, large-scale raids that required the mobilization of Klansmen across several counties, and the similar forms and purposes of Klan violence all speak to striking organizational connections scholars have previously discounted. Klan groups did not just share common features out of a monolithic white southern culture. Instead specific people and specific organizations fed and fostered Klan violence.

There was another parallel to the Klan in medieval-themed jousting competitions at southern festivals and fairs. “Ring tournaments,” as they were called, had taken place in the South since the 1840s, but they were incredibly popular after the war and were “one of the first public rituals taken up in many areas of the South after Appomattox.”

Paul Christopher Anderson has noted that they “flowered in tandem with the formation of the Ku Klux Klan,” and that both served as a way for white southern men to “resurrect themselves” in the aftermath of Confederate defeat. But they were not just simultaneous phenomena; some Klansmen actually rode in them.

In the fall of 1869, the town of Rock Hill, South Carolina, hosted a large medieval-themed tournament, in which at least five Klansmen, including Iredell Jones, rode as disguised knights using names like “Scotland,” “Silver Cross,” and in the case of Dudley Jones, Jr., “Ku Klux.” They engaged in riding competitions, spearing decorated rings with their lances and receiving prizes from young ladies also attired in medieval costumes. There were also the Reconstruction-era Klan were figures of Klansmen’s inability to mobilize nineteenth-century technology and organizational techniques,” in “Midnight Rangers,” 815.

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227 “Tournament at Rock Hill,” Yorkville Enquirer, October 14, 1869.
tournaments that same month at Yorkville and Union, both towns that had high numbers of Klan members and saw considerable violence. These tournaments were displays of a white southern assertion of a longstanding white aristocratic heritage. They were the opposite side of the two-faced persona that Klansmen embraced: noble and chivalrous in the daylight, terrifying and violent at night, both sides robed and mounted on horseback.

Too often the performative aspect of the Klan’s organization and activities have caused historians to embrace cultural explanations for its organized and coordinated insurgency of calculated and precise violence. Paul Christopher Anderson used the existence of the ring tournaments to argue that the Klan served as a form of mockery or burlesque. Members were simultaneously attacking and making fun of their victims, playing pranks and making jokes. White conservative men thought that Reconstruction was making a mockery of politics, and thus they turned to the Klan in what Anderson calls “an abomination, a ghastly, hideous farce.”

The idea that the Klan was a joke was used for a very different political purpose by contemporary conservative newspaper editors, who filled columns in their papers with satirical stories about the Klan that made fun equally of Republicans’ fears about the rampant violence and the Klan’s emphasis upon spectral secrecy. One South Carolina editor threatened that Klansmen would attack his subscribers if they were late with their payments. The Richmond Dispatch made fun of the Klan’s alliterative name by jokingly reporting that “The Kuklux Klan are kalled upon to kastigate or kill any colored kusses who may approve the konstitution being koncocted by the contemptible karpetbaggers at the kapitol.” The entire paragraph had similar

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228 See also “Tournament at Rock Hill,” Yorkville Enquirer, October 21, 1869, & Yorkville Enquirer, October 28, 1869.


230 “Scraps,” The Newberry Herald, June 7, 1871.
alliteration. Similarly, the New Orleans Times reported “that the Ku-Klux hoax was gotten up a patent medicine man for advertising purpose, and the announcement of the Ku-Klux-Klan, the world-renowned panacea, may be expected to appear soon in its columns.”

But Klansmen were deadly serious. The Klan united its participants in common cause and through common mechanisms. As the next chapter details, the Klan united a much broader coalition of conservative white southern men than was commonly suspected.

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232 Yorkville Enquirer, April 30, 1868.
Iredell Jones was born in 1842 in the North Carolina piedmont to a wealthy and politically prominent family. Iredell’s father, Cadwallader Jones, served in the North Carolina general assembly, and when Cadwallader moved his family to Rock Hill, South Carolina, in 1857, he served in that state’s legislature as well. Cadwallader owned 64 slaves in 1860, a large number anywhere, even for South Carolina, and he owned property valued at $71,310.\textsuperscript{233} When the war broke out, Cadwallader and four of his sons—including Iredell—joined the Confederate Army. The family prospered after the war, as well. By 1870, at age 28, Iredell claimed $41,000 of his own property, was married, and worked as merchant in the town of Yorkville.\textsuperscript{234} Iredell’s wife Ellen died few years later, leaving him a widower living alone by 1880.\textsuperscript{235} But he remained politically active, becoming a freemason and member of a Confederate Veterans’ association and serving on the Board of Regents for the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum for nearly twenty years by the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{236}

Iredell Jones’s wealth and status placed him far above most average white men in the Carolinas. Joseph Clark was close to Iredell’s age, and was also born in the North Carolina piedmont. But Clark’s father John only owned $375 in property in 1860 and held no slaves, and

\textsuperscript{233} Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Series M653, Roll 1228, Page 394, Image 195.
\textsuperscript{234} Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Series M593, Roll 1512, Page 328A, Image 253.
\textsuperscript{235} Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Roll 1243, Page 419A, District 165.
did not leave Chatham County.\textsuperscript{237} Joseph could not read or write, and after the Civil War, at age 24, propertyless, Joseph lived in the home of a man for whom he worked as a farm laborer, childless and unmarried.\textsuperscript{238} He supplemented his income by making bootleg whiskey or working for men who did.\textsuperscript{239} Ten years later he was a farmer with his own household, had married a woman named Artilia ten years his junior, and had taken in his widowed mother to board with them.\textsuperscript{240} Iredell and Joseph, then were two southern white men who shared little in common aside from age, race, and sex—and membership in the Ku Klux Klan.

Contemporaries and later historians alike have sought to find specific demographic features that members of the Ku Klux Klan shared. In what ways did Klansmen cluster around similarities of wealth, or age, or family status? Were there specific aspects of their lives that could explain their participation in the most infamous organization of racial terror and political violence in the American South? But the conclusions about Klan membership that both Klan contemporaries and later scholars have reached are mostly inconclusive and unsatisfying.

Most observers of the Reconstruction-era Klan, past and present, have emphasized a uniformity among the men who joined the Klan. Many contemporaries often stressed that Klan violence was only committed by poor, young men somehow predisposed to committing atrocities. Others, particularly those who sympathized with the Klan, would say that those poorer, violent men were aberrations, and in fact the majority of Klansmen were elite, distinguished, and respectable white men who would never deign to commit an act of violence. Many recent historians, when analyzing the backgrounds of Klansmen, have largely focused

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\item \textsuperscript{237} \textit{1860 Census}, Series M653, Roll 892, Page 3.
\item \textsuperscript{238} \textit{1870 Census}, Series M593, Roll 1129, Page 110.
\item \textsuperscript{239} See testimony of Essic Harris, \textit{KKC NC}, 91.
\item \textsuperscript{240} \textit{1880 Census}, Series T9, Roll 957, Page 45.
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upon the similarities between them, stressing an elite leadership of the Klan and asserting that those elite wanted “to reestablish the hierarchy and control to which they were accustomed.”

The tendency to emphasize such uniformity is at least partially a reflection of Klansmen’s own desire to be seen as homogenous. Though the Klan was a hierarchical organization, Klansmen wore their robes and hoods in order to seem anonymous and identical. And in terms of race, ethnicity, and sex, indeed Klansmen were identical. Of course there were no black members of the Klan, and (based upon last names) neither do there seem to have been any of Jewish descent or other ethnic groups marginalized during the nineteenth century. Only two Klansman in the Carolinas were listed in census reports as having been born outside of the United States: John A. Walker, a physician in York County, South Carolina born in Ireland, and Fred Latham, of Union County, South Carolina, born in Scotland. It appears that only two women, Mary Avery and Louisa Chambers, were ever arrested for participation in the Klan, and they were released and not convicted. Both were likely the wives of Klan chiefs.

The federal investigations into the Klan generated depositions, federal testimonies, trial transcripts, arrest records, and convictions, making it possible to identify men who participated in the Ku Klux Klan or were suspected of doing so. The investigations recorded the names of well over one thousand in the Carolinas. This chapter uses those names to undertake a detailed demographic analysis of the white men who participated in the Ku Klux Klan using the federal

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241 Paul D. Escott, Many Excellent People, 154. Allen Trelease argued that “The maintenance of white supremacy, and the old order generally, was a cause in which white men of all classes felt an interest. All classes had been united in defense of slavery before the war, occasionally joining in patrol or vigilance activity for that purpose, and they had jointly fought a war to preserve the institution,” in White Terror, 51.


243 David T. Corbin to the Attorney General, February 19, 1872, Microfilm Publication M947, Letters Received by the Department of Justice, From South Carolina, 1871-1884, Roll 1, RG 60, NARA.
census reports of 1860, 1870, and 1880. Appendix A discusses in depth the methods used to conduct this analysis.

It is important to note that though this analysis lumps together all white southern conservative men who joined the Klan as equal participants, there was undoubtedly a range of engagement with the Klan’s goals and activities. Several men claimed to have been tricked into joining the Klan. Those accounts were likely overstated, but even some Republicans would say that several conservative men joined “not to be active or participate in any acts of violence, but simply be members for the sake of protection.”244 Some men were active leaders, recruiting friends, serving as officers within the organization, eagerly engaging in violence. Others were less committed; many confessed and served as states’ witnesses during federal trials. A straightforward demographic analysis of these men risks flattening the range of engagement white southern men had with the Klan, just as it might count a few white men who were accused of Klan participation because they were arrested on suspicion though they may never have engaged in violence. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to differentiate quantitatively between Klansmen who were committed and those who perhaps joined because of social pressure. But that there was a range of participation does not absolve members from the atrocities the organization committed. There is no evidence that a significant number of Klansmen were unwilling participants in acts of violence. All members understood the stakes.

Membership in the Klan skewed significantly toward the elite. Though Iredell Jones was among the richest of men to participate in the Klan, most of his fellow Klansmen were also more likely to have owned more property (including, before emancipation, slaves) than white southern men who did not join the Klan. But despite this trend, as evidenced by the participation of poorer

244 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 148.
men like Joseph Clark, Klansmen varied significantly—not just in regards to socioeconomic status, but also in age, marital and familial status, and occupations. Rather than exclusively coming from the elite or the poor, Klansmen came from a wide swath of the southern white male population. Klansmen’s diversity of background was accompanied by a shared trend of relative stability in their family status, residence, occupation, and socioeconomic status over the course of Reconstruction. Rather than seeing their households destabilized and their livelihoods endangered, southern white men who were members of the Klan settled down and established homes and families both during and after their participation in violence.

Both contemporaries and later scholars have attempted to find out what the white men who joined the Klan shared in common beyond their whiteness and their masculinity. Many have claimed that Klansmen were more likely to come from specific portions of the southern population: rich or poor, old or young, respected or marginalized. Their claims, when investigated more thoroughly, are unsatisfying. The Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction united men like Iredell Jones and Joseph Clark in its campaign of violence, but not for easily discernible economic or demographic reasons.

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Before exploring in depth various facets of the demographics of Klan membership, it is important to discuss the overall size of the Klan in the Carolinas. Well over one thousand white conservative men were arrested in both states under suspicion of having been Klansmen, and those came from places specifically targeted for arrests, so the overall number was surely very much larger. But the efforts of both its sympathizers and its critics to exaggerate its size and influence have likely inflated the reckonings of most scholars. In Congressional testimony in 1871, former Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest, Grand Wizard of the entire Klan,
estimated its membership at over half a million men throughout the South, but that number is undoubtedly too high, given that fewer than one million white men had fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War. In 1870 Governor Holden of North Carolina declared that he believed the organization to have forty thousand members in the state; Albion Tourgée in his history of the Klan in North Carolina gave a similar number. Many scholars have accepted the claim as valid. Paul Escott notes that the number would have been “less than 10 percent of the white population but nearly one-third of the adult white males.”

The just-under-ten percent ratio, applied statewide, would have put the number of Klansmen in North Carolina at roughly sixty thousand and thirty thousand in South Carolina. But that ratio was almost certainly too high. A North Carolina Klansman from Rutherford County testified that there were between four and five hundred men in the organization in his county, divided into eight or ten dens of roughly forty or fifty each. That county had a white population of ten thousand, suggesting that the Klan apparently could muster 5% of the white population in one of the counties that saw some of the heaviest Klan violence. Klansmen also said that there were also around five to seven hundred members in Alamance County, a county with over eight thousand white residents, again suggesting that the Klan drew significantly less than ten percent of its white population even in its strongholds. Furthermore, only a minority of counties in either state saw substantial Klan violence. Most dens seemed to average between twenty and fifty members, and if each county had between ten and twenty dens—a reasonable

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245 Trelease, *White Terror*, 45.


247 Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 158.


249 Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 158.
estimate based on contemporary accounts—a county with extremely active Klan membership might have had a maximum of one thousand members. Given that there is evidence about active Klan membership in only about twenty counties in the Carolinas, Klan membership in both states combined was almost certainly less than thirty thousand, a smaller number than previously suspected, even assuming an underreporting of both violence and membership. But twenty thousand members of an organization of racial terror in two states that spanned hundreds of miles meant that Klan was a very robust organization that drew from a large swath of the white male population.

That the Klan was only active in particular counties have led some to speculate that the demographics of those counties could explain Klan membership. One white Republican from the South Carolina upcountry, for example, claimed that “It is right in this section of the State that most of the trouble is, where there is a large white majority among the people,” and many of his contemporaries (and later historians) also assumed that violence was concentrated in areas with a white majority.\textsuperscript{250} Klan violence did occur in counties where there was a white majority, like Spartanburg, in the South Carolina upcountry (67.4% white majority), or in Chatham County of the North Carolina piedmont (65.4% white majority). But it also took place in many counties that had a black majority, like Chester County near Spartanburg in the South Carolina upcountry (66.5% black majority) and Jones and Lenoir counties in eastern North Carolina (both 53% black majority).\textsuperscript{251} There was no discernible trend to the racial makeup of counties that saw Klan violence. Some had seen significant population growth between 1860 and 1870, while others had seen their populations decrease; some of those counties saw an increase in their black

\textsuperscript{250} Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, \textit{KKK SC}, 30.

populations, while others saw a decline. Similarly, some scholars have concluded that Klan violence was concentrated in places that saw industrial development and rapid economic change, like the counties of the North Carolina piedmont, Alamance and Chatham. But it also erupted in heavily agrarian counties, like Sumter in South Carolina, or in counties with little industrial development, like Rutherford in western North Carolina.

There was no “recipe” of circumstances that caused white conservative men to join the Ku Klux Klan and commit violence in their local communities. Were Klansmen responding solely to the changing makeup of their neighborhoods—perhaps out of anxiety at an increase in the numbers of black residents of their home counties, or perhaps out of fear that too many black laborers were leaving—there would have been more commonality to the demographics of counties within which it arose. Similarly, if violence was solely a response to a particular set of economic circumstances, there would not have been such diversity among the counties where it arose. Instead, Klan violence occurred because of its organizational strength in certain counties. Though perhaps a seemingly tautological point, Klan violence arose in places where the Ku Klux Klan was organized, not because of any discernible demographic or economic conditions.

Contemporaries also accused Klansmen of all being the same age. One white victim of Klan violence from South Carolina called them “the young bloods of the county,” and asserted that they were “sons of the old planters in the neighborhood.” The historical record tells a slightly different story. The mean age of Klansmen in 1870 was 32 with a median age of 29—meaning half of Klansmen were out of their 20s at the time of the height of Klan violence, not

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252 Hayden, in “Root of Wrath,” offered this conclusion, arguing that “the Klan grew up in those communities that experienced a rapid economic growth and market integration in the antebellum and, especially, Reconstruction years,” 18-19.

the brash young men contemporaries claimed. Though a substantial cluster of Klansmen were in their twenties around the time of their membership in the Klan, many Klansmen were significantly older, as demonstrated in Figure 2.1. This frequency distribution chart of Klansmen’s ages might look, at first glance, to support the assertion that all Klansmen were young men. And indeed the largest percentage of Klansmen were between 21 and 25 years old. But there were as many Klansmen older than thirty than there were younger. Rather than being dominated by young men perhaps more inclined to violence, the Klan contained many older, more mature white men.

Figure 2.1 – Klansmen’s ages in 1870

Similarly, some contemporaries assumed that Klansmen were unmarried and childless, partially as a result of the presumption of their youth and partially out of the supposition that men who joined the Klan came from the margins of southern society. A conservative from South

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254 The ages of Klansmen found in the 1860 and 1880 censuses tell the same story: the mean age of Klansmen in 1860 was 21 while the median age was 18, and the mean age of Klansmen in 1880 was 41 with a median age of 37. Furthermore, Klansmen spanned wide ages as demonstrated by the standard deviations for their ages; Klansmen in 1860 had a standard deviation of their ages of 11.5, 11 in 1870, and 10.5 in 1880. That means that the majority of Klansmen had ages spanning over two decades.
Carolina claimed that Klansmen were “young men who have no families, no property; they are pretty much outcasts; some of them have committed such acts at home that they cannot go home for fear of arrest, and they just float about in the community,” and that they would “burn up a democrat” for speaking out against the violence as eagerly as they would attack a Republican.\textsuperscript{255}

Again, the truth was different from the assumption, as shown in Table 2.1.

\textbf{Table 2.1 – Klan households}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heads of Households</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Children at Home</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1860, nearly a decade before the Klan’s existence, at least one-third of Klansmen were married and over one-fourth had children. Klansmen with children had a mean of 3.8 and a median of three children. Even more were settled in 1870, when 74% of Klansmen were heads of their own households in. Almost two-thirds of Klansmen were married in 1870, and exactly half had children, with a mean and median both of three children. In other words, at the height of Klan violence, Klan dens had an even mix of husbands and fathers as well as bachelors and childless men. By 1880, nearly every Klansman had an established family, as 89% of Klansmen were heads of their households, 80% were married, and of those who were unmarried, about one-third were widowers, like Iredell Jones. About 14% of Klansmen had spouses with discernibly different names in the 1880 census than the 1870, suggesting that several Klansmen remarried after a previous wife had died. By 1880 two-thirds had children who lived in their households, with a mean of 3.5 and a median of 3 children—suggesting that the average Klansman’s family size remained stable over Reconstruction.

\textsuperscript{255} Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, \textit{KKK SC}, 125.
These figures become even more interesting when compared to a representative sample of everyday white southern men from the Carolinas, as seen in Table 2.2. Because the 1860 and 1870 censuses do not specifically list marital status or number of children, it is impossible to compare those years to individual Klansmen. However, data about those who were heads of their households demonstrate that when controlled for age, Klansmen were about as likely as to be heads of households as ordinary white southern men. And 81% of white men in the age range of Klansmen in the Carolinas were married in 1880, compared to 89% of Klansmen. Furthermore, ordinary white men had a median household size of 5 across the years 1860 to 1880; those Klansmen who had children typically had an average of three. Thus rather than being social outcasts, Klansmen were at least as likely to have families as ordinary white men, if not more so.

Table 2.2 – Average white male households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heads of Households</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Along with claims that Klansmen were young and single, indeed inseparable from them, were claims that Klansmen were poor. Conservative elites would frequently say that most violence was committed by poor, young white men in order to depict themselves as innocent of involvement in violence. Plato Durham, a Klansman from western North Carolina, testified to the Joint Select Committee that “It is only among the poorer classes of white people, as far as I have been able to learn, that any jealousy or hatred toward the negro race is entertained. I know

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256 Data on everyday white men from North and South Carolina (some of whom might have joined the Klan, some who undoubtedly did not) come from a representative sample from the federal census, generated by the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) from the Minnesota Population Center at the University of Minnesota; Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 [Machine-readable database] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010). See Appendix A for a detailed discussion of the means by which this representative sample was analyzed.
that the negroes are treated kindly by the more intelligent and wealthy portion of the community; there is no disposition to treat them in any other way." Republicans sometimes made similar claims, but for different purposes. One white Republican claimed that outrages were “committed mostly by young men. There is a class of men who have nothing to do but loaf about taverns and bar-rooms,” but that the violence they committed was “countenanced to a lamentable degree by the intelligent people of those counties.” By “intelligent people,” he meant the white elites.

The assumption that Klan violence was the fault of poor white men entered the early histories of Reconstruction. Early chroniclers sympathetic to the Klan would blame the worst excesses of violence on poorer, degenerate white men in order to absolve elite and respectable white southerners from the worst excesses of Klan violence. Interestingly, historians sharply critical of the Klan would often make similar assumptions. Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, an early black revisionist historian, blamed “the irresponsible and shiftless whites” who had “a tendency toward vagabondage” for Klan violence. W.E.B. Du Bois, in his pathbreaking history of Reconstruction, also blamed violence upon an essential degeneracy in poorer whites, arguing that “from 1870 on the planter class merged their blood so completely with the rising poor whites that they disappeared as a separate aristocracy. It is this that explains so many characteristics of the post-war South: its lynching and mob law, its murders and cruelty, its insensibility to the finer things of civilization.”

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257 Testimony of Plato Durham, KKK NC, 318.
258 Testimony of Reuben Tomlinson, KKK SC, 93.
259 See, for example, Richardson, Historic Pulaski, who spoke of the “disposition” of the “better class of people” to accommodate Reconstruction until black political power expanded, which caused violence to erupt; 31-32.
261 Du Bois, Black Reconstruction, 54.
Many people, including those critical of racism and racial violence, have assumed that racial violence has more often been committed by poorer white southerners. This could be because of beliefs that poorer white southerners are in some ways degenerate or depraved; people often assume that the same failings that caused some whites to be poor cause them to be more inclined to commit violence. Others sometimes assert an economic explanation: when economic resources are scarce, the thinking goes, whiteness provides poorer white men an intangible advantage over African Americans, and thus those on the margins are more willing to use violence to maintain their white privilege.262

That assumption does not hold true for the men who joined the Ku Klux Klan in North and South Carolina during Reconstruction. For example, Klansmen were at least as likely as other white southerners to have been schooled. In 1860, 28% of the men who would become Klansmen had attended school in the last 6 months, nearly identical to the 26% of a random sampling of white men in the Carolinas of an equivalent age. Similarly, the 28% of Klansmen who had attended school was roughly half of those who were of schooling age at the time. Before the Civil War, North Carolina had taught roughly half of its school-age children in semi-publicly funded common schools.263 As previously discussed, many Klansmen had gone to colleges, elite institutions in the antebellum South, where they had joined fraternities. And very

262 The latter concept owes much to Du Bois, who recognized that “the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public psychological wage,” in Black Reconstruction, 700. Later scholars, most notably David Roediger, have adopted the concept of a wage to explain the privileges whiteness provides. It is important to note that though the assumption that poorer whites committed more Klan violence in Reconstruction than elites is specious, it is still true that whiteness provides privileges analogous to (and usually accompanied by) economic benefits. See The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class (London; New York: Verso, 1991).

few—fewer than non-Klansmen—were illiterate.\footnote{Precise numbers are difficult to ascertain because of the inconsistency with which census takers marked literacy; some used the fields to mark literacy while others marked it for illiteracy, and still others skipped it entirely. Only two Klansmen in 1860, three in 1870, and three in 1880 were definitively illiterate, putting the literacy rate of Klansmen somewhere above 95%. Those numbers match or are higher than the illiteracy rates of the general white population of the Carolinas. In North Carolina 33,111 of white men over 21 could not write, roughly 10% of its white male population; in South Carolina 12,490 white men over 21 could not write, about 8% of its white male population; Ninth Census, The Statistics of the Population, Vol. I, 369. Even accounting for errors in the census, Klansmen were clearly more likely to be literate than other southern white men.}

Klansmen could not reasonably be considered uneducated by contemporary standards.

More importantly, Klansmen were almost twice as likely to have been slaveholders before emancipation as other white southern men. 21\% of Klansmen owned slaves themselves in 1860, and another 38\% lived with a head of household who did, bringing the number of Klansmen whose nuclear families participated in slave ownership to 59\%. Those households owned a mean of 14.6 and a median of 7 slaves. By contrast, roughly 33\% of all white Carolinians (men and women) lived in households that owned slaves in 1860, with a mean of 12 slaves per slaveowner.\footnote{The percentage of white families who owned slaves in the Carolinas has to be extrapolated from aggregate population numbers of white and enslaved people. The total white population of the Carolinas was 921,242 in 1860. Assuming a household size of 5 people (the average household size of average white men from the Carolinas), North Carolina had roughly 126,000 white households, and South Carolina had roughly 58,000. Dividing the total number of slaveholders from each state (34,638 in North Carolina and 26,701 in South Carolina) by the total number of white households reveals that roughly 28\% of North Carolina and 46\% of South Carolina white households owned slaves in 1860, for a total of approximately 31,339 slaveowning households in the Carolinas, or about 33\% of the total. The numbers for North Carolina are consistent with Paul Escott’s finding that 28\% of white households in antebellum North Carolina owned slaves, in Many Excellent People, 7. For the mean, there were 331,059 slaves in North Carolina and 402,406 slaves in South Carolina; dividing their sum by the number of slaveowners results in 12 slaves. Data on number of slaveholders from Joseph Kennedy, Superintendent of Census, Agriculture of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864) 236-237; other population data from U.S. Census Bureau, Eighth Census of the United States, 1860 (Washington, D.C. National Archives and Records Administration, 1860).}

Klansmen were significantly more likely to own slaves, and to own more slaves, than other white Carolinians, and thus most Klansmen had previous experience asserting social, economic, and personal authority over African Americans through violence.\footnote{These numbers compare interestingly to volunteers for the Army of Northern Virginia in the Civil War. About 36\% of volunteers for the major army of the Confederacy either owned slaves or lived in households that did—lower than Klansmen, but 42\% more likely than the general population of the Confederacy. By contrast, more than}
Table 2.3 – Slave ownership, Klansmen compared to average white households, 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Owned Slaves</th>
<th>Households Owned Slaves</th>
<th>Mean Slaves Owned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Klansmen</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average White Carolinians (including women &amp; children)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, given the frequency with which previous scholars have claimed that Klansmen were attempting to reassert the authority they had held during slavery, that just under half of all Klansmen were not slaveowners in 1860 is also significant. Previous scholars have perhaps slightly overemphasized the role of slave ownership in explaining the roots of the Klan, arguing that members joined the organization principally to rebuild slavery, using as evidence examples such as some members’ participation in slave patrols before emancipation. The roughly 40% of Klansmen who did not come from households that owned slaves undoubtedly had aspired to enter the slaveholding elite during the antebellum period, or might have drifted into and out of the slaveholding class. Political alliances between slaveowners and white southerners too poor to own slaves was nothing new in the South. Southern whites who could not afford to own slaves often yearned to enter the slaveholding class.

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half of the officers of the Army of Northern Virginia personally owned slaves in 1861, putting them above Klansmen in rates of slave ownership. See Joseph T. Glatthaar, General Lee’s Army, 20.

267 Rene Hayden, in “The Root of Wrath,” makes this point explicitly, arguing that “Klansmen were trapped in a twilight region, champions of the past at the very moment it was irrevocably lost,” 2, and further that “The Klan and its strange pageantry and ritual aspects were attempts at recapturing a mythical solidarity of antebellum community, a community united under the sage hand of its patriarchs, where all white men could be masters,” 20. As previously discussed, actual connections between slave patrols and the Klan were more tenuous.

268 Stephen A. West has documented that it was very rare for white southerners in the South Carolina upcountry who did not own slaves in 1850 to own slaves in 1860; the divisions between slaveholding and nonslaveowning whites were not very permeable, making the number of nonslaveowning Klansmen even more striking; From Yeoman to Redneck.

269 Joseph Glatthaar explores how even those Confederate soldiers who never entered the slaveowning class had deep familial, cultural, and economic ties to the system of slavery; see General Lee’s Army, 29-31. Even in the
But that this sizeable number of men who did not come from slaveowning families joined the Ku Klux Klan also shows something quite new about the postemancipation South: white southerners who could not have afforded to join the slaveholding elite during the antebellum period could actively engage in the construction of a racial hierarchy that placed white over black after emancipation. Poor and middling Klansmen asserted their role in the creation of a new racial hierarchy by their very participation in violence and reaped the benefits of that hierarchy alongside their elite comrades.

The assumption that only poor men joined the Klan is also disproved by Klansmen’s property ownership. Klansmen owned, on average, between two and three times as much real and personal property as a representative sample of white men of a similar age range in North and South Carolina. Table 2.5 charts the real and personal property owned by Klansmen in 1860 and 1870 (the 1880 census did not record property ownership), broken down between those Klansmen who were heads of their own households and those who lived under a different household head (usually a parent), against those owned by average white men in the Carolinas of equivalent ages who were heads of their own households. For those Klansmen who were not heads of their own households, the property values listed are for the household head in order to demonstrate the wealth of the households from which Klansmen came. In 1860, only 33% of Klansmen were heads of their own households; by 1870 that number had increased to 75%.

Several things are striking about this data. The first is the extent to which Klansmen were, on average, significantly wealthier than everyday white southern men of a similar age range, despite an equivalent number being heads of their own households. In 1860, 38% of white

South Carolina lowcountry, which had a sizeable social and economic chasm between elite planters and poor or yeoman whites, Stephanie McCurry found that “yeomen and planters forged an uneasy alliance that simultaneously buttressed independence and planter power.” See Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 93.
men in the Carolinas of a similar age range as Klansmen were heads of their own households, roughly equivalent to Klansmen’s 33%, but they owned on average property ranging from roughly one-half to one-fifth that owned by Klansmen.²⁷⁰

Table 2.4 – Property ownership, Klansmen compared to average white men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Real Property</td>
<td>Personal Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households of Klansmen, Non-Household Heads</td>
<td>$4,554</td>
<td>$10,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$1,411</td>
<td>$310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$800</td>
<td>$228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klansmen, Household Heads</td>
<td>$5,111</td>
<td>$13,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$2,335</td>
<td>$587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average White Men, Household Heads</td>
<td>$1,747</td>
<td>$3,601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$1,054</td>
<td>$592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$163</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to those defenders who claimed that the Klan was made up of poor young men, other apologists would ignore the existence of economic disparity amongst Klansmen in order to assert that rich, respectable white men were the only ones who had joined the organization. These defenders tried to thread a narrow needle, arguing that because Klansmen were respectable, rich, and educated, they could not have committed the atrocities of which they were accused. One conservative from North Carolina cautioned

Do not imagine that the Ku Klux were recruited from the criminal classes. Such I know is the prevalent northern idea, but is absolutely false. The members of the K. K. K. were gentlemen of fine education, struggling manfully to retain and sustain their manhood, and give to their children as a heritage of the war a higher civilization than perhaps they themselves had enjoyed.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ At some level this data are slightly misleading. Because the random sample of average white men from the census reports did not include the property values of the heads of households in which they lived, many of the men—young men who lived with their parents—were recorded as having no property. In contrast, when Klansmen lived with parents, the property values of those households could be included. Thus overall the property values for average white southerners probably skews slightly lower than it should, though overall the data definitely suggest that Klansmen were considerably wealthier than average white men in the Carolinas.

²⁷¹ Quoted in West, The Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan in York County, 40.
Those assertions, as will be extensively explored, were yet another rhetorical campaign on the part of sympathetic white conservatives seeking to obscure the reality of the diversity of Klan membership in order to defend its violence in the face of criticism and federal investigation. A conservative newspaper from the South Carolina upcountry lambasted Republican assertions that Klansmen were elite white southerners, sarcastically declaring “This is good, if the murdering work is to be done, it is better that respectable citizens do the job, than rowdy rascallions, and disreputable characters, as it might be botched and done in a slovenly manner. A neat job is always turned off by respectable workmen, and there are no after touches to be made.” The implication was that either Klansmen were violent and poor or rich and innocent. The truth was that Klan violence was committed by men both rich and poor.

For though Klansmen were wealthier than other white southerners, data on property ownership also expose that there was a wide range in the amount of wealth that Klansmen had. That is partially visible through the substantial discrepancy between the mean and median of these property values, suggesting that those Klansmen who were wealthy were incredibly wealthy relative to the majority of Klansmen. The standard deviations for property values also revealed this trend. The standard deviation values for real and personal property owned by Klansmen in 1860 were, respectively, $14,239 and $36,027, a vast difference among the values recorded, many times over the average amounts owned. For those Klansmen who lived in households where others were listed as household heads, the standard deviation values for real and personal property were, respectively, $6,531 and $16,104. And in 1870 the standard deviation values for real and personal property owned by Klansmen were, respectively, $5,657 and $1,331; for those Klansmen who lived in households where others were listed as household

heads, the standard deviation values for real and personal property were, respectively, $2,048 and $341 (all vast differences among the values recorded). This means that across Reconstruction, various Klansmen owned property that ranged in value many times that of the overall average. There was a vast disparity of property ownership between Klansmen.

To illustrate these discrepancies with examples: as previously discussed, in 1860 Iredell Jones from York County, South Carolina, lived in a household (headed by his father) that owned $15,500 in real property, $55,810 in personal property, and sixty-four slaves. But a fellow Klansman from the same county, Banks Kell, fifteen years old in 1860, lived with his mother whose occupation was listed as “domestic.” She owned two slaves and held $1,000 in real property and $3,750 in personal property.\(^{273}\) Though both families were members of the white slaveholding class, and both participated in racial violence, the Jones brothers were richer than their fellow Klansman—whose property holdings were still greater than half of all other Klan members—by a factor of more than ten. In 1870 Iredell Jones headed his own household and owned $40,000 in real property and $1,000 in personal property. Meanwhile, Banks Kell was employed as a farm laborer still living with his mother, who had $3,000 in real and $205 in personal property.\(^{274}\) Again Jones was more than ten times wealthier than a Klansman from his same county—a Klansman who fit into the middle of the Klan economic spectrum.

The disparity between elite and poorer Klansmen played out within Klan groups in several ways. One Klansman testified in a federal trial that he could not afford a horse for a raid, so a richer Klansman—one of the group’s leaders—lent horses to him and two of his fellow members.\(^{275}\) Other members might have been too poor to provide their own robes. The Chester

\(^{273}\) 1860 Census, M653, Roll 1228, Page 464, Image 338, and Slave Schedules, York, South Carolina, Image 89.

\(^{274}\) 1870 Census, M593, Roll 1512, Page 442A, Image 482.

\(^{275}\) Trial testimony of Julius Fortune, KKK NC, 441.
Conservative Clan received orders from its local “headquarters” that included a stipulation that “If it is impossible for all the members of any Klan to obtain Regalia, the Cyclops will have as many as practicable (not less than ten) made by general contributions of Klans to be kept for the use of Klan.”\textsuperscript{276} Scholars of the antebellum South have long analyzed the vast chasm of wealth between elites and middling families, so it is unsurprising that such disparity would be reflected in the backgrounds of Klan members as well.\textsuperscript{277} But alongside the data about slave ownership, the class differences suggested by property ownership values strongly contradict knee-jerk characterizations of Klan members as either exclusively elite or poor.

Another important revelation from a study of Klansmen’s property ownership is their marked decline in property value ownership between 1860 and 1870. The median combined property owned by Klansmen or their household heads in 1860 was $4,100, but by 1870 that had declined to just $1,000, less than one-fourth what it had been a decade before. This decline is notable because economic deprivation is typically given as an explanation for racial violence. Just as poorer white men were (and are) frequently blamed for participating in racial violence, so too is economic trouble typically seen as a root cause for participation in racial violence. And to a certain extent that played out with members of the Klan. The Civil War wrought enormous economic destitution on the southern countryside, and the immediate postwar years saw economic hardship and even famine amongst many southerners, white and black. The death of slavery further decreased the overall property holdings of Klansmen. Given that Klansmen drew disproportionately (but not exclusively) from the white southern elite, most of them suffered

\textsuperscript{276} General Orders of the Chester Conservative Clan, October 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.

\textsuperscript{277} See, for example, Stephanie McCurry’s Masters of Small Worlds, and West, From Yeoman to Redneck.
economically from the end of slavery, and all suffered from the destitution of the southern economy after the Civil War.

But a closer look shows that economic destitution is at best an unsatisfying explanation for Klan violence, and potentially a false one, for several interesting reasons. First, not all Klansmen suffered equally from economic disruption. To return to the data presented in Table 2.4, mean values for Klansmen’s property ownership decreased substantially, by factors of five to ten. But median values did not decline nearly as much, perhaps suggesting that many Klansmen—who already owned less property—lost less of it between 1860 and 1870. Second, the vast majority of ordinary white southerners also suffered substantial economic decline during Reconstruction and did not choose to join the Klan. Average white men who did not join the Klan also saw substantial decreases in their property ownership, though to a lesser degree than Klansmen (a decrease of roughly one-third to one-half). If economic privation alone could explain Klan membership, then even more white southerners should have joined than did.  

Additionally, the occupations that Klansmen held did not remarkably change between 1860 and 1870 or into 1880. Based upon the occupations Klansmen reported (roughly classified into categories of unskilled labor, land-owning farmers, and skilled professionals), only 8% of Klansmen saw an appreciable decline in their occupation between 1860 and 1870. By contrast, 21% of Klansmen saw their occupations increase in professional status from 1860 to 1870, and the majority held the same or a similar occupation as they had before the war. And the individual stories of those Klansmen who took occupations lower in the socioeconomic ladder of the South

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Other than the death of slavery—slaves being valued as property—several other factors might explain the changes between the 1860 and 1870 censuses. The South had crises over the valuation of land after the Civil War, as the death of slavery led to changes in land valuation, and as the new political coalitions of Reconstruction changed the basis for valuation and taxation. Furthermore, the methods by which the census takers themselves valued land, or asked individuals to report their property, were likely different between 1860 and 1870. Chapter Five further explores the economic changes of Reconstruction, and the ways Klan violence were caused by and in turn affected the postemancipation southern economic system.
were often more complicated than simple economic destitution. Benton Knight of Chatham County, North Carolina, for example, lived with his father who was a blacksmith in 1860, but was himself a farmer in 1870. That shift from professional worker to agricultural labor might be seen as a decline. But though his father only owned $800 in real property and $500 in personal property in 1860, by 1870 Knight himself owned $400 in personal property. And the life of a farmer who owned his own land might have been a significant improvement over being the son of a middling, possibly semi-skilled blacksmith.

For Klansmen like Knight, then, Reconstruction—though it entailed a substantial loss of the property values as reported in the census—did not destroy their economic livelihoods. And though slavery was destroyed, many Klansmen still employed and housed black laborers. A Klansman from York County, South Carolina named Theodore Byers in 1870 employed a 34-year-old black live-in domestic servant named Jane Ross, housed her three year old son, and also employed a 19-year-old black farm laborer named Adam Barris. Byers hated African Americans enough to join a secret violent organization to keep them politically, economically, and socially inferior to white southerners, but retained enough money and social power to employ them and live with them in his household. What his black employees thought about his membership in the Klan—of which they were unlikely to have been ignorant—is not known.

Klansmen saw similar occupational stability between 1870 and 1880. Klan violence essentially ended in 1872 because of a widespread federal crackdown and growing conservative political power. Democrats regained control in North Carolina in 1872, and passed a new state constitution in 1875 that rolled back many of the changes Republicans had previously

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279 1860 Census, M653, Roll 892, Page 2, Image 185; 1870 Census, M593, Roll1129, Page 57.
280 1870 Census, M593, Roll 1512, Page 466B, Image 531.
established to democratize the state. Democrats regained control in South Carolina in 1877 after a particularly violent campaign in 1876 led by Red Shirts—white Democratic paramilitary groups who did not conceal their identities. Though the 1880 census did not include property ownership figures, it remains revealing because it showed what Klansmen gained after the achievement of their political goals in terms of households and occupations.

Participation in the Klan might have afforded Klansmen an opportunity to climb the economic ladder after Reconstruction, or at least it did not hinder them. After Reconstruction’s reversal, 84% of Klansmen saw their occupations either stay the same (57%) or increase in social standing (27%). For example, William Bostick of Cleveland County, North Carolina was a farmer in 1870 but a dry goods merchant in 1880; James L. Hunter of Alamance County went from being a dry goods merchant and grocer in 1870 to county sheriff in 1880.281 Some Klansmen, 16% (more than between 1860 to 1870) experienced what could be seen as downward mobility in their occupations from 1870 to 1880. One of them was John S. Dixon, who in 1860 lived with his father, a millwright, then worked as a cabinetmaker in 1870.282 But by 1880 he was just a laborer.283 Another Klansman, Fred Blanchard of Alamance County, North Carolina went from being listed as a cabinetmaker in 1870 to a farmer in 1880.284 As with the changes between 1860 and 1870, individual stories could complicate this change, as “farmer” could be used to describe rich planters, and the 1880 census does not include real or personal property figures. It is possible that Blanchard traded up with this move from cabinet making to farming.


As a whole, despite the widespread economic destitution of the postbellum South, few members of the Ku Klux Klan had any significant decline in occupation between 1860 and 1880.

A final interesting phenomenon about men who joined the Ku Klux Klan was that many of them remained in their hometowns over the course of Reconstruction. Were they indeed the poorer, marginal white men whom contemporaries blamed for Klan violence, one might expect them to have a transient lifestyle in terms of where they lived. Only 35% of Klansmen moved to a different county over the twenty years that surrounded Reconstruction. This is perhaps an unsurprising number given the stable nature of the mostly rural communities in the postbellum South. But apologists for the Klan would frequently claim that prosecution of Klansmen broke up homes and caused suffering among families. The data speak a different truth. Fewer Klansmen, 25%, moved counties between 1870 and 1880, and most of those were to adjacent counties, not scattered across the South. Just under half, 49%, lived in towns with different names in 1870 and 1880, and many of those changes are likely a result of different naming conventions by census-takers. The majority of Klansmen were not itinerants or vagabonds and were able to continue leading a similar lifestyle during and after Reconstruction.

When combined with the data that Klansmen were overwhelmingly married with children by 1880, the fact that so many kept their occupations and stayed in their hometowns after Reconstruction paints a fascinating picture of demographic stability for most Klansmen. These findings about the general shared stability of Klansmen’s lives and households over the tumultuous years of Reconstruction are some of the most significant overall findings of this dissertation. Klan members were not social deviants or outcasts. There were no significant

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285 Towns frequently changed names, and the 1880 lacked a field for post office, which had been present in the 1860 and 1870 censuses. Given how many southerners lived in rural areas, parsing which areas fell under which towns was apparently a rather arbitrary practice.
demographic markers by which they differed substantively from other white conservative southerners. They came from a wide swath of white conservative southerner men: rich members of the planter elite, members of the fledgling postbellum artisan or merchant class, poor farm laborers. They differed in age, in marital status, and occupation.

When it came to concrete, real world markers, Klan members got what they wanted during the Reconstruction period. If anything Klansmen tended to come from a more privileged and settled stratum of white southern society. They built households of which they were the head, stayed in their communities, worked similar jobs, and did not seriously deviate from the patterns of other white southerners. This point will become even more pronounced in subsequent chapters that explore how Klansmen used violence to build a new racial hierarchy in which they took control of their political worlds, their social and economic lives, and their own households. * * * * *

What then does explain why so many white men—perhaps tens of thousands—who shared so little else joined a secret organization of racial terror? The major thing to change in these men’s lives between 1860 and 1870 was the abolition of slavery through the defeat of the Confederacy. It effected even those white men who had not owned slaves, but who in the 1870s asserted their right to exercise political and social control over African Americans through the use of vigilante violence. The principal demographic factor by which Klansmen differed from ordinary white southerners was that they were twice as likely to have been slaveowners. Having staked their future to the creation of a new nation state founded upon the principle of slave ownership, the collapse of the Confederacy and the death of slavery united a broad swath of the white southern male population behind the endeavor to forge a new form of white male mastery.
After the Confederacy’s defeat, those white men who felt particularly aggrieved over the course of Reconstruction united through the Ku Klux Klan. Not only the elites who had lost large plantations, some poor and middling white southern men who had aspired to the slaveholding elite found common cause in opposing black political equality. Rather than a shared economic background or identical ages and life situations, Klansmen were driven by a common opposition to the equality African Americans asserted and achieved through Reconstruction, and they were dedicated to the creation of a new hierarchy of white over black. Consequently, at times Klansmen disagreed over how violence was to be used and who was to control the organization. As the next chapter explores, though the Klan was a regional, coordinated organization, it also saw dissension and tensions in some part because of the varying backgrounds and agendas of its members.
David Schenck believed he was a respectable man. A prominent white Democratic lawyer from Lincolnton, North Carolina, Schenck traveled to Washington, D.C. to testify in front of the Joint Select Committee in December 1871. As Schenck told about the condition of affairs in his home state, he asserted time and again that although he was opposed to Republican policies, he had never raised a hand against the state or national government. Republicans on the committee, however, confronted Schenck with accusations that he was actually a leader of the Ku Klux Klan. Schenck calmly admitted that he had indeed joined the Klan soon after it spread to his county in 1868 because he wanted to participate in a conservative political club. He only consented to join the order, he said, when friends assured him that violence “was not the object or purpose of it, but merely a secret political society to promote the interests of the democratic party.” But committee Republicans had evidence of a different story.

They presented a deposition by a Klansman named T.A. Hope, also from Lincoln County. Hope’s deposition described raids in which he had participated and also detailed how Schenck was a prominent Klan leader who had ordered several of those raids. In particular Hope told of a meeting in Schenck’s law office where Schenck had ordered a raid upon a black man named Isaac Revels, who was rumored to have set fire to the barns of local white planters. Hope swore that he had “heard Schenck say, some time ago, in a conversation, that he was opposed to

286 Testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 362.
raiding, but if a raid was necessary it would be better to hang to a limb than whip, as dead men
tell no tales.”

Schenck, by Hope’s account, was a chief organizer of the secret group of white
conservative men whose violence was tearing apart the South, and not a benevolent or high-
minded man of nonviolent principles.

Though he admitted joining the Klan, Schenck categorically denied his involvement in
violence, thundering that Hope’s story was a “base tissue of falsehoods.” He called Hope “a very
low man,” and maintained that the atrocities committed by the Klan happened in spite of the
Klan’s political origins, not because of them. He even claimed to have helped disband three
Klan groups in Lincoln County. Any violence that had arisen, he said, was because by 1870
the Klan had “degenerated into a mob of rioters and marauders who plundered and abused friend
and foe alike, sparing neither party nor sex.” By his account it was certainly no longer an
organization with the goals of advancing conservative politics. He even said it included several
men that were Republicans—the ones “who had committed more offenses than any of them.”

Schenck’s denials and Hope’s deposition against him were not only tit-for-tat squabbles
about whether Schenck was an active Klan member. They were part of the contemporary debates
about the composition of the Ku Klux Klan. Those debates mattered even when the particular
circumstances could not be convincingly resolved. Hope’s deposition is apparently the only
surviving textual evidence of Schenck’s involvement with Klan violence. Schenck had been
disbarred by a local judge on suspicion of his having participated in the Klan, and a white
Republican testified to the Joint Select Committee that it was widely reported that Schenck was a

287 Deposition of T.A. Hope, read into testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 399.
288 Testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 398, 400.
289 Testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 362.
290 Testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 385, 374.
leader within Lincoln County. Schenck himself claimed to never have worn a disguise, and said that he had many elite friends—“gentlemen of high standing”—who had joined the Klan but also never wore a disguise, and “have used their influence in favor of peace and order.” Both North Carolina and the United State Congress had passed legislation outlawing secret political organizations that used disguises, so Schenck’s testimony was probably at least partially driven by a desire to avoid prosecution. Schenck’s diary survives to this day, but contains no mention of active involvement in the Klan (although several lines of writing in his entries about the Klan have been cut out). Attention also came to Schenck in 1874 when he shot Bob Burton, a black man who worked for him, in the leg with a shotgun. Schenck again had a defense against accusations that he participated in an unwarranted act of racial violence, claiming that Burton was drunk, had threatened him with a knife, and threw a rock at his head. The case was investigated by the local justice of the peace but dismissed.

Schenck’s story corresponds with two trends about Klan membership. First, white elites claimed to abhor and denounce racial violence but often committed it themselves. Second, in their denials, elites would often blame poorer white men like T.A. Hope for the worst atrocities occurring across the South. Schenck often served as a defense counsel for poor white men arrested for Klan activity, but he described his typical client with disdain. “They are in the lower orders of life,” he told the Joint Select Committee. “In our county there are iron manufacturers and there are large numbers of coalers and wood-choppers—the lower order of negroes and

291 Testimony of Plato Durham, KKK NC, 329, and testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 163.
292 Testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 388, 390.
293 Diary, David Schenck Papers, SHC.
294 H. C. Brogden to Attorney General George H. Williams, September 4, 1874, M1345, RG 60, NARA.
whites… These coalers are squatted all over that, and they have mostly committed these outrages… They are always in broils with the negroes, and fighting backward and forward.”

Despite the stability that Klansmen saw over their lives, despite the organization and coordination between Klan groups, and largely because of the relative diversity of the backgrounds of white conservative men who joined the Ku Klux Klan, there were significant tensions and conflicts between Klansmen. Members of the Klan disagreed about who could—and did—control the violence the Klan used, and those fractures often—though not always—occurred along lines of class. Differences of class and life situations like age and marital status within an organization based upon shared ideological goals of course do not necessitate frictions and fissures; a diverse organization is by no means necessarily a conflicted one. But differences amongst members of the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction often led to conflicts about who could mobilize violence and how violence would be used. Those disagreements and conflicts were exacerbated by the threat of prosecution when Republicans at state and federal levels began trying to limit Klan violence, but they were even present at the height the violence. Though the Klan was a regional, coordinated, and hierarchical organization, it sometimes did not operate as smoothly as its leaders intended.

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Though opposition to black political power united white southern conservatives across lines of class, the union was not always easy. Similar tensions had occurred before the Civil War, when the planter elite and poorer white southern men had an uneasy political alliance. Planters had often held contempt for poor white men even as they employed them as laborers; poorer and yeoman whites simultaneously despised and envied the planter elite even as they were

295 Testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 412-413.
financially indebted to them.\textsuperscript{296} The Civil War exacerbated some of these tensions, as many non-slaveholding whites blamed planters—and slavery—for the devastating conflict.

Other observers noticed these fractures. Many contemporary observers would claim that elites like David Schenck controlled the organization, but forced poor young men—“the youths of the country, the hard-laboring plow-boys”—to take the blame for the violence it committed. James M. Justice of Rutherford County, North Carolina was attacked by Klansmen after making a speech that said so directly. He had declared “that the same secession leaders had organized this midnight and exceedingly dangerous organization, and were pushing the poor men, the laboring men, forward to commit these deeds, and that when the day of trial came their secession leaders would step behind the curtain and say, ‘I had nothing to do with it,’ and leave the poor boys to suffer.”\textsuperscript{297}

But it appears that there was no neat division between elite leaders and common rank-and-file Klansmen. More accurately reflecting the diversity of Klan membership, one white North Carolinian testified to the Joint Select Committee that “I suppose you might consider them neighborhood leaders, some of them,” when asked about Klan leaders. But, he also noted, “There are some of these chiefs who are very ordinary men.”\textsuperscript{298} A North Carolina Klansman named J.R. Depriest testified in a trial of Klansmen in Raleigh that “reckless… young men who wanted fun” committed most of the violence. But when one of the attorneys asked him if raids were more likely to be made by “low-down men,” he declared that most members were “generally, very respectable” and came from respectable families.\textsuperscript{299} Depriest was the leader of a Klan den in

\textsuperscript{296} See, for example, McCurry, \textit{Masters of Small Worlds}, 93; 112-116.
\textsuperscript{297} Testimony of James M. Justice, \textit{KKK NC}, 115.
\textsuperscript{298} Testimony of J. B. Eaves, \textit{KKK NC}, 174.
\textsuperscript{299} Trial testimony of J. R. Depriest, \textit{KKK NC}, 427.
western North Carolina. He had served in the Confederate army and lost a leg during the Civil War. But instead of being a respectable white southern elite, James M. Justice testified that Depriest peddled whiskey and kept a “dram-shop,” and that he was “a man who drinks a great deal; a tolerably shrewd fellow, and I think a mighty mean one… a man who would not scruple to do anything that is mean.”

Depriest’s den split and several members left to form a new den, in Depriest’s telling, “because I would not allow them to raid.” Another member—who had sworn that raids could only be undertaken with approval of a chief—verified his account, testified that “we only changed name and chief,” not activities or rules.

Despite the supposedly strict hierarchical organization of the Klan, orders were not always followed. Central to T. A. Hope’s accusation was a story that Schenck had ordered a raid upon a black man named Isaac Revels. But Hope admitted that the attack never happened because two other groups of Klansmen had not arrived as ordered to carry out the attack, and the group Hope was in dispersed. Despite the coordination typical of Klan activities, in this particular instance the raid failed, the dens ordered did not show up, and Revels’s life was apparently spared.

There were even instances of Klansmen openly defying their chiefs. Witnesses at the federal trials in Columbia testified that Joseph Banks Lyle, a former Confederate major, was the chief or Grand Cyclops of the state of South Carolina. One white conservative from Columbia also declared Lyle to be the Grand Cyclops of the state. In his memoirs, the conservative

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300 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 146.
301 Trial testimony of J. R. Depriest, KKK NC, 426.
302 Trial testimony of John Harrill, KKK NC, 444.
303 Deposition of T. A. Hope, read into testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 399-400.
304 SC Trials, 633, 773, & 777.
claimed, on authority from a Klansman who had been there, that Lyle “called the Klans together late in that summer [1871], and told them that unless they ceased their outrages and excesses he would withdraw and wash his hands of the whole business.” Suggesting that the Klan had significant dissension, the South Carolina Klansmen at the meeting were said to refuse, telling Lyle “Your oath binds you to us and to all that we do; if you quit we will kill you.”

Lyle claimed to value restraint, but he was certainly not innocent of involvement in violence. He was a schoolteacher and ran the Limestone Springs Academy in the South Carolina upcountry after the Civil War. He was also a strident Democrat and prominently campaigned for the party, depicting himself and the party as decent, reasonable and compromising. He gave a speech to a Democratic club in August 1868 advocating that the Confederate debt be forgiven—an atypical position for most conservatives because “no question tends so much to distract & to divide our people as the question of debt.” Lyle painted himself as willing to compromise at a time when he declared “it is a matter of vital importance to us as a people that we be united on all great questions of national policy.” But despite claiming to value political compromise, and despite his supposed opposition to the scale of Klan violence, he had helped lead the massacre of a black militia company in the spring of 1871. He fled to Texas to avoid prosecution for his involvement; while in Texas he did not attempt to conceal his participation in the massacre.

Alongside class lines, Klansmen argued over who would control the violence. Some previous historians have asserted that the diversity of the Klan meant that it was not organized or

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305 Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 145.
306 “Mere-Mention,” Yorkville Enquirer, June 11, 1868; Joseph Banks Lyle Collection, SCL.
307 Joseph Banks Lyle, notes for a speech to a Democratic club at Limestone Springs, S.C., August 1, 1868, Joseph Banks Lyle Collection, SCL.
308 “Backward Glances,” From the Scrapbooks of the Late A. W. Neville, Editor of the Paris [Texas] News, 1936-1956, September 6, 1933, Joseph Banks Lyle Collection, SCL.
coordinated, asserting that “the Klan was not an organization struggling to police its boundaries but a heterogeneous mass movement that included organized elements.” Though accurate in asserting the general heterogeneity of the white conservative southern men who joined the Klan, such a view misses many instances of Klansmen in fact policing the organization. The strict emphasis upon hierarchical control, the selection of specific leaders, the existence of sworn oaths and written orders all underscore how Klan violence was premeditated, not haphazard. A corollary of the control Klansmen exercised over violence was the prevalence of disagreements about specific instances of its use.

One South Carolina Klansman, interviewed many years later by the Federal Writer’s Project, asserted that he had joined “a good clan—it was run right, to keep down sorry negroes and scalawags.” He described several instances of Klansmen killing African Americans, showing that he had no moral opposition to racial violence in general. But he contrasted his group to “another crowd” of men he called “’bush-whackers’, that had no scruples about shooting down negroes in the back or killing them on little provocation.” His claimed that he and his fellow Klansmen “never shot a negro in the back, and always gave him chance to defend himself or leave the country.” The overwhelming tendency for Klansmen to declare that they only used violence in a respectable manner was most likely intended to assuage their moral guilt (and mitigate legal culpability), but perhaps also demonstrated that the organization did not have a monolithic approach to violence.

Given the atrocities the organization committed, it would be too strong to describe Klansmen as ambivalent about violence, but there almost certainly were internal disagreements

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309 Parsons, “Midnight Rangers,” 816.

310 James R. Davidson, interview by G. Leland Summer, April 15, 1938, Federal Writers’ Project, Cabinet H, Drawer 4, Folder 13, SCL.
about violence’s use. Those might have even spilled into open conflicts between Klan dens. A South Carolina conservative who did not himself join the Klan recalled in his memoir that within Union County in the upcountry

there were several Klans, and each Klan could make its own raid. They undertook to govern all things at their own sweet will. For instance there were two clans which I will denominate as A and B. The respective chiefs of which were at enmity. One night the chief of A ordered out his Klan went to the house of the chief of B and gave him a sound thrashing. The next night the whipped Chief with his Klan retaliated in like manner on the chief of A.\footnote{Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 145.}

Such an account fits into the widespread conservative narrative that the Klan was composed of innately, criminally violent men instead of community leaders, and thus might be an exaggeration. There is little other evidence of actual violence between Klan dens.

More common, however, were instances where Klansmen used violence to punish members who ratted them out. T. J. Downey, a white man from Rutherford County, North Carolina, was whipped for having joined the order for the purpose of learning more about it and sharing that knowledge with the Republicans in Rutherford investigating the Klan.\footnote{Trial testimony of T. J. Downey, KKK NC, 437.} In South Carolina, a Klansman known as Faulkner was shot and killed by disguised men as he recovered from gunshot wounds received from a black Republican county commissioner who returned fire when Klansmen attacked his family. Some rumored that Republicans had killed Faulkner, but most people suspected that his fellow Klansmen killed him because they feared he would turn state’s witness and name names.\footnote{Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 72-73.}

The Klan’s rise had been coordinated and connected as white conservatives in the Carolinas were united against the common foe of black political participation and Republican
political success. But when Republican power, either at the state or federal level, was used to arrest Klansmen, the alliance began to fray. A few white conservatives abandoned the Klan when arrests began. When Alamance County, North Carolina was declared by Governor Holden to be in a state of insurrection, sixteen white conservatives publicly renounced their membership for the purpose of seeing “that the signs, grips, and pass-words of this organization are fully exposed, together with the plans of operations, &c., so that the people everywhere may see with their own eyes,” and thus “restoring peace and good order in our county.”  

Some Klansmen—at least nine, and likely more—turned state’s evidence when arrested and provided information about the organization in order to gain a lighter sentence or be immediately released; many others volunteered to do so. Several Klansmen, when arrested, would swear that though they had been initiated into the order, they had never seen a disguise, had never been on a raid, and desired to see the violence stop. Hardy Layton, of Sampson County, North Carolina, confessed that he had joined the Klan but swore that he never went on a raid. “It is true I don’t want the troops in here,” he said, “but I want this thing put down.”  

Similar denials might have been true in individual instances, but they were common enough to form a kind of pattern. The denial of ever having seen a disguise or having been on a raid were both clearly attempts to avoid prosecution for those activities that had been made illegal at both state and national level to suppress the Klan. Many would admit their participation, probably because others could easily swear that they had been involved. Proving participation in violence, however, was more difficult, and could more easily be denied.  

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314 NC Report, xxii.

315 Deposition of Hardy Laton, J. S. M. Evans to A.T. Ackerman, November 24, 1871, M1345, RG 60, NARA.

316 See, for example, numerous depositions and affidavits included in correspondence from J. S. M. Evans to A.T. Ackerman, November 24, 1871, M1345, RG 60, NARA.
Even staunch Klansmen offered to report on their comrades when facing federal prison time. Randolph Abbott Shotwell of Rutherford County, North Carolina—who in his later memoirs compared the Klan to the Boston Tea Party and wrote that “I never knew of, read of, or in any way heard of a single instance of punishment by the Ku Klux Klan that was not plainly and unmistakably deserved by the recipient”—struck a different tone when imprisoned in a federal penitentiary in Albany, New York. After having been sentenced to six years imprisonment and a fine of $5,000, he declared himself “willing to appear in evidence against certain parties,” and declared “that if put upon the stand I may be able to make other useful disclosures.” Among the information that he volunteered was a story that Joseph Banks Lyle of South Carolina had organized a Klan raid to free several Klansmen who were held in a prison in Rutherford, North Carolina. Lyle canceled the raid upon the realization that the prisoners were being guarded by U.S. Army troops. Shotwell, upset that he was convicted and sent to prison in Albany instead of freed in a daring Klan raid, tried to lash out at Lyle, who apparently was never caught.

The threat of prosecution not only led to conflicts between Klansmen, but also highlighted how people perceived class differences between Klansmen. When federal troops arrived in the South Carolina upcountry to begin arresting members, Major Marcus Reno of the U.S. Seventh Cavalry wrote to a member of the Joint Select Committee to report that “property holders are willing & anxious to do any thing to prevent a recurrence of” violence. In addition

317 Randolph Abbott Shotwell, The Papers of Randolph Abbott Shotwell, ed. J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton and Rebecca Cameron (Raleigh: The North Carolina Historical Commission, 1931), II, 345 (emphasis in original); D. H. Starbuck to A. T. Ackerman, February 24, 1872, M1345, RG 60, NARA.

318 R.A. Shotwell to Captain J. S. McEwan, October 16, 1871, M1345, RG 60, NARA.

319 Captain J. S. McEwan to Attorney General A. T. Ackerman, October 18, 1871, M1345, RG 60, NARA. This was perhaps the canceled raid that James M. Justice had detailed.
the threat of prosecution, he credited “the active part taken by some of the men of property to show the folly of such deeds” for a decline in Klan activity.³²⁰ Elite conservatives desired to be seen as helping to stop Klan violence, not orchestrate it, once prosecutions began. But the presence of U.S. troops was the major contributing factor to decreasing violence, not the actions of the white elites. Reno also noted that the only recent incident of violence occurred when Klansmen whipped a man in Union County, while his troops were stationed in another county.

Though the supposedly strict hierarchy of the organization of the Klan had far more fractures than their oaths and orders were intended to allow, stories that elite leaders could not control the actions of their poorer rank-and-file members were, at best, overly-simplistic. Shotwell’s offer to testify against Lyle stemmed from anger at Lyle’s calculation that attacking a jail guarded by U.S. Army troops was unwise, not anger at any moral objection to racial violence on Lyle’s part. And neither Shotwell nor Lyle were poor. Shotwell was the son of a very prominent Presbyterian minister and remembered as “a very shrewd man and an excellent writer,” but also “a man of disreputable character” who frequently got drunk and was shot by a former employer for insolence.³²¹

Instead, these back and forth accounts show that the fractures of the Klan could transcend easy class divisions. J.R. Depriest, when testifying in a different federal trial, said that Shotwell had sworn him into the order, but “he said they were raiding too much, and wanted me to help him stop it. That it was outside of the order to whip and raid so much down there.”³²² His

³²⁰ Major Marcus A. Reno to Senator John Scott, September 6, 1871, M947, RG 60, NARA. Reno later took most of the public blame for the disastrous Battle of the Little Bighorn, in which most members of the Seventh Cavalry—the same troops who had helped to arrest the Klan in South Carolina—were killed under the command of George Armstrong Custer.

³²¹ See also trial testimony of John Harrill, KKK NC, 445.

³²² Testimony by James M. Justice, KKK NC, 147; see also trial testimony of J. R. Depriest, KKK NC, 425.
account might partially be seen as a strategy to avoid his own prosecution and the conviction of his comrades. The defense attorney defending Klansmen had prompted Depriest by asking “Didn’t Shotwell tell you that they were raiding too much, and it must be stopped?” And the account that Shotwell wanted raiding to decline does not match well with other accounts of his life, either his own memoirs which celebrated the violence of Reconstruction or stories from contemporaries that he ordered and participated in several raids.\textsuperscript{323}

The stories that elites tried to stop Klan violence lasted beyond Reconstruction and spilled into the early histories of it by conservatives sympathetic to the Klan. A predominant theme in accounts by the first chroniclers of the Klan was that “the Klan was, in the main, composed of the very best men of the country—peaceable, law-loving, and law-abiding men, men of good habits and character, men of property and intelligence.”\textsuperscript{324} Just like the accounts told by Klansmen under threat of conviction, the principal intention for the stories by early chroniclers was to point blame for the violence of Reconstruction elsewhere. What violence took place, these apologists asserted, happened for one of two reasons. Some would claim that black political activism and Republican control were so evil that even respectable men were more or less forced to commit violence in order to right the wrongs they were supposedly suffering. Others pointed their fingers at other white southerners. One conservative who had not been in the Klan reminisced that the Klan was founded by elites, but that “the dread they inspired by their midnight marches, disguises, and punishments induced the lowest element of our white people to join,” so that by 1871 “[the] Ku Klux committed outrages that their leaders abjured and

\textsuperscript{323} J. B. Eaves, for example, testified that Shotwell had fired a pistol near the Rutherfordton court house before the Klan raid on James M. Justice; testimony of J. B. Eaves, \textit{KKK NC}, 177.

\textsuperscript{324} Richardson, \textit{Historic Pulaski}, 51.
condemned, but could not prevent nor expose."  

Another account claimed that “deeds of violence were done by men who were Ku Klux, but who, while acting under cover of their connection with the Klan, were not under its orders. But because these men were Ku Klux the Klan had to bear the odium of wrongdoing.”

Some historians have picked up on such accounts, and concluded that after its spread, “The nature of its membership changed, more violent men became dominant, and Klan groups behaved like ordinary criminal bands.” Others have focused upon the supposed conflicts between elites and poorer Klansmen to conclude that “If there was a pattern beyond local action, it was of a movement that the organizers could start up but then find themselves unable to stop.” But instead conflicts between Klan members, in addition to highlighting the general diversity of membership in the Klan, show that there were no real, dedicated voices for stopping violence internal to the Klan. Instead members struggled over who could control Klan violence and who ought to have been blamed for it when arrests began.

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There was more hesitation about violence by those white conservative southern men who never joined the Klan, though nearly every white conservative southerner supported Klansmen’s political goals. Consequently, some Republicans held prominent conservatives responsible for the violence, whether they were members of the Klan or not. Their accusations were often wrapped up in assumptions about class differences. One white U.S. commissioner in North Carolina who helped prosecute the Klan testified that he had never “had a case… where [a

325 Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 142 & 144.
326 Richardson, Historic Pulaski, 52-53.
327 Rable, But There Was No Peace, 92.
328 Summers, A Dangerous Stir, 256.
Klansman] had any property at all.” But in contrast to those who asserted that the elites controlled the violence committed by young men without property, this Republican asserted that elites could stop the violence if they wanted:

if such men as lead and control, and have led and controlled, the democratic party in the South for the last ten years would take some interest in suppressing the organization… if they would undertake to put it down, it would go down. There is no doubt about that. William A. Graham could put down the whole Ku-Klux organization in Orange County. I do not mean to say that Mr. Graham is at the head of it, or that he puts it forward; but I do say that by saying nothing he winks at it.

There was no evidence of Graham’s involvement in the Klan, but other white Republicans made similar assumptions that inaction by white conservatives directly aided the Klan. Most asserted that the Klan was “made up of the lower classes of society”—one Republican presumed that “those men who do the actual killing are desperadoes.” But they also blamed elites for supporting such violence. James L. Orr, provisional Republican governor of South Carolina, was more sympathetic to conservative elites than most, but even he declared that he thought “the better portion of the community are responsible for these acts no further than that they do not use their influence, both morally and in actually enforcing the law.”

Some white conservatives were indeed ambivalent about Klan violence. Robert Wallace Shand, from the South Carolina upcountry, who apparently never did join the Klan, recounted in his memoirs that he “was never a member of the Ku Klux Klan, openly opposed it, and succeeded in keeping some others out—for which they afterwards thanked me.” Pride Jones, a conservative from Orange County, North Carolina, testified to the Joint Select Committee that he

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329 Testimony of A. Webster Shaffer, KKK NC, 34.
330 Testimony of A. Webster Shaffer, KKK NC, 46.
332 Testimony of James L. Orr, KKK SC, 7.
333 Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 144.
was contacted by North Carolina Governor William Holden to communicate with leaders of the Klan in an attempt to reduce violence. He testified that the men he contacted were “of respectable position,” and that he “told them that it was clearly to their interest to disband and commit no further offenses; that I thought it was all wrong anyhow, and they did disband.”\(^{334}\) But violence did not stop in the North Carolina piedmont. Pride Jones was the uncle of the Jones brothers of Hillsboro, North Carolina and Rock Hill, South Carolina, four of whom were active Klan members, so his interest in actually prosecuting Klansmen was undoubtedly limited. He also frequently blamed the victims of Klan violence for the attacks they suffered.

Sometimes the former owners of African Americans attacked by the Klan opposed the violence. One former slave told of a Klan raid against a black dance, where the former plantation owner, “Ole Marster Barry wuz mad, case he ain’t sent fer ‘em at all an’ he doan want dem.”\(^{335}\) Essic Harris rented from a white man who had promised him that “there’s no Ku Klux about” his place, and that “They will never bother you.”\(^{336}\) One black woman in Rutherford County, North Carolina, was attacked by Klansmen, who also beat her former owner, an old white widow, when the widow tried to stop the whipping.\(^{337}\) Though these white southerners might not have opposed the work of the Klan in the abstract, they were upset by individual attacks upon African Americans they closely knew.

But most white conservative men shared the political goals of the Klan and supported its work in their own ways. James M. Justice testified that he was friends with an older white man from North Carolina who

\(^{334}\) Testimony of Pride Jones, KKK NC, 12 & 1.
\(^{335}\) Interview with Tina Johnson, Born in Slavery, Volume XI, Part 2, 22.
\(^{336}\) Testimony of Essic Harris, KKK NC, 93.
\(^{337}\) Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 105.
told me that this Ku-Klux was a capital thing, that they could not live without it; that the boys did some bad deeds sometimes which they ought not to do, but that the organization was a good thing, and was necessary to control the negroes. When he told me this it was a very cool morning, and he said, “If it was not for them we would not be sitting here by this fire this morning, for the negroes would take it away from us.” Said he, “The negroes are working well, and the fear of the Ku-Klux keeps them about right and proper.”

Such sentiments about the general necessity of Klan violence, paired with slight ambivalence about the “bad deeds” of violence, were common. And blaming the black victims of Klan violence for the attacks they suffered, and asserting an essential predilection for crime on the part of African Americans, were both common parts of the construction of narratives that provided ideological and rhetorical support for Klan violence. Justice said as much in his own testimony, telling the Joint Select Committee that it was his belief that nine-tenths of the democratic party in North Carolina are either members of the order, or have an idea of its workings and intentions, and secretly or slyly encourage it; and some of them openly and boldly do so by their speeches and their writings, by apologizing for the outrages, or denying them, and also denouncing the subjects of the outrages as vile persons guilty of some crime.

He blamed most conservatives, and newspaper editors especially, for encouraging the violence. Another major narrative that white conservatives sympathetic to the Klan constructed was the claim that most conservatives were such respectable men that it was impossible for them to be members of the Klan. One white conservative from Columbia, South Carolina, testified that the Klansmen arrested and brought to trial were “some of the best citizens we had, who had no more to do with it than the man in the moon.” They would assert that the Klan could not have been organized. Another South Carolina conservative testified that he thought “if there was a permanent organization in the district, it would soon be known, and the courts would be strong

338 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 137.
339 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 145.
340 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 98.
enough to put it down; but I do not believe there is a permanent organization.”\footnote{Testimony of C. H. Suber, \textit{KKK SC}, 160.} Furthermore, a report produced for the Senate investigating the Klan referenced conservatives who “have stated that they believe person and property are as secure under the laws of North Carolina as under those of Massachusetts or Pennsylvania,” citing the conviction of three black men in Alamance County who committed crimes while disguised to hide their identity. However, the report sardonically noted, “With the exception of the outrages committed by the secret armed bands of Ku-Klux, the statement [that person and property were secure] is true.” It was a big exception.\footnote{\textit{NC Report}, xxvi.}

Similar to James M. Justice, many Republicans, at both local and national levels, would blame conservative newspaper editors for supporting and fostering Klan membership.\footnote{Historians of Reconstruction have noted the relationship between conservative newspaper editors and violence. Hannah Rosen, in studying the massive race riot in Memphis in 1866, argued that “White conservative newspaper editors in Memphis told their audience that black men were not sufficiently in control of the inner nature—the violence understood to be lurking inside all men but mastered by those men who were ‘civilized’—to be worth of power and authority in public;” \textit{Terror in the Heart of Freedom}, 49.} Ulysses S. Grant, after his 1868 presidential victory, gave an interview wherein he stated his concern at “the palpable fact that rebels in editorial places can easily break the terms of the parole by advocating incendiary doctrines and fomenting turbulence and bloodshed.” He was quoted as saying “I’d like to see the tone of the rebel papers now,” after his election. “I imagine they will quiet down, as they did after Lee’s surrender.”\footnote{“Grant Speaks,” \textit{Yorkville Enquirer}, November 26, 1868.}

As with everyday conservatives, most conservative newspaper editors claimed to oppose the Klan. The editor of the \textit{Yorkville Enquirer}, a Democratic paper from the South Carolina upcountry, publicly stated that “We believe no good can come from such organizations, and
regret to hear of the K. K. K.’s in our midst” in April 1868 as the organization spread there.\textsuperscript{345} Simultaneously many editors were supportive of Klansmen’s political goals. The \textit{Newberry Herald}, another Democratic paper from the South Carolina upcountry, ran an article claiming to be written by a correspondent from the stars. The supposed celestial observer noticed with satisfaction among you an organization, which originated in the unfortunate State of Tennessee, and which since spreading to the right and left, has permeated the society of your gallant State; we allude to the K.K.K.’s. This organization is destined to work for good. Tyranny and oppression will bend before it; darkness and falsehood will be brought to light.

Trafficking in the otherworldly and spectral imagery of which Klansmen were so fond, the author declared “These mysterious bodies are moving silently and promptly, with mystic sign and startling emblem.” He gave a warning to Republicans, declaiming “Woe to the oppressor, the assassin, the midnight prowler and the betrayer of his country”—roles that Republicans might rightfully have accused Klansmen of playing.\textsuperscript{346}

Conservative southern newspapers also promoted many of the narratives other white conservatives used to justify Klan violence. They often claimed that stories of Klan violence were made up by African Americans. The \textit{Yorkville Enquirer} also printed a column from a correspondent from nearby Chester claiming that “The excitement among the darkies about the K. K. K’s, has simmered down completely, and everything is quiet here. The whole thing has been an unfounded ‘scare,’ from the beginning—no such mischievous organization existing here, save in excited imaginations.”\textsuperscript{347} The \textit{Charleston Courier} reported that its editors “incline[d] to the opinion that the whole matter [of the Klan] is an egregious sell, and the self-sacrificing

\textsuperscript{345} “Local Items,” \textit{Yorkville Enquirer}, April 2, 1868.

\textsuperscript{346} “Glimpses from Another World; Or What the Seven Stars Saw. No. III,” \textit{The Newberry Herald}, May 6, 1868.

parties may, with safety, pitch into the good offices.” Others went much further, publishing information at the request of Klansmen, including ads, threats, and warnings. Some conservative newspaper editors seem to have had an even closer knowledge of the Klan. In the spring of 1871, at the height of violence in the South Carolina upcountry, the *Newberry Herald* published an item that “Section VI. of K. K. K., 54th division, reads: The good and virtuous have nothing to fear from us; we are their friends. Let the vile and vicious beware; we are their enemies.” How the paper got such an item from the supposedly secret rules of a Klan den was left unsaid.

White conservatives’ statements about ambivalence towards Klan violence should not be dismissed out of hand. Several undoubtedly were disturbed by the violence tearing apart southern communities. Longstreet Gantt of Winnsboro, South Carolina, a boy during Reconstruction, recalled to an interviewer with the Federal Writers’ Project in 1938 that “I remember the Ku Klux, but I didn’t approve of them. They did some good, but did many wrong things. I remember when they took seven or eight negro prisoners out of jail and hung them.” But on the whole, most white conservatives differed from Klansmen only in the level of their engagement with violence, not their larger political goals.

The point is especially magnified when compared to the opinions of those white southerners who, previously having supported the Confederacy, denounced the Klan decisively. W. P. Bynum, a lawyer from Lincoln County—the home of David Schenck—had been appointed state solicitor for portions of western North Carolina by the Confederate legislature in 1863, and again elected popularly, by both white and black men, under the 1868 constitution. Declaring

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350 Interview of Longstreet Gantt by G. L. Summer, unpublished manuscript, November 21, 1938, Federal Writers’ Project, Cabinet H, Drawer 4, Folder 13, SCL.
himself a member of “no party,” he came to support Republicans in large part because he opposed Klan violence. In a letter to Governor Holden he declared that “as a law officer, I can do nothing through the ordinary channels of the courts. In my judgment, there are only two ways of arresting the evil: First by arousing public opinion to put it down; or, secondly, by invoking the aid of United States troops, and making some sharp and decisive examples.”351 Such unequivocal and strong opposition from other white moderates or conservatives was essentially nonexistent.

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The debates between conservatives and Klansmen, the arguments between Klansmen, and the accusations about the Klan leveled by Republicans were all attempts to pin the blame for Klan violence on specific populations: elite white conservatives, poor young Klansmen, even the victims themselves. But the Klan drew from a wide swath of white southern society. Jason Wethrow, a Klansman from western North Carolina, was asked in a federal trial whether the men in his den were “generally low-down or respectable men?” He responded, “They were all conservatives,” demonstrating that political beliefs functioned as a proxy for class standing and respectability among Klansmen. When asked again where his comrades ranked in standing, he replied, “They stood pretty fair.” And Wethrow knew that the political project of the Klan was paramount. He testified that the purpose for membership in the Klan was “To take in any person they could, so they could gain the election.”352

The Klan could not be excused away as having come from the margins of white southern society. Poorer white men were less likely to have joined the Klan, either because they did not have the time to participate in night riding, or because they believed they had less to gain from

351 Testimony of W. P. Bynum, NC Report, 56.
352 Trial testimony of Jason Wethrow [Witherow], KKK NC, 449.
the establishment of Democratic rule. All socioeconomic segments of the white southern male population were represented in Klan membership. Their whiteness and masculinity united Klansmen, as did their conservative politics—to which the next chapter turns.
CHAPTER FOUR: REMAKING A “WHITE MAN’S GOVERNMENT”: ELECTORAL POLITICS AND KLAN VIOLENCE

One night in late January 1870, in Rutherford County, North Carolina, the Klansmen of a newly formed den met on Cherry Mountain. The donned their costumes—most had pale red robes with masks, but one wore a robe a deeper shade of red, made of flannel—and rode out on their first raid. They attacked an old African American man named Nelson Birge, whipping him severely. A local white Republican later claimed that the Klansmen selected Birge as their first victim because he was old and black.\(^353\) Perhaps they thought he would not put up much of a fight; perhaps they wanted to see how a black victim would respond to their disguises and tactics. Based on patterns of Klan attacks elsewhere in the state, it was unlikely that an attack on a single black man would result in a successful prosecution. For the Klansmen of the Cherry Mountain den, Birge’s whipping was, more or less, a trial run.

Remembered as “a man of excellent character” by his former owner, Birge was also a Republican.\(^354\) The attack upon him thus fits well with how most scholars have framed the violence of Reconstruction. In the deep and distinguished literature on the politics of Reconstruction, Klansmen often appear as instrumentalist actors with the clear-cut political goal of disfranchising Republican voters and supporting the work of the Democratic Party.\(^355\) But the

\(^{353}\) Testimony of James M. Justice, \textit{KKK NC}, 153; Justice also provided a description of their robes.

\(^{354}\) Testimony of James M. Justice, \textit{KKK NC}, 105.

\(^{355}\) Allen Trelease has contended that after its founding as a social organization in Tennessee, the Klan “was soon transformed into a terrorist organization aiming at the preservation of white supremacy;” \textit{White Terror}, xi. George Rable made a similar assertion that “some southerners turned to the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist
specific kind of violence targeted against black Republicans like Nelson Birge was only one of many kinds of political violence Klansmen committed—violence that had different political effects. The same group of Klansmen committed several other attacks in Rutherford County.

Some two or three weeks after the attack upon Birge, on a cold February night with a blanket of snow on the ground, a group of roughly a dozen Klansmen from the Cherry Mountain den rode out on their second major raid.

They rode to the small farmhouse of James and Malinda McGaha and broke down the door. They found Malinda inside and demanded to know where her husband had gone. Malinda protested that James was away hunting with his eldest son. The Klansmen, unsatisfied with her news, ransacked the house, looking for him and loudly demanding his shotgun and pistol.

Malinda again said that James was gone, and had his guns with him. One of the Klansmen, dressed in a darker red robe, shoved her against the fireplace. Only the Klansmen, Malinda, and her four children—still in the house—know exactly what happened, but later accounts maintained she suffered no other injuries or abuse. Eventually the Klansmen left.356

James returned home a few hours later to find his house despoiled, his wife and children distraught. He gathered friendly neighbors and formed a posse to avenge the assault. They followed tracks in the February snow leading from his house to the farm of a neighbor, Samuel Biggerstaff, one of the Klansmen in the raid. The posse fired several shots into Samuel’s cabin to

organizations, using terrorism to eliminate opposition leaders and to strike fear into the hearts of rank-and-file Republicans, both black and white;” Rable, But There Was No Peace, xv. And Steven Hahn has written that “Klan violence demonstrated that political power in the Reconstruction South grew out of the barrel of a gun,” in A Nation Under Our Feet, 283.

no apparent effect. The Klansmen had already left, most likely to whip another white man and an elderly black woman, their other victims that night. McGaha’s posse disbanded and returned home. The next morning, Malinda told James that one of her attackers was a neighbor, Decatur DePriest, whose face she believed she had seen through his homemade mask. Seeking vengeance for the assault upon his wife and home, James McGaha went to the DePriest farm, where Decatur lived with his father, knocked on the front door, and shot Decatur dead.

The McGahas were white farmers of modest means. After the attack McGaha and his family left their home, perhaps staying in the county for a short while; there were rumors that he burned the barns of some local white conservatives in retaliation before fleeing the state. The family eventually moved west, settling in French Lick, Indiana by 1880, James never having been convicted for the murder of Decatur DePriest.

Unlike the attack upon Nelson Birge, several things might make the attack upon Malinda McGaha seem divorced from the typical political violence of Reconstruction. The chief victim of the Klansmen’s violence was a white woman who could not vote. The intended target, James, was the one who wielded the most violence—DePriest, the Klansman, was killed, not a member of the McGaha family. And James and his family were not known as Republicans. Though one white Republican from Rutherford testified that McGaha was also a Republican, at a later trial of Klansmen accused of another raid, one Klansman testified that McGaha was “a mean man” who talked too much, and he had even voted the Democratic ticket before. A white Republican testified to the Joint Select Committee that he did not know McGaha’s politics; locally he was

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357 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 138.

358 The 1880 census recorded James McGahey, born in North Carolina, living in French Lick, Indiana, with children of the same names as those of the James McGaha in the 1870 census; 1880 Census, Series T9, Roll 302, Page 138.

359 Testimony of J. B. Eaves, KKK NC, 188; trial testimony of Julius Fortune, KKK NC, 443.
known as “a very ordinary man, but a very fighting kind of man,” and that the Klansmen “said he was a bad man, or a liar, or something of that kind.”360 Rather than his electoral politics, the Klansmen went to his house seeking to disarm and punish him because James McGaha had reported on the Klansmen’s illegal alcohol distilling to revenue authorities.

Rather than trying to suppress a Republican voter, the Klansmen were working to defend their moonshining. The making of illegal whiskey is rarely seen as a political act. Some historians have even contended that the activities of moonshining Klansmen in the mountain South were more or less divorced from the politics of Reconstruction.361 But even this raid both reflected and influenced the conflicts over electoral politics during Reconstruction.

Though James McGaha might not have been an active Republican, the friends he gathered into a posse to pursue the Klansmen mostly were. Some six or seven of his male neighbors armed themselves and joined McGaha in tracking the Klansmen, many of whom were Republicans. Prominent among those neighbors was Aaron Biggerstaff, the half-brother of Samuel Biggerstaff (to whose house the tracks in the snow led and into whose house the posse fired to no apparent effect).362 In contrast to his half-brother the Klansman, Aaron was a very outspoken Republican; he had been a Unionist before the war and was a member of at least one local Republican organization. Biggerstaff’s political prominence later led to two different attacks by Klansmen upon him and his family. That McGaha could so quickly gather Republican

360 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC 151.

361 Allen Trelease, after asserting that the Klan’s work always slanted towards white supremacy, added a parenthetical that “perhaps the major exception to this rule was in some mountain counties of Georgia, North Carolina, and other states, where the Klan protected moonshiners,” in White Terror, xlvi.iiii. Bruce Stewart seconds this argument in his article, “‘When Darkness Reigns Then Is The Hour To Strike: Moonshining, Federal Liquor Taxation, and Klan Violence in Western North Carolina, 1868-1872’” North Carolina Historical Review Vol. 80, No. 4. (October 2003), writing “These attacks on revenuers and the absence of a large black population indicate that not only race, but also local issues—including federal liquor taxation—shaped Klan violence in the region,” 454.

362 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 161.
neighbors to try to combat Klan violence hints that partisan electoral politics might have been
more important to the incident than the accounts of McGaha’s own voting record might suggest.

Furthermore, by reporting on the Klansmen’s bootlegging to revenue authorities, McGaha had supported the new expansion of federal authority that came with post-Civil War revenue laws that imposed stricter penalties on bootlegging. That authority had come from legislation passed during the Civil War by northern Republicans and came to the South in the form of revenue agents who were Republican patronage appointments. Thus by reporting to those agents about the activities of the Cherry Mountain den, McGaha had supported a Republican state apparatus that many white conservatives found politically distasteful.

But most importantly, the fact that the same men who attacked Nelson Birge raided the McGaha family showed that the Klansmen themselves saw their work as connected. Though working to protect their illicit distilling interests, these Klansmen had chosen to join the Ku Klux Klan for explicitly political reasons. In the series of oaths that Klansmen in the western part of North Carolina swore, the second oath was “I reject and oppose the principles of the radical party.” A young man in the Cherry Mountain den that raided the McGahas testified that when he was sworn into the order, a leader—who was also a bootlegger—“came and tied a handkerchief over my face, and said if I wanted to belong to a white man’s government I must be blindfolded and take the oath while I was blindfolded.”

When they joined the order, these Klansmen pledged not to protect the immediate interests of their fellow moonshiners, but to build a “white man’s government”—understood to

363 KKK 25.
364 Trial testimony of Jason Wethrow [Witherow], KKK NC, 446.
be a white conservative Democratic one. Even in those places where it seemed like Klansmen were wielding a politics that did not strictly involve a racial hierarchy, they understood their political program in racial terms. Klansmen across the South used the phrase to describe their political goals. In eastern North Carolina, members of the Constitutional Union Guard would be asked “Do you believe in a white man's government? Do you promise to labor faithfully for the overthrow of the — party?” The Klansman administering the oath would ensure the initiate would say “Republican.”

An exclusive focus on how Klan violence supported the Democratic Party can obscure the different forms and effects of Klan violence, which suggest the diversity of Reconstruction’s political conflicts. The Klan’s political project went beyond removing African Americans from the body politic. As Klansmen and white conservatives used it, the phrase “white man’s government” functioned as a referent, not a literal term. The presidency, the governorships of North and South Carolina, and the majority of southern political offices were held by white men during Reconstruction. But members of the Ku Klux Klan and sympathetic white conservatives saw political beliefs as an essential part of the definitions of whiteness and manliness.

Klansmen indeed worked to support the Democratic Party. They disfranchised Republican voters, black and white, assassinated Republican politicians, and destabilized Republican Party organizations. But violence was not the only legacy of the Klan. Simultaneous to the violence, white conservatives defended and sought to justify it. Randolph Abbott Shotwell, a Klansman from western North Carolina, later wrote in his memoirs that “Radicalism and

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365 Kidada Williams has analyzed how the idea of a “white man’s country” was an antebellum idea, writing “As the rhetoric of the sectional crisis and the early years of the Civil War revealed, many whites had seen the nation as a ‘white man’s’ country and the war as a ‘white man’s’ conflict,” in They Left Great Marks, 59. Williams argues that the idea was resurrected and made stronger after 187.

366 Testimony of George W. Tillon, NC Report, ci.
rascality became nearly synonymous in those days.” In language highly typical of how conservatives defended the violence of the Klan, he wrote:

> I challenge the world to prove that in North Carolina the Klan ever visited an house, or whipped, or otherwise interfered with a man or woman, whose moral character was above reproach, and who was an inoffensive, well meaning person! …I must concede they were often acting illegally, but I can conscientiously declare that no man was ever molested for political opinion’s sake alone; he must have been rascal as well as Radical.³⁶⁷

In blaming the victims of Klan violence for the attacks they suffered, white southern men like Shotwell asserted their right to commit political violence against men they saw as both rascals and radicals. But Shotwell also claimed that the essential purpose of the Klan was not political, a claim of course unsupported by historical evidence. But many—perhaps most—white southern conservatives made it in public forums like federal testimonies as well as their personal correspondences. When Klansmen and white conservatives made denials like Shotwell’s, they were engaged in a process of creating a narrative that Reconstruction’s radical expansion of political power was illegitimate, ineffective, and even unnatural.

Both Klan violence and narrative justifications for it crafted by white conservatives worked to build an ideological framework—a series of beliefs about acceptable behaviors to support a new racial hierarchy. In that hierarchy, only certain white men could hold political power, and there was no room whatsoever for black political participation. Just as Klansmen used violence to remove those southerners they believed ought not be involved in electoral politics, both Klansmen and white conservatives who did not themselves join the Klan used the narrative of recreating “a white man’s government” to justify the violence and codify their political program into a new racial hierarchy. That hierarchy existed in a world where white Republicans supported black political equality and African Americans asserted their new

³⁶⁷ Shotwell, The Papers of Randolph Abbott Shotwell, II, 345 (emphasis in original).
political power, and thus “a white man’s government” referred to more than just the political system that predated the Civil War or one without African Americans.

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Before exploring the major forms of Klan violence that surrounded electoral politics, it is useful to chart out some of the context for the political conflicts of Reconstruction, especially as the chronology of Reconstruction political conflicts problematizes a simplistic depiction of the Klan as nothing more than an arm of the Democratic Party in the South. For one, violence committed by the Ku Klux Klan was just one part of widespread violence against African Americans by white conservatives and was not the only form of political violence during Reconstruction. Klan violence emerged in North and South Carolina from and within particular local circumstances as well as national election patterns. Republican electoral successes, despite violence and intimidation by conservatives preceding the election, tended to lead white conservatives to step up their extralegal activities. Violence, in turn, caused Republicans to increase efforts to stop it, through securing rights for African Americans and using governmental intervention to arrest those suspected of committing the violence.

Racial violence predated the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, and African Americans suffered other forms of oppression in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War.\footnote{For overviews of the political history of early Reconstruction, see Carter, \textit{When the War Was Over}; Foner, \textit{Reconstruction}; Summers, \textit{A Dangerous Stir}. For North Carolina politics during Reconstruction, see Escott, \textit{Many Excellent People} and William L. Barney, \textit{The Making of a Confederate: Walter Lenoir’s Civil War} (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). For South Carolina, see Zuczek, \textit{State of Rebellion}.} Aided by the lenient policies of Andrew Johnson’s presidential administration, in 1865 and 1866 Southern legislatures were controlled by white conservatives and began passing “Black Codes”—myriad laws that attempted to restore antebellum order by creating labor relations nearly identical to slavery. Republicans became increasingly frustrated at the combination of violence, a southern political
landscape that encouraged it, and a presidential administration that had little interest in addressing the problems. That frustration led to increased support for more radical Reconstruction efforts. In particular incidents like the 1866 riots in Memphis and New Orleans prompted many Republicans to insist that violence would only stop with broader political and civil rights for African Americans.\textsuperscript{369}

After passing the 1866 Civil Rights Act to radically expand citizenship to include African Americans, in 1867 Republicans in Congress passed the Military Reconstruction Acts over vetoes by President Johnson. Those acts required southern states to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment—which permanently secured the changes of the Civil Rights Act, providing for birthright citizenship and guaranteeing citizens due process and equal protection of the law—and also to hold conventions redrafting their state constitutions. The Acts stipulated that the elections for those constitutional conventions were to include African American male voters. In the fall of 1867 Republicans impeached Andrew Johnson; though he was not removed from office his political influence was effectively over.

Many white conservatives boycotted the elections for the new constitutional conventions because of their fierce opposition to black suffrage, particularly in South Carolina.\textsuperscript{370} One South Carolina conservative summarized the feeling that led to the boycott:

\begin{quote}
the leaders in South Carolina, the people whom we had been accustomed to believe in, and whom we had always been led by, the old leading citizens, never believed that the Government here at Washington would thrust negro suffrage upon us, and put the State in the possession of the ignorant negroes, who were 30,000 majority in the State; they did
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{369} Rosen, \textit{Terror in the Heart of Freedom}, 14.

\textsuperscript{370} James L. Orr, Republican governor before the 1868 election, testified that in the 1867 South Carolina constitutional convention elections, approximately 90,000 African Americans voted, but only 3,000 white men did; testimony of James L. Orr, \textit{KKK SC}, 5, 18. A white conservative from South Carolina in his memoirs wrote of the Reconstruction Acts that “The whites generally, under advice of their leaders, treated these laws as unauthorized and refrained from registering and voting;” Shand, \textit{Incidents In the Life of a Private Soldier},” 140.
not believe that such a monstrous act would be perpetrated, and consequently they thought it was useless to take any part in the formation of the State government.\footnote{Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, \textit{KKK SC}, 102.}

He used the language of a violent crime being “perpetrated”—perhaps even a sexual crime, a “monstrous act” “thrust” upon the white South—to describe black suffrage. Despite the fact that most of “the old leading citizens” had been among the political elite before the Civil War who had championed secession and caused the war, many white conservatives strongly believed that those elites ought to continue to control the political future of the South.\footnote{See Dan T. Carter’s \textit{When the War Was Over} for a discussion of the southern political elite during Presidential Reconstruction.} For white conservatives, that those “leading citizens” were exclusively white was self-apparent.

The elections for the 1867 constitutional conventions saw the first widespread voting of African American men in American history. Many states, both free and slave, had allowed free people of color to vote at the start of the nineteenth century if they met property qualifications, but had rolled back those provisions during the Jacksonian period. Certainly no elections had seen the mass participation of black men as these elections saw. The combination of the conservative boycott and new black voters led to the writing of more democratic and racially progressive state constitutions throughout the South. Delegates guaranteed black suffrage and ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, ensuring that a radical expansion of citizenship was written into state and federal constitutions. Most states established subsidized public education and local control of county government, and many legalized interracial marriage.\footnote{See Chapter Six for a longer discussion of the politics of interracial relationships during Reconstruction.} Those conventions set the stage for the presidential election of 1868, the first under the new biracial Republican coalitions that dominated southern states.
Klan membership increased before the presidential election in the fall of 1868, and members attempted to intimidate Republicans to ensure a Democratic victory, with mixed results. One Republican later testified that in the counties of the South Carolina upcountry, violence and intimidation meant “There was no election” in 1868, and that most election precincts “were picketed, and negroes prevented from going to the polls.”\textsuperscript{374} He also criticized white conservatives’ intransigence about the prevailing political trends, calling the unrest “inevitable” because of white conservatives’ boycott of the new state constitutional conventions. To his thinking, conservatives “did not seem to have wisdom enough to take a step forward at the right time; they take their steps forward a day or two after it is too late.”\textsuperscript{375}

But despite that intimidation, Ulysses S. Grant was elected with a large majority and Republicans swept to large electoral victories at the state and national level—though Democrats had isolated local victories, including in the South Carolina upcountry.\textsuperscript{376} After that election, Klan violence escalated to even higher levels. In the winter and spring of 1869 violence erupted in eastern North Carolina by the Constitutional Union Guard. Later in the spring and throughout the summer and fall of 1869 groups calling themselves the White Brotherhood began terrorizing the North Carolina piedmont. The Klan grew in both numbers and prominence as conservatives focused upon reversing Republican control at the local level as an initial step to gaining national political control.\textsuperscript{377}

\textsuperscript{374} Testimony of Reuben Tomlinson, \textit{KKK SC}, 92.

\textsuperscript{375} Testimony of Reuben Tomlinson, \textit{KKK SC}, 91.

\textsuperscript{376} The \textit{Yorkville Enquirer}, for example, took the fact that Republicans carried the state by 10,000 as a sign that conservatives were within striking distance of victory and could indeed return to power, as Democrats had carried York County due to significant intimidation of black voters. See “The State Elections,” \textit{Yorkville Enquirer}, November 12, 1868.

\textsuperscript{377} Several historians have asserted this point. For example, see Rable, \textit{But There Was No Peace}, 79-80.
Violence also occurred before the 1870 congressional elections, but again rose in intensity in the winter and spring of 1871. It was then that the most widespread violence in the South Carolina upcountry counties of York, Union, and Chester occurred. It spilled over the state line to the western piedmont and mountain counties of North Carolina, including Rutherford County—the raids on Nelson Birge and the McGahas in February 1870 were among the first incidents in the region—with violence in the western parts of both states peaking in the winter and spring of 1871. That violence led to increased Republican resistance at the national level, with the passage of the Enforcement Acts, also known as the Ku Klux Acts, which authorized Congress to outlaw secret political organizations. The Enforcement Acts also led to the formation of the Joint Select Committee to investigate Klan violence in an attempt to stop it. The committee held hearings that generated evidence that eventually led President Grant to dispatch federal troops to the Carolinas to arrest Klansmen.

Thus the rise of the Klan had a direct relationship to the political circumstances of Reconstruction. Klan groups formed after civil control had been restored to southern states and immediately before the 1868 presidential election. As Republicans gained more electoral success, conservatives responded with violence, even as Republicans attempted to suppress that violence. White conservatives mobilized violence through the Klan when they saw the possibility of a return to political power after the restoration of civil control, the end of voting disabilities through widespread pardons for former Confederates, and limited electoral success at the local level in 1868. But they also turned to violence at a moment when Republicans continued to control most state and local political offices. Klansmen understood that Reconstruction was vulnerable to attack, and they used violence at particular times and in particular places to accomplish their political goals.
In addition to existing in a dialectical relationship with the expansion of the political franchise and Republican political success, Klan violence around electoral politics took many forms, targeted different kinds of victims, and had varying effects. Some violence was targeted against specific individuals; other attacks were done with more scattershot intentions. Some violence was done to suppress Republican voting before a particular election, while other incidents were intended as retribution for Republican electoral success.

The fall 1870 election in Laurens, South Carolina, was accompanied by a destructive race riot. The 1868 elections in the South Carolina upcountry had been marked by considerable violence and intimidation by Klansmen, and though Republicans won most statewide offices, Democrats carried many of the counties of the upcountry.

Consequently both U.S. troops and a local black militia company were stationed near Laurens to safeguard the 1870 election, which took place with widespread black participation and resulted in a clear Republican victory. On October 19, the day after the election, the troops withdrew. After that withdrawal, white conservative men stormed the town, killed or whipped perhaps a dozen Republicans, both black and white, and reportedly seized the ballot boxes from the election. The violence continued for several days, and troops of the Eighteenth U.S. Infantry were dispatched on October 23 to restore order.

Despite an investigation under the authority of the Enforcement Acts spearheaded by David T. Corbin, the U.S. district attorney for South Carolina, no arrests were made—largely because the majority-white grand jury voted against bringing indictments.

378 Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 82. See also testimony of C. H. Suber, KKK SC, 154-155.
379 NC Report, xlvi.
380 Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 69-70, 76-78. Some Klansmen were later arrested in the case. A white Republican victim of the riot, Erastus W. Everson, castigated a South Carolina judge for releasing on bail Antone
In the targeting of individual voters, Klansmen particularly attacked African Americans. Samuel Gaffney, a black man from Spartanburg, South Carolina, testified that Klansmen hit him about fifteen times “With a sort of stick; a sort of brush stick, a thorny thing” because he was a Republican. Klansmen told him “that they had nothing against me more than one thing. I asked them what that was. They said voting a radical ticket.”[^381] A white Republican testified that “The only excuse I have ever heard them [Klansmen] offer was that they proposed to keep down the negroes, and to get possession of the State government in one way or another.”[^382] A white Virginian whose railroad operation in Chatham County, North Carolina was raided by Klansmen testified that during the raid he “heard [Klansmen] repeatedly damn the negro, say he should not vote, and that they intended to keep him from the polls.”[^383] But even such seemingly simple violence had variations and contestations.

The amount of Klan violence against African American voters makes clear the radical extent to which African Americans asserted their political voices during Reconstruction. Only through violence were African Americans dissuaded from exercising the political rights they seized and secured. Many scholars have documented both the alacrity with which African Americans approached voting as well as the myriad other forms black political activism took.[^384] Black assertions of their right to political power predated the Military Reconstruction Acts and

[^381]: Testimony of Samuel Gaffney, KKK SC, 601.
[^382]: Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, KKK SC, 30.
[^383]: Testimony of William Howle, KKK NC, 63.
[^384]: As Steven Hahn has written, “The advent of the electoral franchise was itself the result of sensibilities, struggles, and mobilizations advanced by slaves and freedpeople before, during, and immediately after the Civil War;” [A Nation Under Our Feet], 3. See also [Elsa Barkley Brown]; Hannah Rosen, [Terror in the Heart of Freedom], 88; Holt, [Black Over White], 27.
the violence committed by Klansmen. African Americans held alternate constitutional
conventions when they were excluded from participating in the early conventions of Presidential
Reconstruction. They formed political organizations, attended and taught citizenship classes, and
ran for public office. They organized Emancipation Day celebrations to publicly declare the
break from slavery. They wrote and petitioned public officers ranging from local
commissioners, Freedmen’s Bureau agents, soldiers and War Department officials, legislators,
governors, and presidents. They voted in large groups, as much for self-defense as public
displays of their political engagement and enthusiasm. Political opportunities expanded during
Radical Reconstruction, and black southerners exercised the most meaningful kinds of political
power at the local level—where it was most visible to white southerners.

Klansmen often conflated the Republican Party with all black voting. One Klansman
from eastern North Carolina who joined the Constitutional Union Guard testified about its
orders. He said that he did “not recollect all the by-laws, but was under the impression that the
order was committed to the overthrow of the radical party, and to hostility to the colored people,
and that any means whatever were to be used to effect the object of the order.” Most white
conservatives similarly conflated Republicans with black people. A conservative newspaper in
Yorkville, South Carolina, ran a small column of “Political Items” in October 1868 that
recounted “An exchange [that] pithily puts up the Presidential contest in a nut-shell, thusly:
‘Radical Platform—the negro; Democratic Platform—the white man. The issues are the

385 See William A. Blair, Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914
celebrations.
386 Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 224-225, 237-238.
387 Confession of Thomas F. Williford, NC Report, lx.
Statesman against the Soldier; intellect against brute force; the law against the sword.”

In contrast, James M. Justice testified that the purpose of the Klan was “to prevent the republican party from carrying the elections, and to prevent the negro from voting at all.” In separating the two goals, Justice demonstrated a greater attention to the difference between the Republican Party in particular and black southerners in general. But Klansmen lacked that nuance, trying to prevent African Americans from voting at all in order to stop Republican success at the polls.

Because of the extent to which African Americans asserted their right to vote through community organizing and martial activity, Klansmen often would disarm African Americans as part of their campaigns against black voters, as they did to Essic Harris. During a raid in the South Carolina upcountry in March 1871, Klansmen went house to house to disarm individual members a black militia company by taking away the repeating rifles they had been given by the governor. They stopped and assaulted several black men, and captured a man named Gadsden Steel. The Klansmen interrogated a white man who knew him well, asking him how Steel voted. Steel later testified, “he said I voted the Radical ticket; they says ‘There, G-d d—n you, I’ll kill you for that.”’ They assaulted Steel and insisted he tell them who had stockpiled the rifles.

The violence was varyingly effective. Essic Harris told the Joint Select Committee that “The way things are we cannot vote. That is just the way it is. It is not worth while for a man to vote and run the risk of his life.” James M. Justice seconded the claim. The violence “has had a very material effect with regard to the way people vote,” Justice said. “Some have changed

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388 “Political Items,” Yorkville Enquirer, October 1, 1868.
389 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 136.
390 Testimony of Gadsden Steel, SC Trials, 233.
391 Testimony of Essic Harris, KKK NC, 95.
their votes, I think on account of terror, and a great many have failed to go to the polls.” 392 Terror had been effective, he said: “I do not think that in Rutherford the colored men would dare to vote at this time.” 393

Among African Americans the memory of electoral violence during Reconstruction continued well into the twentieth century. In the 1930 the Federal Writers’ Project interviewed former slaves, several of whom recounted stories of political intimidation by the Ku Klux Klan. Charlie Robinson of Winnsboro, South Carolina, aged 87 at the time of his interview, remembered that “Ku Klux come dere one night and whip every nigger man they could lay deir hands on. Things quiet down then but us no more go to de ‘lection box and vote.” 394

But in those same stories were assertions of a counter-narrative about the strength of black resistance, both individual and communal. Mack Taylor, of Ridgeway, South Carolina, who was 97 when interviewed, told his white southern interviewer that “Us was never pestered by de Ku Klux, but I was given a warnin’ once, to watch my step and vote right. I watched my step and didn’t vote a-tall, dat year.” 395 Taylor simultaneously said that he and his community were “never pestered” by Klansmen, except once—and that year he did not vote. Taylor downplayed the overall effectiveness of the terror the Klan threatened while still attesting to the personal results of such intimidation.

392 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 136.
393 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 136.
394 Charlie Robinson, interviewed by W.W. Dixon, Federal Writers’ Project Papers, Cabinet D, Drawer 4, Folder 18, SCL. Tom Rosborro, also of Winnsboro, who was 79 at the time of his interview, recalled that Klansmen “visit pappy’s house after freedom, shake him, and threaten, dat if him didn’t quit listenin’ to them low-down white trash scalawags and carpetbaggers, they would come back and whale de devil out of him, and dat de Klan would take notice of him on ‘lection day;” Federal Writers’ Project Papers, Cabinet D, Drawer 4, Folder 18, SCL.
395 Mack Taylor, interviewed by W. W. Dixon, Federal Writers’ Project Papers, Cabinet D, Drawer 4, Folder 18, SCL.
Taylor also told his interviewer about the 1874 election for governor, won by white Republican Franklin Moses, a strong proponent of black equality. Demonstrating the strong community activism that undergirded black voting, Taylor recounted how “Colored preachers was preachin’ dat he was de Moses to lead de Negroes out of de wilderness of corn bread and fat grease into de land of white bread and New Orleans molasses. De preachers sure got up de excitement ‘mongst de colored folks.” And women were an essential part of voting as a community experience. The preaches “‘vised them to have nothin’ to do wid deir husbands if they didn’t go to de ‘lection box and vote for Moses.” Taylor himself did not vote that year—perhaps because of the memory of Klan violence from the previous elections, or perhaps because of a personal choice. But as a result, “my wife wouldn’t sleep wid me for six months.” As suggested by Taylor’s story, Klan violence had marked effects, but did not end African American political participation. In South Carolina, African Americans voted in elections in sizeable numbers, despite widespread violence, until the eight-box law was passed in 1881. And in North Carolina, African Americans continued to vote until the violence of the 1898 election and suffrage restrictions passed in 1900.

Klansmen also attacked white Republican voters as another part of their campaign to unseat Republican control. One North Carolina Klansman, testifying in the trial of members arrested for attacking a prominent white Republican in Rutherford County—site of the attacks upon both Nelson Birge and James McGaha—was asked “What was the order for?” He replied,

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396 Mack Taylor, interviewed by W. W. Dixon, Federal Writers’ Project Papers, Cabinet D, Drawer 4, Folder 18, SCL.

397 The eight-box law was a disfranchisement measure particularly targeted against illiterate voters that increased the bureaucratic complexity of the process of voting, and appreciably limited the number of black voters in the state; J. Morgan Kousser, The Shaping of Southern Politics, 84-92.

“To put down the radicals.” When asked “how?”, he replied, “By whipping and killing them out, and scaring them so that they wouldn’t go to the elections. I was ordered to have my uniform there weeks before the election, to ride around and go scaring and whipping the radicals.” 399

Another North Carolina Klansmen testified that his fellow Klansmen whipped one victim twenty-five to thirty times, telling him “You must be careful how you vote hereafter.” 400 A white South Carolina Republican testified that several whites in the South Carolina upcountry voted Republican but disguised their ballots—placed publicly in a ballot box—to look like Democratic votes. He asserted that among white South Carolinians, “The poorer class, which are the majority, have felt perfectly confident that the Government we now live under was the best for the country,” leading many to vote for Republicans. 401 But when his county was carried by Democrats in the 1870 election, he believed it was because of intimidation by Klansmen.

Klan attacks upon white Republicans suggest two things: that the “white man’s government” envisioned by Klansmen did not include every white man, and that many white southerners supported black suffrage and opposed white conservatives’ campaigns for a narrow, racially exclusive body politic. White Republican support for black political equality had significant limitations. One white North Carolinian from Chatham County testified to the Joint Select Committee that “the white people in my county, league or no league, will not vote for a colored man… The white people will not vote for a colored man even for school

399 Trial testimony of T.J. Downey, KKK NC, 437.
400 Trial testimony of John Harrill, KKK NC, 443.
401 Testimony of Charles Dennis O’Keefe, KKK SC, 39.
commissioner.” Indeed, white Republican voters were less likely to support black politicians than they were likely to support African American’s right to suffrage.

But many white southerners who voted Republican supported black political equality. They voted to ratify state constitutions that established black suffrage, they supported politicians who advocated for African Americans, and they joined biracial Unionist and Republican political organizations. Many southern white Republicans saw advocating for political equality for African Americans as an essential part of the party’s principles. One South Carolina white Republican was asked if he “advocate[d] the cause of the negro,” to which he replied, “Not the negro especially. I advocate the general principles of republicanism.” He further defined those principles as including “the right of the colored people to vote and to exercise their civil and political privileges.”

Republican Party membership also gave some Klansmen an excuse to attack white southerners with whom they had previous disagreements. In Spartanburg, South Carolina, Klansmen beat Margaret Blackwell over the head with a pistol after she resisted during an attack they made trying to target her brother Jason. They had come to murder him, she later testified, “because he was a republican,” and a “damned radical,” even though previous fights between the Klansmen and members of the Blackwell family contributed to a feud that prompted the Klan raid that resulted in Margaret’s beating.

As the attack upon the McGahas suggests, not every attack upon white southerners occurred because of how they voted, but most of the white southerners who suffered violence

402 Testimony of Elias Bryan, KKK NC, 82.
403 Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 251.
404 Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, KKK SC, 33.
405 Testimony of Margaret Blackwell, KKK SC, 373-379.
from the Klan were attacked because of their party politics. One white man in McGaha’s posse the night of the attack was Aaron Biggerstaff, the half-brother of Klansman Samuel Biggerstaff. In 1860 Aaron owned two slaves—a male aged 21 and a female aged 17; his brother Samuel owned one 95-year-old black woman. But Aaron was a prominent and vocal member of the unionist organization the Heroes of America during and immediately after the Civil War. In early 1865 he helped Federal cavalry procure horses from his neighbors throughout Rutherford County—including the DePriests—and also housed or harbored some Union officers. This action prompted a fierce feud with his half-brother Samuel and the disapprobation of most conservatives in the community.

Contemporaries debated about Biggerstaff’s character, with some declaring that he was poor and “a man of as good character for truth and honesty as there is in our community.” But others said he was “rather a fussy and talky member [of the Union League], he has said a great deal, used a great many words of little use, unmeaning words. It seems to be his weak point to talk too much, and say things not worth anything to himself or friends.”

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406 Given that there were three Aaron Biggerstaffs and three Samuel Biggerstaffs in Rutherford County in 1860, and the federal slave census does not give demographic data beyond the name for slave owners, it is possible that neither of the brothers owned slaves; given their ages and property holdings, however, it is most likely that both did. 1860 Slave Census, M653, North Carolina, Rutherford, Broad District 2, Page 2.


408 Aaron Biggerstaff was sued by Adolphus DePriest in 1870. The existing court records do not contain the basis or details of the suit; it was dismissed in a special term of the court in 1870. No doubt tensions from Aaron’s support of Union troops during the war, his outspoken Republicanism, and his participation in McGaha’s posse did him no favors with his conservative neighbors. See Adolphus DePriest vs. Aaron Biggerstaff, Rutherford County Superior Court, Minute Docket, 1869-1876, North Carolina State Archives [subsequently cited as NCSA].

409 Testimony of J.B. Carpenter, KKK NC, 21.

410 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 146.
declared he was “a man of no influence at all,” while others denied that the attacks against him were themselves political acts.\footnote{Testimony of Plato Durham, \textit{KKK NC}, 307. David Scheck testified that “I do not think the Biggerstaff raid was [political]; and I do not think that the general belief is that it was political;” \textit{KKK NC}, 368.}

Biggerstaff was attacked by Klansmen twice. The second attack involved large numbers of Klansmen, and attracted much attention in Rutherford County and beyond it.\footnote{See multiple testimonies, \textit{KKK NC}, 21, 112, 146, & 157; Jolley, “The Ku Klux Klan in Rutherford County,” 23.} The local sheriff employed a mixed race group of armed militia troops—about three-fourths of whom white, the rest black—to guard Klansmen arrested for the attack.\footnote{Testimony of J.B. Eaves, \textit{KKK NC}, 169.} And the trials of those Klansmen were an essential piece of the larger federal investigation into the Klan in 1871. The trial’s results were of interest in South Carolina, too, where in 1872 a friend wrote to Klansman John Bratton—who had fled the state to avoid prosecution for the murder of a black militia captain—complaining that “radical Judges override Constitutions, laws and all established precedents in N Carolina the jury gave [James M.] Justice Forty Thousand Dollars, Biggerstaff Ten Thousand, and sold all the real and personal property of some men, their families turned out.” The friend advised Bratton to stay away lest a similar judgment happen to him.\footnote{Anonymous to John Bratton, March 28, 1872, Bratton Family Papers, SCL.}

Klan violence was intended not just to prevent white Republican men from voting or punish them for votes previously cast, but also to undermine white support for the Republican Party generally. In South Carolina, several white men publicly renounced the Republican Party after having been whipped and threatened by Klansmen. One white Republican testified to the Joint Select Committee about an older man he knew from Spartanburg:

a white man, sixty-eight years of age, who has had no connection whatever with the State government. Coming to town on sales day, he called a few of us together and showed us
his back, stating that the Saturday night previous a party of disguised men came to his house, took him out and whipped him, and ordered him to come to town on sales day, and in the presence of the crowd, publicly renounce his republican principles, and ask for pardon of the people for ever having identified himself with the republican party.\textsuperscript{415}

Despite a squad of troops being dispatched to his house to provide protection, “The result was that the old man was obliged to get up there on the court-house steps in the presence of the people of the county and tell them that he was very sorry he had ever acted with the republican party, and hoped they would forgive him for it.”\textsuperscript{416}

Democratic newspapers would print similar testimonies. One in the South Carolina upcountry described white men who would “come out and renounce their republican principles, and state that hereafter they will act with the democratic part. But we have affidavits from a large majority of them, stating that they have been obliged to make this public renunciation; that they have been either whipped or threatened.”\textsuperscript{417} In York County, South Carolina, in April 1868, right around the time the Klan arrived in the upcountry, a white man named R. L. Simmons posted a notice in the \textit{Yorkville Enquirer} declaring that

\begin{quote}
while not in possession of his proper faculties, he was seduced by the arts of designing men, into the ranks of the Republican party of this District, and that his name, to some extent, became identified with that party. He hereby renounces, in this public manner, all connection, sympathy or support of that party, and proclaims that he is fully identified in interest and feeling, with the masses of his fellow-citizens, and that he fully and cordially endorses the nomination of WHITE MEN, made on yesterday, for members of the General assembly, and will vote for, and otherwise support the same.\textsuperscript{418}
\end{quote}

It is unclear whether Klan intimidation or community pressure forced Simmons into changing his affiliation, but it is interesting that he also contrasted the Republican Party with “white men.” In

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{415}{Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, \textit{KKK SC}, 27.}
\footnotetext{416}{Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, \textit{KKK SC}, 27. An identical story was told by Reuben Tomlinson; \textit{KKK SC}, 88.}
\footnotetext{417}{Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, \textit{KKK SC}, 30.}
\footnotetext{418}{“A Card,” \textit{Yorkville Enquirer}, April 9, 1868.}
\end{footnotes}
Rutherford, a white former county magistrate was threatened, though not whipped, by Klansmen who said “they thought two hundred lashes would make a good conservative of him.”

As with Klan violence against black voters, electoral intimidation against white southerners had mixed results beyond the incidents themselves. James H. Goss, a Republican congressman from Unionville, South Carolina, who had lived in South Carolina for fifty years, testified to the Joint Select Committee that Klan violence meant that there were no white Republicans in his county; “a man cannot be a republican there without subjecting himself to great indignities,” he said. When reminded by a Democratic member of the committee that he himself was white and a Republican, he replied, “I have gone through things I would not go through again. A man might do things to-day he would not do to-morrow. No man can live in South Carolina, no white man, and be a republican.”

Some white Republicans remained steadfast and took even stronger action against the Klan by testifying, urging prosecution of Klansmen, and supporting the politicians who attempted to suppress the Klan. Others refrained from voting, renounced their party affiliation, or left the South. As with black Republicans, white Republicans could continue to participate in politics, though in reduced numbers, after Democrats regained control, until the disfranchisement campaigns of the 1880s and 1890s cemented one party rule.

Klan violence targeted against Republican organizations also took several different forms. Opposition to secession and the policies of the Confederate government had caused some white southerners to form Unionist or pro-peace organizations during the Civil War, particularly in western North Carolina, where Aaron Biggerstaff was just one of many members of the group.

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419 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 138.
420 Testimony of James H. Goss, KKK SC, 65.
called the Heroes of America. After the end of the war, those groups gained in strength and numbers as they supported the Republican Party and added or were founded by black members. The need to organize voters, particularly African Americans, led to a proliferation of various Republican groups throughout the South.

Of these, the most prominent and notable was the Union League, sometimes known as the Loyal League. The League began as a pro-Union and pro-Lincoln organization during the Civil War in the North, and after the war took root in the South as an arm of the Republican Party. Members of the Union League worked to mobilize support for Republican politicians and to encourage voting among freed slaves. The League had a hierarchical structure, with a national organization, but it was also heavily focused on local political activism, and the strength of local organizations depended heavily on local conditions. And though most chapters had biracial membership, the makeup of Union Leagues depended on the demographics and social and political conditions of the locations in which they were formed. In majority-black counties, Union League chapters were often nearly exclusively black, and were subject to more antagonism from white conservatives than groups that were more mixed or mostly white.421

Several scholars have discussed the chicken-and-egg relationship between the Union League and the Ku Klux Klan. The League predated the Klan, and some recent historians have used the League’s precedence to celebrate its biracial political activism.422 Apologists for the Klan argued that Klan violence served as a necessary corrective to the Leagues’ activities, and

421 For extended discussions of the Union League’s activities, see Steven Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 177-182, and Thomas Holt, Black Over White, 30-31.

422 Thomas Holt offers reminders that the Union League was neither as secret, nefarious, widespread, nor powerful as depicted by earlier historians, in Black Over White, 30. Steven Hahn has argued that the fact that the Union League predates the Klan might prompt us to accept “many of the representations of the place and role of the Union League while questioning the view that vigilantism was something of an aberration in the course of political events,” in A Nation Under Our Feet, 266.
declared that the League, like the Klan, had secret membership. Contemporary Republicans countered that claim. James M. Justice, an organizer for the League in Rutherford County, North Carolina testified that the only oath sworn when joining the league was “to support none but true and loyal men for any office,” and that no one concealed their membership. He said that the only oaths were “to uphold, strengthen, and maintain the National Government; to aid in the education of the masses; to elevate the laboring classes of the country to positions of honor and respectability in society, and to maintain a brotherly and kind feeling toward all people.” He asserted that some of the white members had been Confederates during the war. Though many members would come to meetings armed, there is no evidence of widespread violence being committed by Union League members.

Many Klansmen saw the Union League as a direct threat and set up their organization to directly counter it. Members of the Chester Conservative Clan in Chester County, South Carolina had an oath wherein their members not only pledged eternal secrecy, but also

that we will do all in our power to counteract the evil influences exerted by a certain secret Radical organization known as the Union League. We do furthermore swear that we will Protect and Defend any member of this organization should his life or property be endangered by the Union League, or any other Radical organization.

In addition to trying to monitor League activities, Klansmen committed violence against its members. There were no known major pitched battles against the Union League and members of the Klan, but Klansmen did try to disrupt meetings and burn meeting places. One white South Carolinian from Sumter, County, testified that Klansmen wanted to “put down all country stores

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423 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 140.
424 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 141.
425 Oath of the Chester Conservative Clan, June 28, 1868, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.
and drive out all republicans from the country.” They particularly targeted country stores “Because the republican party held their meetings there and their barbecues.”

Klansmen also targeted Union League leaders. Charles Dennis O’Keefe, a white Union League organizer in York County, South Carolina, was beaten in broad daylight in 1868 by two white Democrats whom he personally knew. They repeatedly harassed him, crying out “Kill the God damned radical son of a bitch,” suggesting that his radical politics sullied his whole family, especially his mother. The attack occurred when “our Union League was doing its most powerful work, as it was drawing nigh to election day.” O’Keefe tried to draw the pistol he was carrying, but the men pinned his arm and continued to beat him. He finally threw off the two attackers, and attempted to have them indicted, but they were never convicted. O’Keefe was a prominent Republican official: the deputy collector of state taxes, assistant marshal for the census, and for a time the state president of the Union League. The league chapter he personally organized had 196 members, all but three of whom were black.

White conservatives sympathetic to the Klan blamed the Union League for the violence of Reconstruction, a narrative that lasted into the twentieth century. An early chronicler of the Klan claimed that the League was composed of the disorderly element of the negro population, and was led and controlled by white men of the basest and meanest type just now referred to. They met frequently, went armed to the teeth, and literally “breathed out threatening and slaughter.” They not only uttered, but in many instances executed, the most violent threats against the persons, families, and property of men, whose sole crime was that they had been in the Confederate army.

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426 Testimony of John J. Neason, KKK SC, 44.
428 Testimony of Charles Dennis O’Keefe, KKK SC, 39.
429 Richardson, Historic Pulaski, 34.
A 1930s newspaper article about a South Carolina Klansman claimed that the League “undertook to control elections, burn gins and other houses, insult or ravish white women, plunder and steal. To combat this menace the Klan was organized and its work is known of all men.”

The League reached the high-water mark of its membership and influence in the 1868 election. James M. Justice testified to the Joint Select Committee that the League more or less dissolved after that election; “there was no act to dissolve them, but we have ceased to hold meetings in my section of the State, and I have not heard of any being held anywhere else in the State.” That might have been because of Republican electoral success in the 1868 elections; with black suffrage cemented, a Republican in the White House, and Republican majorities in both Congress and most state legislatures, the widespread organizing of the Union League could have seemed less necessary in 1870 than it had in 1868. However, the declining participation might have also been at least partially a result of Klan violence against both everyday voters and Republican Party organizers; Charles Dennis O’Keefe left South Carolina for New York after his beating in 1868. And constant comparison by conservatives between the League, whose activities were largely peaceful, and the Klan likely reduced the appeal of participating in a secret political organization for white southerners.

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Another critical part of Klansmen’s campaign to build “a white man’s government” was unseating Republican politicians through threats, whippings, and assassinations. The campaigns had mixed effects, removing some politicians but not destroying the Republican Party. After Reconstruction, white conservatives and apologists for the Klan would assert that all Republican

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430 “Backward Glances” (From the scrapbooks of the late A. W. Neville, Editor of the Paris [Texas] News, 1936-1956), Paris News, September 6, 1933, Joseph Banks Lyle Collection, SCL.

431 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 145; see also testimony of Elias Bryan, KKK NC, 82.
politicians had been alike. One white South Carolina conservative in his memoirs years later
moaned about “Pratt Suber, a big black negro, [who] was School Commissioner in Laurens
County and many other offices were filled with just such negroes; negro sheriffs, negro
treasurers, negro legislators, negro senators…”

Actual patterns of Klan violence instead illustrate that, like Republican voters and
organizations, Republican politicians were a diverse and sometimes fractured group. Though
Republican officials and politicians agreed on many policies, they had significant tensions
among themselves and with their constituents that arose from differences in race, geography, and
class. Most Republicans in the North were far more centrist than their southern comrades;
many white Republicans supported black equality as much for political purposes as moral
conviction. Some white southern Republicans had tepid support for black suffrage. James
M. Justice testified that white southern Republicans supported the extension of the franchise to
African Americans as a necessary precondition for Reconstruction, saying “We in the South did
not desire negro suffrage until Congress offered it, and then we accepted it… We had attempted
by the aid of the white people there to restore the States to the Union, and it was a failure…
When the Government said, ‘Take the negro and be restored,’ we did it cheerfully with that
view.”


433 Thomas Holt has demonstrated that Republicans lacked Democrats’ party cohesion in the South Carolina
legislature, and presumably nationally as well; Black Over White, 124.


435 Steven Hahn has summarized white Republican political goals during Reconstruction as revolving around
“protecting the position of white petty proprietors, weakening the power of traditional black-belt elites, and
punishing ex-rebel enemies in their midst. Some [white Republicans] were explicitly hostile to black suffrage and
officeholding;” Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 209.

436 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 162.
participation, many white Republicans did not always reflect black political interests.\textsuperscript{437} That disconnect led to a lack of party unity in southern state legislatures, undermining their overall effectiveness.\textsuperscript{438}

White Republicans’ paternalism about African Americans did not help. Some white Republicans held regressive ideas about race in general and African Americans in particular. James L. Orr, one-time provisional governor of South Carolina and centrist Republican, after declaring that African Americans “are a very docile race,” and “a very controllable and manageable race,” testified to the Joint Select Committee that “when you consider the sudden change wrought in the condition of the slave from 1865 to the present time, the matter of surprise is that the negro has not become much more insulting, exacting, and domineering than he has.”\textsuperscript{439} Such patronizing praise also explained his suppositions on why African Americans had not committed more violence in retaliation for Klan attacks:

I think the moral power of the white race over the colored race, which was acquired during two hundred years of slavery, exists to a very great extent yet. I think you may take colored men and train them and make good soldiers of them, if you have officers who will lead them. But if you trust to their individuality in resisting aggression and outrage upon them, it would be an exceptional case where the white race would be resisted.\textsuperscript{440}

Of course African Americans often would respond when threatened.

But Orr’s patronizing views were not unique among white Republicans. The Union Republican Congressional Committee, an organization based in Washington, D.C., printed up thousands of circulars titled “A Dialogue Between a White Republican and a Colored Citizen,”

\textsuperscript{437} Steven Hahn has written that “the Republican party’s program and leadership was never determined by black constituents—it never became ‘their’ party,” in \textit{A Nation Under Our Feet}, 249.

\textsuperscript{438} Holt, \textit{Black Over White}, 124.


\textsuperscript{440} Testimony of James L. Orr, \textit{KKK SC}, 15.
known informally as the “Loyal League Catechism.”[^441] Structured as a series of questions between a freed slave and a white Republican official, it contained descriptions of the two parties’ platforms and reasons African American voters were to support Republicans. Clearly a piece of political propaganda, it also served as an articulation of Republican principles, including a description of why Radical and Republican were synonymous at the time: “[Radical] means one who is in favor of going to the root of things; who is thoroughly in earnest; who desires that slavery should be abolished, that every disability connected therewith should be obliterated, not only from the national laws but from those of every State in the Union.”[^442]

In addition to such idealism, the pamphlet demonstrated considerable paternalism towards African Americans. When the hypothetical former slave asked “What would the people think if the colored men voted with the Democratic party?” the hypothetical white Republican responded, “that they did not fully understand their rights nor the duties devolving on them; and the people of the South would proudly say, ‘We have always told you that the negro did not wish to be free.’”[^443] Southern Democrats would frame those black voters who supported the Democratic Party in that very way, and the pamphlet writers were essentially correct in their assessment of the stakes for black political involvement. The Democratic Party consistently supported black disfranchisement and excused the Klan’s campaigns of racial violence to accomplish it. But the pamphlet’s authors made patronizing assumptions about African


Americans’ voting acumen—suggesting some of the weaknesses in the Union League’s biracial alliance, as well as disconnects between white Republican politicians and their black constituents.\textsuperscript{444}

But even Republicans who identified along lines of color often disagreed. Black politicians were a diverse group among themselves, with differences in political ideologies and policy decisions as well as background.\textsuperscript{445} For example, the black delegates of the 1868 South Carolina constitutional convention disagreed on issues including property restrictions or poll taxes for suffrage.\textsuperscript{446} Furthermore, politicians often differed from their constituency; black politicians more often were free-born black elites, though the vast majority of African American voters had been born as slaves and scraped by after emancipation as agricultural laborers.\textsuperscript{447}

There were also fractures between local and national Republicans, and the national Republican Party did not exert a lot of influence upon the policy decisions of local southern politicians.\textsuperscript{448} Republican politicians in southern states were more likely to support issues of social equality like interracial marriage than their national counterparts. And there was a wide

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\textsuperscript{444} James L. Orr voiced similar patronizing ideas about African Americans and the Democratic Party, saying “it required a very short argument to be addressed to the most ignorant negro in the State to satisfy him that his attachment to the republican party should be greater than to the democratic party… I thought at the time that it was very unreasonable to imagine for a moment that the colored population could be induced to vote for a party from whom they apprehended such results, and against a party that had done them such service.” He suggested that African Americans were so pliable that, by just accepting the Republican Party, white conservatives could regain political control—“the white population of the South would obtain absolute control of affairs there;” \textit{KKK SC}, 14.

\textsuperscript{445} Holt, \textit{Black Over White}, 39-40; Hahn, \textit{A Nation Under Our Feet}, 222.

\textsuperscript{446} Holt, \textit{Black Over White}, 131; see also 20-21. Holt offers a reminder that “There was much greater unity among Negro Republicans on civil rights issues than on political or financial policies. White Republicans, especially native whites representing up-country constituencies, were generally opposed to civil rights legislation;” Holt, \textit{Black Over White}, 143.

\textsuperscript{447} Thomas Holt summarized fractures among South Carolina African Americans: “the key leaders were basically bourgeois in their origins and orientation and oftener than not failed to act in the interests of black peasants,” in \textit{Black Over White}, 3.

\textsuperscript{448} One South Carolina white conservative remarked in 1877, that although “‘on national questions the negroes … implicitly follow the dictation of northern republicans,’ in ‘home matters they are more independent,’” quoted in Hahn, \textit{A Nation Under Our Feet}, 254.
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range between state and local politicians. Local officials could range from elite to poor; one South Carolina county commissioner resigned his post in 1868 because he could not afford a horse, and without one could not “really not attend to the duties” of the office.\(^{449}\) And African Americans were more likely to get positions as local officials than as state legislators in majority white districts. Rutherford County, in North Carolina, though it had a white majority, had two or three black men on the board of school commissioners.\(^{450}\)

Klansmen engaged in campaigns to unseat all such politicians. Klansmen would frequently send letters to politicians and officials threatening their lives or post public notices that they would be killed unless they resigned their posts and left the region. In Union, South Carolina, during a grand jury investigation of two brutal Klan attacks upon black militiamen, “an order from the Ku Klux Klan was found posted on the Court House door directing every negro office holder belonging to the negro party to resign at once under penalty of death.” The white conservative who recorded the story remembered that “The order was promptly obeyed by every one of them.”\(^{451}\) Klansmen did not make empty threats; officials who did not leave were often indeed visited with violence. In Sumter County, South Carolina, a white man named Bigger, a county treasurer or commissioner, also ran a small “dram-shop” that served many black customers; he also purchased unginned cotton, a practice many white conservatives believed encouraged African Americans to steal cotton from white planters. Klansmen “gave him notice to leave,” and after he had not left by the specified time, they whipped him.\(^{452}\)

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\(^{449}\) Unknown sender to James J. Klein, October 29, 1868, James J. Klein Papers, SCL.

\(^{450}\) Testimony of J.B. Eaves, KKK NC, 168.

\(^{451}\) Shand, “Incidents In the Life of a Private Soldier,” SCL 144.

\(^{452}\) Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 124.
Black local officials often suffered attacks if they did not flee. Simeon Young, “a light colored negro” and the chairman of the board of county commissioners in Newberry, South Carolina, was attacked by a large group of Klansmen one night in May 1871.\textsuperscript{453} They approached his house and began shooting into it, injuring his wife and child. Young returned fire, wounding a Klansman named Faulkner, and escaped out of the rear window of his house, being wounded as he fled.\textsuperscript{454} The Klansmen left, but Faulkner was left behind because of his injuries and captured by state authorities. He was released on bail, and his leg was amputated. While recuperating from his wounds, he was murdered by several men in disguise—quite likely his fellow Klansmen, who feared he had turned states evidence and informed on his comrades.\textsuperscript{455}

Each South Carolina county had a board of three commissioners who managed taxation and expenditures, including services like road work and management of poor houses. Young was widely accused of having embezzled money for Newberry’s poor-house, having been contracted to run it for $500, but subletting it for $200 and pocketing the rest.\textsuperscript{456} Even white Republicans said he was “obnoxious” to his community, incompetent and corrupt. Klansmen later arrested in Newberry for the attack said they committed violence against their victims “because they were damned negroes and voting the republican ticket; that they proposed to stop that kind of business; that the white people did not propose to be subject to negroes any longer.”\textsuperscript{457}

More prominent politicians were also subject to intimidation and violence. In North Carolina, James M. Justice, a member of the state house of representatives and a newspaper

\textsuperscript{453} Testimony of David T. Corbin, \textsuperscript{KKK SC}, 72. See also testimony of C. H. Suber, \textsuperscript{KKK SC}, 163.

\textsuperscript{454} “An Unfortunate Visitation,” \textit{The Newberry Herald}, May 17, 1871.

\textsuperscript{455} Testimony of David T. Corbin, \textsuperscript{KKK SC}, 72-73, 79.

\textsuperscript{456} See testimony of James L. Orr, \textsuperscript{KKK SC}, 3-4, testimony of C.H. Suber, \textsuperscript{KKK SC}, 139-140, and testimony of David T. Corbin, \textsuperscript{KKK SC}, 79.

\textsuperscript{457} Testimony of David T. Corbin, \textsuperscript{KKK SC}, 79.
printer from Rutherford County, was the subject of a large Klan raid in June 1871. Nearly two hundred Klansmen, including men from nearby counties in South Carolina, converged on Rutherfordton to assassinate Justice for speeches he had made denouncing the Klan. The Klansmen broke into his room, dragging him out of bed. They took him out into the street and clubbed him on his head. He later testified that the leader of the mob, a man from South Carolina, excoriated him, telling him that he was to be hanged. The crowd of Klansmen stopped and had a conversation with me about my political course. They asked if I was not ashamed of being of that party that put negroes to rule and govern. They said the white men would not suffer such things; that I had been warned; that my course would not longer be borne by the whites of this country; that they had brought me there to put me to death.\footnote{Trial testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 419.}

Justice begged for his life, and complained that he had grown lightheaded due to loss of blood. The leader mocked him, saying, “He thought it would do me good to bleed, to take the negro equality blood out of me.”\footnote{Trial testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 419.} Justice defended his beliefs and his actions. The leader then told him his life could be spared if he revealed the location of Aaron Biggerstaff, then in hiding. Justice declared he had no idea where Biggerstaff was. Justice convinced the Klansmen of his honesty, and the leader of the raid relented and let him live. Other Klansmen, perhaps including Randolph Abbott Shotwell, whom Justice recognized by height and voice, still wished him dead. During Justice’s conversation with the raid’s leader, another Klansman came up brandishing a pistol, declaring it “was the tool they had to work on ‘damned radicals’ with.”\footnote{Trial testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 420.} Ultimately the Klansmen left Justice alive.

Justice neither renounced his Republican principles nor backed down from denouncing the Klan. A month after his attack he traveled to Washington to testify to the Joint Select

\footnote{Trial testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 419.}\footnote{Trial testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 419.}\footnote{Trial testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 420.}
Committee, where he said that Republicans ought to unite even more strongly to resist Klan violence. “I feel that if men would stand by me and assist me,” he declared, “I ought not to be driven from my home when I have done nothing why I should leave and have my interests there destroyed because I entertain certain political views, whether I am right in them or wrong.” Setting himself in contrast to white conservatives, he said “any man who lives on the continent of America should be allowed to express his vote such views as he pleases. I have never endeavored to control the vote of a conservative, except by argument, never in my life.”

Other politicians were not as lucky as Justice, some having no time to beg for their lives. At least four state legislators were assassinated in the Carolinas during Reconstruction. In South Carolina, in June of 1868, Solomon G. W. Dill, a white man from Camden, was killed in his home, along with Nestor Ellison, Dill’s African American bodyguard. Dill’s wife, who was black, was also severely wounded with a gunshot in the thigh. Dill had served in the constitutional convention and was elected to serve in the state legislature. He was also a commissioner in Kershaw County. Dill was in his home along with friends—white and black—when shots suddenly rang out. The group tried to flee, but Dill was shot from behind in the neck and head and quickly died. Dill and Ellison were buried together at a funeral in Camden but buried in different parts of a segregated cemetery. It was the first major assassination in South Carolina, and U.S. troops were dispatched to find the murderers and restore peace. Nine men were arrested in early July, the Charleston Mercury complaining that they were “of the highest

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461 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 160.

respectability” and had been arrested “all upon the allegation of lying negroes, who will tell one story one day and another the next.”

In October, Klansmen assassinated James Martin, a white Republican member of the South Carolina legislature from Abbeville County. A fellow white Republican described Martin as “a very inoffensive man, a very excellent man, admitted to be so by all his neighbors.” Conservative newspapers, however, claimed he was nicknamed “sneak.” They reported that Martin and two black accomplices were traveling home near Lowdesville (the paper reporting they were transporting whiskey) when they were attacked by men on horseback. Martin was shot in the groin and bled to death, his pistol and his pocketbook having been taken by his assassins. His murder prompted Governor Scott to call for more federal troops.

October 1868 also saw the assassination of Benjamin Franklin Randolph in South Carolina. Randolph was a state senator and was elected as chairman of the Republican state central committee in 1868, one of the first African Americans to hold such a prominent party position. According to the Charleston News, Randolph was born in Kentucky but moved to Ohio as a child,

where he received a good common school education, and when he arrived at the age of manhood, he set himself up for a minister of the gospel. During the war he received an appointment as chaplain of a negro regiment, and in following the fortunes of his command he was thrown upon the Soil of South Carolina.

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464 Testimony of Reuben Tomlinson, KKK SC, 92.
465 “Murder in Abbeville,” Yorkville Enquirer, October 14, 1868.
466 NC Report, xlvi. See also Taylor, The Negro in South Carolina, 189, and “Murders and Outrages,” Yorkville Enquirer, October 29, 1868.
467 Holt, Black Over White, 115.
468 “Death of B. F. Randolph,” Yorkville Enquirer, October 22, 1868.
He was a member of the 1868 constitutional convention, where he initially opposed universal male suffrage, supporting a literacy test and poll tax, but he did support racially integrated schools, and spoke out in favor of a racially integrated society.\textsuperscript{469} After the convention he was elected to the state legislature to represent Orangeburg County, but chose to live in Charleston, where in April a conservative newspaper accused him of paying off police to avoid arrest.\textsuperscript{470}

During the fall 1868 congressional campaign he became a strong voice against white conservatives, drawing the particular ire of David Wyatt Aiken, a prominent conservative in the upcountry. Aiken’s daughter later claimed that during that campaign Randolph “was making incendiary speeches, spreading the doctrine among the Negroes that the property was to be taken from the White people of the state by the U.S. government & apportioned out among them, each man getting ‘forty acres & a mule.’”\textsuperscript{471} Aiken, a former Confederate colonel, himself made incendiary speeches to Democratic clubs during that fall election season, arguing against “Negro supremacy” and charging that radical rule had led to “a time of treachery, fraud and wrongs.” He claimed to oppose violence: “I do not counsel resistance by force, that is not the way; but resist at the ballot-box next November, and such a resistance as you can make will decide that you can and will be free!”\textsuperscript{472} In late October, the two met at a train station, and Aiken “advised Randolph most earnestly not to come to Hodges & make one of his speeches. He even told him it would not be safe, for his life would be in danger if he did.”\textsuperscript{473}

\textsuperscript{469} Holt, \textit{Black Over White}, 131-133.

\textsuperscript{470} “Arrested for Improper Conduct,” \textit{Yorkville Enquirer}, April 9, 1868.

\textsuperscript{471} Ellen Aiken Smart, unpublished biography of David Wyatt Aiken, c. 1902, David Wyatt Aiken Collection, SCL.


\textsuperscript{473} Ellen Aiken Smart, unpublished biography of David Wyatt Aiken, SCL.
Two days later, Randolph was shot and killed on the very same spot, the train platform of Hodges Depot in Orangeburg, Abbeville County. Three white men rode up to the station, hitched their horses, walked rapidly up to Randolph and “fired upon him simultaneously. They then jumped on their horses and made their escape.”\(^{474}\) Aiken was initially arrested as an accessory to murder; he claimed he “was the first citizen of the State confined in jail by that robber crew, charged with the crime of being chief of the Ku Klux.”\(^{475}\) The charges were later dropped, as no conclusive evidence of Aiken’s involvement in the assassination could be found, and there is no strong evidence that Aiken was a member of the Klan.

White conservatives claimed that Randolph was killed by rogue assassins—one fatuously saying that a hit man had been hired by another Republican politician to stir up unrest among the black population.\(^{476}\) A white suspect named W. K. Talbot (or Tolbert) was arrested for the murder. He implicated two brothers in the scheme and said that the three of them had been ordered by Klansmen and members of a local Democratic club to murder Randolph.\(^{477}\) A local newspaper reported that Talbot “was a Democrat, and served on a committee to break up Union Leagues, kill leading Republicans, destroy Republican tickets and play ‘bully’ generally.”\(^{478}\) Talbot was killed by state constables after escaping and attempting to evade arrest.\(^{479}\) The circumstances of his killing were murky, as he reportedly wanted to turn states’ evidence and

\(^{474}\) “Death of B. F. Randolph,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, October 22, 1868.

\(^{475}\) David Wyatt Aiken to Henry Storm, January 17, 1878, David Wyatt Aiken Collection, SCL.


\(^{477}\) Pritchard, “Colonel D. Wyatt Aiken,” 81.

\(^{478}\) “The Randolph Murder,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, March 4, 1869.

implicate local conservatives; it is unclear if he was killed by those seeking vengeance for Randolph or to quiet Talbot. Randolph was buried in a black cemetery in Columbia, South Carolina, which to this day bears his name as a martyr to political violence against African Americans.

Then in May 1870, North Carolina state senator John W. Stephens was assassinated by Klansmen in Caswell County. Stephens was born to a poor white family and was nearly illiterate. He also loudly supported political equality for African Americans. Klansmen lured him into a back room of the Caswell County courthouse, strangled, and stabbed him. That murder gained widespread attention and led North Carolina governor William Woods Holden to declare the piedmont in a state of insurrection and suspend the writ of habeas corpus. Holden dispatched militia troops under Colonel George Kirk, and numerous Klansmen were arrested. Conservative backlash to the investigation—one North Carolina conservative fatuously claimed that the purpose of Holden’s militia was “for the intimidation of voters at the coming election”—eventually led to Holden’s impeachment and Democrats’ takeover of the state legislature.

Klan violence against individual Republican politicians had various effects. The Republican Party, despite the violence, remained active in both North and South Carolina until the disfranchisement campaigns of the late nineteenth century. But several people testified that in South Carolina, members of the state legislature were hesitant to return to their home districts for

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480 Trelease, White Terror, 212. See also Jacob Doll Diary, SHC.
481 Trelease, White Terror, 213.
482 Testimony of H. W. Guion, KKK NC, 278. William L. Saunders served as the clerk of the North Carolina state senate in 1870 and 1871, during Holden’s impeachment, while he was rumored to be the head of the Klan in the state. Republicans thought it possible that the Klan had orchestrated the impeachment; see testimony of William L. Saunders, KKK NC, 358.
fear of Klan violence. Some claimed that violence prevented men from holding office. One South Carolina Republican testified to the Joint Select Committee that in his county, most offices were held by Democrats even though Republicans had carried the latest elections; violence meant “the men who were elected were driven out of the offices.” And James M. Justice, though he continued to advocate for the Republican Party, testified that “I do not believe that, from a judge to a constable, I know a single officer in my county who feels at liberty faithfully to discharge his duty. I will say I believe they will all do it, but I think it is with the belief that they risk a great deal in doing it.”

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In addition to violence against voters, Republican organizations, and politicians, Klansmen also used violence to attack the increased governmental authority that Reconstruction generated and reflected. Some of it was said to be targeted against the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. During the Klan’s raid upon James M. Justice, the leader of the raid told Justice “the Constitution, as they had it before the negroes were free, was better.” Justice said he agreed that perhaps the antebellum constitution was better, “but that the one we had was lawful,” to which the raid’s leader replied “It will not be lawful long, we are going to break up that damned, infamous thing, and we are going to kill all men like you who advocate and support any such Government or Constitution.”

483 See, for example, testimony of D.H. Chamberlain, KKK SC, 55.


485 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 139.

486 The best recent exploration of how the Civil War and Reconstruction reshaped the relationship between people and governments (both federal and state) is Gregory P. Downs’ Declarations of Dependence: The Long Reconstruction of Popular Politics in the South, 1861-1908 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

487 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 119.
Many Klansmen seemed to have been similarly angered by the symbols of the federal government and the amended constitution it enforced. A railroad contractor, building a new rail line through Chatham County, North Carolina, testified to the Joint Select Committee about an attack upon his workers that caused him to doubt “any loyal man’s life [was] safe.” When asked what he meant by loyal, he said “A man willing to accept the situation with the amendments to the Constitution,” a definition he embraced because he had heard Klansmen “curse and abuse the Government, curse the national flag, the President, and the Congress.”

Revenue regulation was another form of state power in Reconstruction that Klansmen opposed. Violence targeted against state regulation was one of the forms of political violence that contemporaries, and some later historians, have been most quick to declare apolitical. Contemporary observers, both Republican and Democrat, would assert that violence in support of bootlegging was both divorced from the politics of Reconstruction and essentially marginal to the majority of Klan violence. David Schenck testified to the Joint Select Committee about an incident where men recaptured the confiscated still of a white Republican who was a bootlegger, differentiating between “a whisky raid” and “Ku-Klux business.” David T. Corbin, the U.S. District Attorney for South Carolina, testified that “there might have been little parties up in the mountains” to resist revenue laws, “but they consisted of very few individuals, of two or three families, and were mainly to screen and hide each other, rather than to fight.”

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488 Testimony of William Howle, KKK NC, 54.

489 Many historians have asserted that violence in support of moonshining was essentially separate from the majority of Klan violence that involved politics. Bruce Stewart, in an exploration of how Klansmen in the mountain South worked to protect their bootlegging, asserted that bootlegging was separate from the principal function of Klan violence that involved electoral politics because “the organization attacked African Americans to dissuade them from voting Republican,” in “‘When Darkness Reigns’,” 456.

490 Testimony of David Schenck, KKK NC, 403.

491 Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 81. South Carolina Senator Frederick Sawyer made a similar claim in a speech to the Senate, claiming that resistance to the law was not the same as disloyalty to the federal government,
Certainly violence in protection of bootlegging could and did occur in the postbellum South by people whose political concerns did not extend beyond avoiding their own arrests. Like James McGaha, there were other white men who might have been Democrats who were attacked by Klansmen for reporting on bootlegging. But opposition to revenue laws, rather than a secondary issue, was an integral part of the political violence Klansmen used to support their political program. The particulars of the violence committed by the members of the Cherry Mountain den might help to illustrate the point.

Though many Klansmen across the South illegally made alcohol (and often drank it before and during their raids), bootlegging as performed by these Klansmen was particular to Rutherford County. Cherry Mountain was named after the cherry trees that had been planted by early white settlers—brandy distillers—in the late eighteenth century. In the mid-nineteenth century several local white men continued distilling whiskey as well. A white man named Amos Owens, a fifty-one year old farmer and Confederate veteran with relatively large property holdings, was a major player in the Cherry Mountain den; he provided their meeting space as well as the pale red cloth for some of the red robes the Klansmen wore. He was also one of Rutherford County’s most prominent bootleggers. He specialized in making “Cherry Bounce,” described years later by a local historian (who neglected to note Owens’s involvement in the Klan) as “a combination of blue steel whiskey, honey made from the cherry trees on the

—and that “It is doubtless a species of disloyalty to evade the payment of whisky taxes, income taxes, or any other taxes,” but that such disloyalty was not on par with the violence committed by the Klan. See Hon. Frederick A. Sawyer, Removal of Disabilities—Outrages of the Ku Klux Klan. Speech of Hon. Frederick A. Sawyer, of South Carolina, Delivered In the Senate of the United States, March 21, 1871 (Washington, DC: F. & J. Rives & Geo. A. Bailey, Reporters and Printers of the Debates of Congress, 1871), 10.

492 Almon Owens, another white man from Rutherford, was also attacked by the Cherry Mountain den; trial testimony of Julius Fortune, KKK NC, 440.

493 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 153.
mountain, and cherry juice." The fact that Owens’s recipe for illegal alcohol survived over a century later suggests that his activities were not exactly secret in Rutherford County. Illegal activity is often well known among close communities like those of the rural nineteenth-century South. In Owens’s particular case, secrecy was unnecessary prior to Reconstruction; his liquor had been legal and popular before the Civil War.

An act of Congress in 1862—after southern states had seceded to form the Confederacy—established the Bureau of Internal Revenue and codified laws about the taxation of alcohol. Enforcement of those laws, passed without white southern consent, arrived in the South after the war. Widespread crackdown on moonshiners escalated in the late 1860s and continued well into the 1880s, facilitated by a growing federal apparatus and simultaneously fueled by national outrage at the Whiskey Ring scandal. David T. Corbin, U.S. District Attorney for South Carolina, testified to the Joint Select Committee that “during 1867, 1868, and 1869 I obtained at the Greenville court, in the western district, one hundred and fifty or two hundred indictments for illicit distilling, and at successive terms of the court upon the same persons.” And the problem was not confined to South Carolina: “I have heard of the same difficulties in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky,” but there was resistance to the new revenue laws nationally, as he had also “heard of difficulties even in New York.”

White southerners had widespread concerns about the enforcement of the new revenue laws. In 1868 the Yorkville Enquirer discussed the new regulations, opining that “Hedged around

494 Historical Subcommittee of the Rutherford County Bicentennial Committee, comp., Rutherford County 1979: A People’s Bicentennial History (Rutherfordton, North Carolina: Rutherford County Bicentennial Committee, 1979), 666.


496 Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 80.
with all these taxes and restrictions, it is not to be wondered at that there are many violations of
the revenue laws, both voluntary and involuntary. The wonder is, perhaps, that any person with
honest intentions or a sense of justice should enter into the manufacture at all. In 1868, J.H.
Dibble of Kinston, North Carolina, (perhaps naively) wrote to the U.S. Attorney General for
information about the new regulations. “Being desirous of entering into the Distillery business,”
he wrote, “may I trouble you to inform me, what kind of stills are to be used, as required by law.
Those I have are copper stills, but neither the Assessors or Collectors can inform me, if they are
the right Kind.”

Dibble was not alone. Numerous North Carolinians had stills, though the U.S. District
Attorney for the state described them as “generally very small concerns, seldom having more
than one still and that of a capacity from 30 to 60 gallons, & mostly used in distilling fruit,
making from 10 or 15 gallons to 50 gallons of brandy or only as much as 100 gallons.” He
wrote to the U.S. Attorney General to call for more regulation of internal revenue. Though a
month earlier he bragged that the local courts were able to do their jobs, writing “there have been
fewer acquittals in court in N.C. in proportion to the number of cases than in any other State,” in
July 1869 he called for an assistant to help specifically in internal revenue cases. “The Report of
the Commission of Internal Revenue for the year 1868 shows that there are more cases of the
above character in the U.S. Courts of N.C. than in any other State except Pennsylvania,” he
wrote. “There are many cases of heavy Tobacco & Whiskey frauds which often form the wealth


498 J. H. Dibble to the Attorney General, December 14, 1868, Letters Received, 1809-1870, Container #125, “1824-
1870 North Carolina,” Folder “Federal Courts, May 5, 1858-Aug 14, 1870,” RG 60, NARA.

499 D. H. Starbuck to E. R. Hoar, June 19, 1869, Letters Received, 1809-1870, Container #125, “1824-1870 North
Carolina,” Folder “US Attorney, Nov 19, 1824-Aug 1, 1870,” RG 60, NARA.
& influences of parties are well covered up & require much labor & time to ferret out."\textsuperscript{500} Thus the new political circumstances of Reconstruction made the application of revenue laws even more politically laden than they might have been in another time.

That the new enforcement of revenue laws came from Republicans, as well as having resulted from the restoration of southern states to the Union, further politicized bootlegging. Revenue agents were overwhelmingly Republican patronage appointments. Samuel Poinier, a white man who moved from Kentucky in 1866 to Spartanburg, South Carolina after the war, had been a Democrat but began to support the Republican Party. He served as a deputy collector of federal revenue, and eventually became a U.S. commissioner. He led several expeditions into the mountains on the western border of North and South Carolina, capturing several stills. He started a newspaper that first supported the Democratic Party, but increasingly voiced support for Republicans, a move that got him "in very deep water." Around the 1868 election, because of his actions in suppressing bootlegging and his support of the Republican Party, he "received a note ordering me away from there, stating that I must leave the county; that all the soldiers of the United States Army could not enable me to live in Spartanburg."\textsuperscript{501} Erastus W. Everson, who had worked as a Freedmen’s Bureau agent, was several times threatened by moonshiners while working as an assistant assessor for the Revenue Department in the western mountains of South Carolina from 1868-1871.\textsuperscript{502}

Particularly galling to Klansmen, black militias also were used to suppress moonshining.

In Union County, South Carolina, a white whiskey dealer named Matt Stevens was shot and

\textsuperscript{500} D. H. Starbuck to E. R. Hoar, June 19, 1869, Letters Received, 1809-1870, Container #125, “1824-1870 North Carolina,” Folder “US Attorney, Nov 19, 1824-Aug 1, 1870,” RG 60, NARA.

\textsuperscript{501} Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, KKK SC, 26-27: 30. For more on moonshining in Spartanburg, see “Trouble in Spartanburg,” Yorkville Enquirer, December 23, 1869.

\textsuperscript{502} See several anonymous threats, Scrapbook, Erastus W. Everson Papers, SCHS.
killed by black militiamen after attempting to escape when they stopped him around December 1870. That murder led to two major Klan raids upon the Union jail and the killings of ten of the black militiamen. It is unclear if Klansmen in Union County themselves engaged in bootlegging, but the U.S. District Attorney for South Carolina testified to the Joint Select Committee that “A great traffic is now carried on by these peddlers going over into North Carolina for whisky, where they have not been prosecuted quite so sharply as they have been in South Carolina; they go across there, get the whisky, and then come back across the line and peddle it out.” That was in violation of the revenue laws, as “no man can peddle whisky without a license.”

That violence against southerners who reported on bootlegging was more than mere protectionism is also suggested by the fact that Klansmen often attacked other bootleggers, particularly if they sold to African Americans. A white farmer from Chatham County, North Carolina, testified that a white woman of “very bad character,” named Sarah Gilmore was attacked and whipped by the Klan. He recounted, “About fifteen years ago she had a black child. About three or four years ago she was very poor... She put up a kind of a distillery, making about a gallon of whisky at a time. Her visitors are mostly colored men.” Gilmore’s behavior challenged white conservative notions of the proper structure for southern households by engaging in interracial sex as well as selling bootlegged whiskey. Given that several Klansmen

503 Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 80.

504 See for example A. S. Wallace to John Scott, August 27, 1871, Letters Received, Source Chronological Files, 1871-1874, President, Box #1, “January 1871 to December 1871,” Folder “June 1871-July 1871,” RG 60, NARA.

505 See, for example, testimonies of William Howle, KKK NC, 64, and Elias Bryan, KKK NC, 75.

506 Testimony of Elias Bryan, KKK NC, 84.
in Chatham County were themselves bootleggers, it was her black clients, not her illegal product, that Klansmen disdained.\textsuperscript{507}

Violence against enforcement of the new revenue laws continued after the Klan ceased to exist. After Reconstruction White Cappers in the mountains of Georgia and the Carolinas would target revenue agents as well as commit violence against African Americans.\textsuperscript{508} But the enforcement of revenue laws continued after Democrats regained control of southern states in the 1880s, suggesting that white conservatives who did not join the Klan did not oppose the expansion of state power of revenue laws.\textsuperscript{509} Klansmen who engaged in bootlegging, though working to support most of the interests of the Democratic Party, thus sometimes held slightly different political goals from mainstream white conservative politicians.

* * * * *

The narratives that white conservative southerners sympathetic to the Klan constructed to defend and justify Klan violence further demonstrate that such violence had more complicated political causes and effects than simple electoral support of the Democratic Party. The primary narrative white conservatives constructed was an assertion that Klan violence was not political, despite obvious evidence to the contrary. They did so especially during the hearings of the Congressional Joint Select Committee, where many white conservatives said that the Klan was made up of common criminals. Democratic members of the Joint Select Committee frequently steered testimonies to encourage claims that the Klan was apolitical or attempted to ask questions of witnesses whose answers might undermine Republicans’ arguments.

\textsuperscript{507} Testimony of Essic Harris, \textit{KKK NC}, 91.
\textsuperscript{508} Brundage, \textit{Lynching in the New South}, 23.
\textsuperscript{509} Numerous historians, such as C. Vann Woodward in \textit{Origins of the New South} and Scott Reynolds Nelson in \textit{Iron Confederacies}, have argued a similar point: prominent Democrats joined with Republicans in expanding state regulation of the southern economy.
Most Klansmen themselves would admit that the Klan’s primary purpose was political. In a federal trial of Klansmen held in Raleigh, North Carolina, one young Klansman from Rutherford County was asked about the purpose of the Klan. “If I understand it right,” he responded, “it was to raise one party and put down another.” They would accomplish that goal in a “heap of ways,” including planning to “raid around before election.”\(^\text{510}\) Another Klansman from Rutherford declared that one of the leaders of the Klan in that region had “said it was to advance the conservative party; to get all they could by swearing men in.”\(^\text{511}\) And when James M. Justice was attacked by Klansmen, the leader told him that “Our party proposes to rid this country of this damned, infamous, nigger government.”\(^\text{512}\)

But white conservatives who were not Klan members would tell a different story. One such conservative was Edwin Whipple Seibels, of Columbia, South Carolina. He served as secretary and treasurer of the Union Reform Party, a party closely allied with the Democratic Party but which took another name to assert that reform was necessary because of Republican corruption.\(^\text{513}\) In Seibels’s testimony to the Joint Select Committee he claimed numerous times “that politics has nothing to do with” Klan violence, but violence arose “because the parties have been guilty of some outrage in some shape or form, either stealing, or misappropriating the public money, or guilty of some house-burning, or something of that kind.”\(^\text{514}\) When asked by a Republican whether violence was “looked upon as a proper mode of redressing evils,” he did admit it was “not among the sober portion of the community by any means. It is deprecated by a

\(^{510}\) Trial testimony of John Harrill, KKK NC, 445.

\(^{511}\) Trial testimony of J.R. Depriest, KKK NC, 425.

\(^{512}\) Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 117.

\(^{513}\) David T. Corbin, U.S. District Attorney for South Carolina, testified that the Reform party “was the same party [as the Democratic Party] under a different name;” testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 81.

\(^{514}\) Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 96.
very large majority of the people of South Carolina."\textsuperscript{515} Seibels took pains to dissociate Klan violence from any relationship to conservative politics. He claimed that Republican politicians made a joke about being “Ku-Kluxed.”\textsuperscript{516} He even went so far as to claim that “A great deal of this Ku-Klux is got up by the radical party themselves, strange as it may seem, but it is so. We have every reason to believe that in several instances that has been the case.”\textsuperscript{517} A Democratic member of the Joint Select Committee from Ohio encouraged Seibels in his claims, asking whether “it would not be quite as reasonable, or unreasonable, to assume that some of those Ku-Klux acts were committed by republicans in disguise, for the purpose of throwing odium upon the democratic party, and involving them in trouble with the general Government?” Seibels agreed that it would be “just about” as reasonable.\textsuperscript{518}

These claims were more than willful deceptions. Conservatives took several tactics to argue against a connection between conservative politics and Klan violence. Some, like Seibels, blamed the victims of the Klan and asserted that violence was appropriate retribution for southerners they thought were committing widespread crime and frauds. Others asserted that the organization had been founded as a political society to counteract secret Republican organizations, but became debased by unsavory criminals who committed violence divorced from its original intention. Any violence that occurred, according to these witnesses, was thus—similar to discussions of moonshining—not related to electoral politics.

Still other conservatives even claimed that the Klan did not exist. H. W. Guion of Charlotte, North Carolina, denied knowing about any incidents of Klan violence. When

\textsuperscript{515} Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 100.

\textsuperscript{516} Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 133.

\textsuperscript{517} Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 97.

\textsuperscript{518} Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 106.
confronted by members of the Joint Select Committee with numerous newspaper stories of prominent trials, he declared, “If it appeared in the papers, I skipped it. I look upon it as a sort of political foot-ball now-a-days, each party trying to make the most of it.”

Identical declarations of the Klan’s apolitical nature were also widespread in venues away from the federal investigation into the Klan, including conservatives’ private correspondences. A book merchant, born and raised in New York, living in Charleston, South Carolina wrote to a friend in Canada in 1868 at the outbreak of Klan violence to assure him that stories of Klan violence were exaggerated. “The Ku Klux Klan of which you lift a description of from a Northern paper is altogether an imaginary organization,” he wrote, “the report being caused by the Radicals themselves for political effect, like a good many other reports of a similar nature and all equally without any foundation.” Times would be looking up, he claimed, if only a Democrat could be elected President. “Otherwise,” he warned, “I look for a terrible civil war for the people are ground down as far as they can submit to.” Grant’s election in the fall of 1868 did lead to increased racial violence by conservatives, but not the outbreak of another civil war.

Perhaps this northern transplant to Charleston was merely misled by conservative newspapers and did not understand what was going on in the rest of the state—after all, Charleston saw no sustained Klan activity, likely because of its large, prosperous, and politically active black community. And conservative newspapers would frequently claim that accounts of Klan violence was overstated or entirely fabricated. In May 1868, the Yorkville Enquirer, in a report from a contributor from Chester, claimed that “The excitement among the darkies about the K. K. K’s, has simmered down completely, and everything is quiet here. The whole thing has

519 Testimony of H. W. Guion, KKK NC, 262.
520 John W. L. Tylee to J. H. Throckmorton, July 12, 1868, John W. L. Tylee Letterbook, SCL.
been an unfounded ‘scare,’ from the beginning—no such mischievous organization existing here, save in excited imaginations.”


522 “A Slanderous Story,” Yorkville Enquirer, October 1, 1868.


524 Isaac Goings McKissick to Sallie McKissick, April 7, 1872, James Rion McKissick Papers, SCL. His son was likely a member of the Klan, as a list of arrested Klansmen from South Carolina includes Isaac McKissick, Jr., from Union County, South Carolina; David T. Corbin to the Attorney General, February 19, 1872, M947, RG 60, NARA.

525 Mrs. C. M. Cheves to Langdon Cheves, April 3, [1871], Ku Klux Klan Clippings File, SCHS.

Then in October, reporting on conflicts over bootleggers, it claimed that “York was never more quiet or law-abiding than at the present time. A few radicals will, now and then, create a little difficulty, but the people of York must not be made responsible for what these fellows do.”

Many white conservatives seem to have sincerely believed that the accusations Republicans made against the Klan were inflated. One conservative publicly declared that the 1868 election had to have been fair because of the presence of the federal troops as observers.

I.G. McKissick, a Democratic politician from South Carolina, wrote his wife in 1872 claiming that his political opponents were trying to “trying to kill off my case with Ku Kluxism,” implying that Republicans only complained about the Klan for their own political gain.

Some conservatives even said that President Grant invented the Klan, or at least publicized the violence for the benefit of Republicans. One white woman from Charleston wrote to her son in Georgia in 1871, relating that “People here are very much troubled at present about the KK. arrests. They are now taking up people in Laurens & Newberry, where there were no K.K…. They say Grants idea is to produce a rebellion to assist in his election.”

And a South Carolina conservative declared in his memoirs that “‘The Ku-Klux Conspiracy’ was one of the greatest frauds ever practised by a government upon a too credulous people.” He admitted that the organization
existed, “but its objects were sedulously misrepresented, its deeds distorted and magnified by the agency of a horde of spies, informers, and witnesses in the pay of the government.” He called the Klan “a defensive combination to foil a most wicked and cruel plot on the part of the government,” and claimed that Grant and Republican governors colluded, manufacturing a crisis “that the country… might enjoy the benefits of his high military talents.” The multiple media in which these denials occurred suggest that white conservatives were likely predisposed to support Klansmen and assume the worst about the Republicans who denounced it.

White conservatives would take pains to depict themselves as blameless for the violence. Many claimed to be victims of political oppression themselves, declaring that the largest source of disfranchisement in the South stemmed from federal sanctions preventing former Confederates from voting or holding office—even though Andrew Johnson had pardoned countless former Confederates, making such sanctions toothless. During James L. Orr’s testimony to the Joint Select Committee, Missouri Senator Frank P. Blair (a Union general during the Civil War but a prominent conservative and Democratic vice presidential candidate in 1868) asked Orr, the former Republican governor of South Carolina, whether Klansmen’s “indisposition”—a gentle euphemism for their violence—“to some extent [grew] out of the fact that disabilities are imposed by the Government upon that class of people?” Orr agreed that such disabilities, as they were termed, “produced a great deal of sourness and bitterness” among white

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527 A white conservative claimed that all the members of his regiment from the Mexican War, as well as relatives of the members, “were disfranced [sic] within a year or two after the close of the late war, while the most ignorant and vicious classes were called in to aid in ‘Reconstructing’ the State,” in John Witherspoon Ervin, “Notes,” SCHS, 2.
conservatives.\textsuperscript{528} Edwin Whipple Seibels echoed this claim, asserting that “it is our party that is obstructed in the exercise of our privilege of voting, decidedly more than the other party.”\textsuperscript{529}

The claim that conservatives were the real victims of Reconstruction was so endemic that it lasted well into the twentieth century. Many early chroniclers of the Klan portrayed the campaigns to arrest Klansmen as systemic oppression that caused suffering for Klansmen and their families. In an unpublished local history of Chester County, South Carolina, compiled by the Federal Writers’ Project in the 1930s, the author recounted a story where several Klansmen were sleeping out in the woods to avoid being arrested by federal troops. During the night while sleeping, “Richard Robinson’s head got out on the ground which was real damp and Robinson’s hair froze to the ground. He could not get up. Preston Estes took his knife and released him.” The author framed the episode not as a humorous anecdote, but as evidence of the suffering that Klansmen suffered: “This is an illustration of some of the hardships endured by the K. K. K.,” the author surmised.\textsuperscript{530}

Conservatives would also take pains to depict themselves as more decent, reasonable, and compromising than Republicans. Edwin Whipple Seibels testified that “almost nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand of the decent people of South Carolina belong to the democratic party, or to the reform party… In South Carolina the republican party is composed entirely of the colored people.”\textsuperscript{531} When pressed to admit that among those “decent people” were the members of the Klan who were committing outrages, Seibels admitted “I suppose they

\textsuperscript{528} Testimony of James L. Orr, KKK SC, 7.
\textsuperscript{529} Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 122.
\textsuperscript{530} Anonymous, “The K. K. K. at Mt. Pleasant,” September 1, 1941, Cabinet B, Drawer 1, Folder 16, Federal Writers’ Project Papers, SCL.
\textsuperscript{531} Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 97.
belong to our party, or the democratic party,” but still placed “decent people” and “colored people” in rhetorical opposition to one another.⁵³² He claimed that conservatives were far less obsessed with politics than were Republicans, claiming “We do not care about a man's political sentiments, if he does not go and talk with the negroes and excite them.”⁵³³ That a white man’s “political sentiments” might include encouraging black people to vote was, to white men like Seibels, inconceivable.

With no hint of irony, Seibels painted himself as a racial moderate.⁵³⁴ He claimed, “I have taken a very active part since the war, in public speeches, in advocating the rights of the colored people.”⁵³⁵ He reiterated the point several times, declaring: “I struck a middle ground, and it rendered me very unpopular there with some of my own friends, and some of my own kindred.”⁵³⁶ Other white conservatives also claimed to support, or at least acquiesce to, black suffrage as evidence that they were more moderate and compromising than Republicans. Several Democratic politicians, including Wade Hampton in South Carolina, stumped for black votes.⁵³⁷ James M. Justice of North Carolina denounced them as hypocrites to the Joint Select Committee. “I know democrats who will now scrooch up pretty close together, shoulder to shoulder, with the negroes,” he said, “yet they feel themselves disgraced, if they will tell the truth about it, to even be in the halls of legislation where the negro is… the democrats say a great many lovely things

⁵³² Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 97.
⁵³³ Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 122.
⁵³⁴ Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 135.
⁵³⁵ Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 132.
⁵³⁷ Governor James Orr and Wade Hampton both tentatively endorsed limited black suffrage in 1867; Holt, Black Over White, 29. William Stone, a northern Republican transplant to South Carolina, wrote to his friend Erastus Everson in 1868 chuckling that conservatives “are beginning to think they can live under a ‘negro government’ in case of necessity;” William Stone to Erastus Everson, October 25, 1868, Erastus W. Everson Papers, SCHS. See also Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 198.
about the negroes. But it is not for choice, or for principle, but in my opinion it is for the sake of
party success."  

White conservatives also explicitly defended the violence Klansmen used to target
Republican voters, organizations, and politicians. One critical part of that narrative was the
widespread white conservative conviction that black voters were too ignorant to deserve the
electoral franchise. Edwin Whipple Seibels stated:

They do not know what a ballot is or what voting means. I met some of them going from
an election at one time, and asked them if they had voted; they said “No.” … I asked,
“Did you not go up to a little box and put a piece of paper in the box?” They said, “Oh,
yes, we did that; Uncle Dick marched us around, gave us a little paper, and told us to put
it in the box.” I told them that was what was called voting; they said they did not know
that was voting.  

When asked by John Pool, white Republican senator from North Carolina, whether “Is it not
rather remarkable that the negroes should be so ignorant as not to know what the word “voting”
means?”, Seibels answered, “It would seem so to you gentlemen perhaps, who never have had
much to do with the negroes. But, really, in the lower part of South Carolina you might see fifty
negroes on a plantation and you could scarcely understand a word they said; they could not direct
you the way to a neighbor's house.”

Seibels’s answer reflected his prejudice rather than an accurate description of black
politics. African Americans demonstrated with both words and actions their political acumen
during Reconstruction. But numerous white conservatives shared Seibel’s convictions, and Klan
violence worked hand-in-glove with their accusations that African Americans were too ignorant

538 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 161.
539 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 124.
to deserve voting rights. Robert Wallace Shand, a white South Carolina conservative who did not join the Klan, later claimed in his memoirs that

The negroes belonged to the Secret oath bound Union League and at elections voted like sheep at the bidding of their leaders. They could not read their ballots but recognized them by some device printed thereon; not knowing for whom they were voting, but that it was against the white man. Polling places were so arranged as to make them accessible to the negroes and as inaccessible as possible to the white people. Where the negroes were numerous, boxes would be multiplied so as to facilitate repeating, which was freely done—for we had no registration then.\(^{{541}}\)

Those ideas fueled the push for disfranchisement and lasted far beyond Reconstruction. J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, a professor at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, later declared that the Klan “was primarily designed for protection and its influence upon politics was purely incidental. The evidence is overwhelming that the chief purpose of the Ku Klux Klan was to oppose the Union League and check its operations.”\(^{{542}}\)

Conservatives also sought to justify Klan violence against Republican politicians by asserting that Republicans were corrupt, attempting to blame the victims of Klan violence. That assertion was also intended to bolster claims that the violence was apolitical, fueled by moral outrage at corruption instead of blind partisan support for the Democratic Party. A white South Carolina conservative named R. Latham wrote a letter to the *New York Tribune*, reprinted in the *Chester Reporter*, which clearly articulated the typical white conservative defense of Klan violence. Latham was a school commissioner for York and in 1868 had spoken at a meeting of the Conservative Union Club of Yorkville.\(^{{543}}\) In his 1872 letter, after asserting that he had never been a member of the Klan, and declaring that the Klan was “a grand mistake, morally, politically and socially,” he declared that rather than partisan politics, the central question of

\(^{{541}}\) Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 140.


\(^{{543}}\) *Yorkville Enquirer*, April 16, 1868, and *Yorkville Enquirer*, February 4, 1869.
Reconstruction was “shall honesty or dishonesty prevail?” Claiming to excuse both African Americans and northern white Republicans, Latham instead blamed white southerners who supported Reconstruction, writing that it was “a set of thieving adventurers and unprincipled natives, who prowl, as the poet burns says, like ‘hell hounds’ around the Treasury of the State” who caused the problems of Reconstruction. He asserted that “The people of South Carolina are taxed, litterally, to death,” and insisted that rather than a plot against the federal government, the Klan was a conspiracy particularly targeted against corrupt state governments. Latham asserted that the Klan was no different than the Boston Tea Party, as both were necessary albeit criminal activities, asking “what, under the circumstances, could they do otherwise?… Under the peculiar circumstances what could the people of South Carolina do but resort to Ku Kluxing?”

Latham’s accusations were seconded by many white conservatives, especially his charges that unfair taxation crippled southern states. Edwin Whipple Seibels told the Joint Select Committee that his taxes had increased “five to seven times what they were” before the start of Reconstruction. He blamed corrupt property assessors for the increase. While slavery had been legal, slaves were assessed as property and were an essential part of the taxable wealth of the planter class. After emancipation, white planters no longer owned the same amount in property as they had before; consequently, taxes on land increased in order to balance state budgets, inflated by the debt incurred during the Civil War. Conservatives blamed the increase in land taxation not on the exigencies of war and emancipation, but on corrupt Republican tax commissioners, patronage appointees, many of whom were black. White conservatives writing their memoirs would also harp on the corruption of taxation; one claiming that “taxation on land,

in some of the States, has been increased fifteen hundred per cent!"547 In South Carolina, concern over taxation led Democrats to hold several “tax-payer” conventions to investigate charges of fraud against Republicans. After an extensive investigation, one such convention concluded that there was no evidence of actual fraud committed by Governor Scott, “and made a report which was very favorable to the State government.”548

The South Carolina land commission was also charged with extensive graft. The commission, not a full-fledged method of land redistribution, purchased lands with state money—at least $700,000 were reputed to have been appropriated for it—and sold it to homesteaders as a means of providing potential homes for freed slaves and indigent white families, to whom wealthy planters were otherwise not inclined to sell. Conservatives claimed that the program lost money and that commissioners ended up charging homesteaders more than the land was worth, a symbol of both mismanagement and fraud.549 Railroad construction was another major source of conservative complaints about Republican corruption. Contracts for railroad building were cited by several as a major reason for the increase of state debts.550 Some historians have concluded that railroad contracts were one of the few sources of actual vote buying and corruption in state legislatures given the newness of railroad contracts and the lack of robust ethics rules, and it is likely that both parties were complicit.551

547 Ervin, “Notes,” SCHS, 2. Another conservative wrote “Money was borrowed by the State to an enormous amount and the greater part of it was stolen by the leaders, and taxes were onerous;” Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 140.

548 Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, KKK SC, 35. See also James Chestnut, “Executive Committee, Tax-Payer’s Convention,” December 26, 1871, James Rion McKissick Papers, SCL.


551 Holt, Black Over White, 148. See also Nelson, Iron Confederacies.
When they were not making charges against specific programs, conservatives would declare that Republicans were generally incompetent. Edwin Whipple Seibels claimed that Republican legislators were frequently bribed and that the incompetence of state-level Republicans trickled down to county- and local-level officials, thus corrupting the entire system of state government. In 1868 Klansman Joseph Banks Lyle blamed the changes to the federal constitution, saying it was “natural” that the government had “in this emergency, fall[en] back upon art, upon management & fraud to sustain itself & perpetuate its power. It is driven to cunning, artifice, and hypocrisy for a time.” And the Chester Reporter in January 1872, in a retrospective of the problems of 1871, saw little hope for better times ahead:

Dark and gloomy as the past has been, the future we fear is darker and blacker still. Scourged as the State has been during the past year, by pestilence on the coast, by thieves and robbers in the centre, and by Ku Klux outrages and military invasion in the upper counties. The year expanding before us is pregnant, in our judgment, with more flagrant misrule, robbery and oppression than we, with all our bitter experience, could hardly think possible.

They believed that the only hope ahead was if “God in his infinite mercy will so enlighten the minds of the ignorant creatures who have in their hands the power of the State, that they may be led to see how villains and robbers… are practising [sic] upon them and leading them into the pit of ruin, they foolishly think they are digging for the white race alone.”

Actual corruption could not explain real patterns of Klan violence. For one, charges of corruption were much more pervasive in South Carolina than in North Carolina—though both

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552 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 119.
553 Joseph Banks Lyle, notes for a speech to a Democratic club at Limestone Springs, S.C., August 1, 1868, Joseph Banks Lyle Collection, SCL.
states saw extensive Klan violence. Additionally, historian Mark Wahlgren Summers has shown that after a national obsession with conspiracies of disunion and military despotism during Andrew Johnson’s administration, after Grant’s election in 1868 most Americans believed that corruption and graft were the greatest threat facing the nation. The narratives of corruption, though overstated if not outright manufactured, suggested that the major thing that white conservatives saw as corrupt was the very existence of black political activity.

Indeed the accusations of Republican corruption were themselves political acts. They reflected conservatives’ desire to reverse the expansion of citizenship and the political realm that constituted Reconstruction. White conservatives saw the politics of Reconstruction as a winner-take-all struggle between principled conservative whites on one side, and a corrupt coalition of African Americans, northern Republican transplants, and white southern race traitors on the other. Benjamin Franklin Perry, former provisional governor of South Carolina under the Johnson administration, laid out the implicit logic of most white conservatives’ thinking in an 1871 letter to a concerned white citizen. “As to the condition and political prospects of South Carolina,” he wrote, “I can say but little… There [sic] a majority of negroes in this state, & they have been joined by carpet baggers of the lowest & most unprincipled character, & by Scalawags of our own State, who are with few exceptions as bad as the carpet baggers.” He detailed his perception of the state of South Carolina’s state government:

This mongrel party has the process of the State government in its keeping, & they have plundered, robbed, & stolen until the State is on the eve of bankruptcy. Our taxes have been increased threefold although we have but two thirds of our property. The State debt has been increased from six millions to twenty millions in three years.

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555 James M. Justice testified that in North Carolina, “The general expression is that Holden is a bad, corrupt man,… and all such expressions as that; but nothing in regard to our county officers;” testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 142.

556 Summers, A Dangerous Stir, 221.
In contrast to the “white man’s government” that Klansmen and white conservatives both desired to head southern politics, the Republican Party to them was a “mongrel party”—of mixed race and consequently corrupt. And conservatives like Perry had little optimism for the future: “I see no hope of any change until the negroes die out & the white race have a majority.”\textsuperscript{557} Essentially calling for genocide, Perry had convinced himself that only through the direct removal of African Americans—by violence or natural death—would “a white man’s government” return to South Carolina.

As for Klan violence, Perry echoed what his fellow conservatives had claimed in front of the Joint Select Committee. “In regard to the ‘Ku Klux,’” he claimed to have little direct knowledge. But he asserted that “There have been local organizations of this secret society in some parts of the State, but no general organization. It is not a political organization here, but one for the protection of property & the prosecution of crime.” He wrote that African Americans were encouraged by white Republicans “to burn houses, barns, & c.” Local courts could not stop them, he claimed. And he used a narrow definition of what constituted politics, declaring “In no instance have I known the Ku Klux to attempt to influence elections.” Perry saw the Klan’s work as both justified and efficacious:

They were a terror only to evil doers. Good negroes & good white people had no apprehension of them. Where a corrupt ignorant officer was guilty of malfeasance in office, they gave him notice to resign or take the consequences. Governor Scott had the negroes organized all over the state in militia companies & furnished them with arms & ammunition which he refused to the white people. This was placing us at the mercy of the colored race who are still a sort semi savage. In self defense we had to procure arms. With guns in their hands the negroes became most intolerable. The Ku Klux has quieted them very much.

Notable was Perry’s conviction that only voter intimidation constituted political violence.

Though he blamed the political problems of Reconstruction upon the very existence of African

\textsuperscript{557} Benjamin Franklin Perry to Mr. A. P. Peters, July 16, 1871, Benjamin Franklin Perry Collection, SCL.
Americans, he also denounced white Republicans because he considered African Americans too pliable and ignorant to control their own political fortunes. “But for the carpet baggers & Scalawags whose sole purpose was office by means of negro votes,” he asserted, “we should have had no difficulty in controlling the negroes.”\textsuperscript{558} To Perry, Klan violence was the fault of its victims—and in particular its white victims, especially white male politicians whose political beliefs excluded them from the category of “a white man’s government.”

The narratives built by conservatives seemed to suggest that many white conservatives simply wished that Klan violence would not be political. They wanted black men to not be voters, and they believed all Republicans were corrupt because of their support for political and civil equality for African Americans. That desire for a narrowing of the realm of politics during Reconstruction was wrapped up in the widespread conservative belief that the racial politics of Reconstruction functioned in strict binary opposition. Unable to conceptualize a role for African Americans in southern politics, many white conservatives believed that only with the removal of African Americans from the body politic could effective politics come back to the South. Those conservatives who did not deny the political nature of Klan violence also showed that with their words. A Democrat from Orange County, North Carolina who did not join the Klan testified that “the fact that [violence] assumed a party aspect was simply owing to this: The persons who were hung or otherwise punished were negroes, and was done by white people.”\textsuperscript{559} Clearly not all victims of Klan violence were black—but for many white conservatives, the only form of violence that would be considered political would be against African Americans.

\textsuperscript{558} Benjamin Franklin Perry to Mr. A. P. Peters, July 16, 1871, Benjamin Franklin Perry Collection, SCL.

\textsuperscript{559} Testimony of Pride Jones, KKK NC, 4.
White northern Democratic politicians shared white conservative southerners’ desire for African Americans to be excluded from political activity alongside those white Republicans who supported political equality for African Americans. Representative Philadelph Van Trump, a Democrat from Ohio and a member of Joint Select Committee, in a minority report criticizing the findings of the Committee that the Klan targeted Democrats, wrote that “It was an oft-quoted political apothegm, long prior to the war, that no government could exist ‘half slave and half free.’ The paraphrase of that proposition is equally true, that no government can long exist ‘half black and half white.’” Just as Klansmen believed that Republican rule did not properly constituted a government, Van Trump asserted that Republican rule could not—and would not—“long exist” so long as black suffrage continued. The implication was that African Americans should be removed from the political sphere altogether.

White conservatives blamed Republicans for putting race into binary opposition just as they blamed them for the very existence of Klan violence. In a newspaper editorial that assumed the voice of a spectral visitor from the stars, one white conservative commentator declared that “those who now direct affairs in your country have so managed the government as to make COLOUR, and not qualification, the question in the selection of law-makers,” claiming that it was Republicans who were obsessed with race. The editorial suggested that in enfranchising African Americans and stressing the importance of racial equality, Republicans had overlooked the proper qualifications for office: “in the late elections to office, COLOUR has prevailed, and that in the triumphs of COLOUR knowledge and virtue have been put under foot.” Arguing that Africans were savages, the editorial declared that while “COLOUR with you, tho’ not a crime,

560 KKK, 519.
was the badge which nature had affixed to inferiority; and we have always known too that those who wear this badge know and feel this truth.”

The belief in the stark binary opposition between black and white was one of the most longstanding effects of the narratives white conservatives used to justify Klan violence. One South Carolina conservative who had believed before the Civil War “that slavery was ordained by God in perpetuity,” came to think after the war

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\text{that negroes were brought from Africa to this country… by Divine Decree, to be here held in slavery until sufficiently advanced in civilization and Christianity to be changed into freedmen; … and to go gradually back to Africa for the betterment of their race there; that the South will be better off without them than with them if slowly transported; that the United States should not be dismembered, but unified and strengthened by union.}
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His thinking was typical of a turn-of-the-century thought that the presence of African slavery had caused the Civil War and that the nation’s wounds could only be healed by the removal of African Americans from the nation. That ideology reached its full blossom after Reconstruction, but had its germ in the widespread white conservative conviction that the essential political problem of Reconstruction was the involvement of African Americans.

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Just as they fought against the violence Klansmen used to target them, Republicans opposed many of the narratives white conservatives constructed about Klan violence. Republicans contradicted conservatives’ assertions that the Klan was apolitical, claiming that it was obvious to all parties involved that politics drove Klan violence. Several white Republicans cited the obvious fact that so many Klan victims were Republicans as evidence for the political

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561. “Glimpses from Another World; Or What the Seven Stars Saw. No. II,” The Newberry Herald, April 29, 1868.

nature of Klan violence.\textsuperscript{563} “There was no question about it at all in the minds of anybody,” one North Carolina Republican asserted, “because it was well understood what the politics of those men are at the present time.”\textsuperscript{564} He also asserted that the Klan’s targeting of African Americans was obviously political. To his thinking, Klansmen’s political goal was “the driving of the whole negro race out of the country… the disorganization of the people, white and black.”\textsuperscript{565}

National Republicans stressed it as a primary reason for federal intervention to stop the violence. A Senate report on violence in North Carolina in 1870 concluded that “no reasonable man can doubt that the purpose of this organization was political.”\textsuperscript{566} Joseph Rainey, a black U.S. congressional representative from Georgetown, South Carolina, gave an impassioned speech inveighing against the horrors of Klan violence, asking his fellow Congressmen to “Think of gray-haired men, whose fourscore years are almost numbered, the venerated heads of peaceful households, without warning, murdered for political opinion’s sake.”\textsuperscript{567}

After the passage of the Enforcement Acts, Republicans had to prove that violence by disguised men was done for the purpose of denying their victims the right to political power. As a consequence, they made concerted efforts to document instances of expressly electoral violence. Thus in the trials of Klansmen in Columbia, South Carolina in the winter of 1871, the prosecution had to establish that the victims of Klan raids had not just been murdered, but

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\item \textsuperscript{563} One North Carolina Republican, when asked if “the men who have terror of these Ku-Klux and lie out; are they republicans?” answered “Yes, sir, entirely so;” testimony of J.B. Eaves, \textit{KKK NC}, 167.
\item \textsuperscript{564} Testimony of A. Webster Shaffer, \textit{KKK NC}, 33.
\item \textsuperscript{565} Testimony of A. Webster Shaffer, \textit{KKK NC}, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{566} \textit{NC Report}, xv. Its major finding was “That the Ku-Klux organization does exist, has a political purpose, is composed of members of the democratic or conservative party, has sought to carry out its purpose by murders, whippings, intimidations, and violence, against its opponents,” \textit{NC Report}, xxxi.
\end{itemize}
murdered for explicitly political purposes. White conservatives defending the Klansmen argued the opposite: that the victims of Klan violence had so incensed the decent white people of their communities by their criminal behavior that Klan violence was the result.  

But in the back and forth arguments about the extent to which Klan violence was political, some Republicans effectively ceded to white conservatives a narrow definition of what constituted proper political action. James M. Justice testified that “In my county [attacks] have universally been against republicans, where there has been any politics in it.” But as opposed to reflecting an expansive understanding of political violence, he contended that that some attacks, like that against McGaha, were not political. While he acknowledged that most violence was for political purposes, “The cases against women have been for different reasons,” he claimed. But Justice illustrated the point with a story that seemed to conflict with his assertion: “At one place they went to an old woman’s house and gave them a great deal of insolence, and searched the house for the boys, and rudely handled the women about, but did not whip them. They told them it was because the boys voted the republican ticket, and said that they should tell the boys not to do so any more.” But more than conservatives, Republicans said that the actions of white conservatives were responsible for Klan violence. “I do not say that all their acts are political acts;” Justice acknowledged, “but I do say that if it was not for furthering the interest of the democratic party in the South… there would be no such organization to-day.”

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568 For example, the prosecution in one of the series of trials for the assassination of Jim Williams, a black militia captain killed in the South Carolina upcountry, declared: “We shall endeavor to show that this attack upon Jim Williams was, not only for the purpose of preventing his voting in 1872, but because he had exercised the right and privilege of voting in 1870;” SC Trials, 164. In contrast, the defense argued that “there was a totally different intent from that of preventing voting; that the cause of the hanging of [Williams] was owing to the negroes having been armed, and to the threatenings made by [Williams], the captain of the company;” SC Trials, 231.

569 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 136.

570 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 161.
Several centrist white Republicans embraced the narrative that Republicans in South Carolina were corrupt. James L. Orr, former provisional governor, Reuben Tomlinson, prominent Republican, District Attorney, and D. H. Chamberlain, state attorney general and governor from 1874-1877—all committed Republicans—denounced the corruption in South Carolina in testimony to the Joint Select Committee. After condemning the violence of “bushwackers,” who committed violence “for some time after the war,” and who “who took the law pretty much into their own hands,” and discussing how the assassination of B. F. Randolph led to the suppression of votes in 1868, Reuben Tomlinson denounced corruption, saying

But the great difficulty in having peace and quiet in South Carolina is the maladministration of the government, the reckless expenditure of the public money, the ignorance of the officers who administer the laws, and the high taxes. But the people do not object so much to the high taxes of itself as to the manner in which the public money is squandered after it is collected.571

D.H. Chamberlain, South Carolina attorney general and later governor, even drew a causal link between black suffrage and corruption in South Carolina. He testified that black suffrage

left a very large numerical majority in the hands of the negroes of the State, and of the few white men who had gone there at the close of the war, and the very few white men who had been residents of the State before and had joined the republican party. The material for creating public officers in those elements was necessarily very poor.572

Chamberlain went so far as to say that “bad office-holders” had “suffered most from Ku-Klux outrages.”573 Several South Carolina Republicans said that election fraud had been committed; that the land commission was corrupt; that taxation was too high; that the state was saddled by

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571 Testimony of Reuben Tomlinson, KKK SC, 94.
debt because of reckless spending; and that members of the legislature sold votes for bribes.\textsuperscript{574}

James L. Orr went so far as to say that “A very large portion of the colored element in the house of representatives is of necessity ignorant.”\textsuperscript{575}

Other Republicans denied those charges, particularly sitting politicians. James M. Justice and David T. Corbin both asserted that conservative newspapers were responsible for many, if not most, of the charges of corruption, with Justice saying there was “nothing more common.”\textsuperscript{576}

Senator John Scott of Pennsylvania, chairman of the Joint Select Committee, was particularly keen to argue against corruption as an explanation for Klan violence. When Edwin Whipple Seibels testified at length about the supposed corruption of the South Carolina land commission, Scott asked him, “Has any one, to your knowledge, who has been connected with the maladministration of this freedmen's land fund, been visited by acts of lawlessness?” Seibels admitted that no individuals were known to have been attacked by Klansmen for the supposed corruption.\textsuperscript{577}

Scott then asked about railroad corruption: “Then take the Columbia and Greenville Railroad case, and the bank case, in which so many members of the legislature must have participated; has any one of the members of the legislature or of the State officers, who must have participated in those things, been the victim of any violence in your State?” Again Seibels knew of no actual incidents of violence, but he did recount that several lawmakers had


\textsuperscript{575} Testimony of James L. Orr, \textit{KKK SC}, 5. Ammiel Willard of South Carolina, another white Republican, also argued that most Republican officials and politicians came “from a class of men who have not peculiar fitness for the duty;” testimony of Ammiel J. Willard, \textit{KKK SC}, 61.

\textsuperscript{576} Testimony of James M. Justice, \textit{KKK NC}, 163; testimony of David T. Corbin, \textit{KKK SC}, 77-78.

\textsuperscript{577} Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, \textit{KKK SC}, 95.
been sent letters threatening them. Scott made his point forcefully through questions: “I want to see the connection between the two. If these acts of lawlessness have not been visited upon any of the persons guilty of maladministration, after they had been exposed by name, then what connection has that maladministration with the acts of lawlessness that have occurred in your State?” Seibels admitted that the relationship was less direct than it seemed, but maintained that corruption was a principal cause of Klan violence.

Though the debates about the political nature of Klan violence and the extent of corruption might appear as little more than another tit-for-tat arguments between Democrats and Republicans, the texture of those debates help illustrate how most white southerners perceived race to function. In addition to accepting narratives of corruption, some white Republicans seemed to agree with white conservatives that black and white operated in strict political opposition to one another—even as they supported political equality for African Americans. James H. Goss, a Republican congressman from Union, South Carolina, was asked by a Republican on the Joint Select Committee whether any Republicans had joined the Klan in South Carolina. “Well,” he answered, “I think they intend that the white men shall rule,” implicitly suggesting that “white” and “Democrat” were essentially synonymous—though he himself was a white Republican. Several others also would say “white men” when they only meant white conservative southerners. In 1869, a white southern Republican from Sumter County, South Carolina, opposed legislation that would have outlawed discrimination in public accommodations, declaring “I have always maintained that whenever this question becomes a

578 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 131.
579 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 96.
581 See, for example, testimony of Reuben Tomlinson, KKK SC, 90.
matter of color I would be obliged to take sides with my own color.” 582 Many white Republican legislators were similarly tepid about expanding political equality for African Americans, and even fewer supported policies that forwarded social equality like equal access to public education, public accommodations, and interracial marriage. 583 In the Joint Select Committee hearings, Representative Philadelph Van Trump of Ohio asked James L. Orr whether “you think that the attempt at a half-white and a half-negro government is a failure?” Orr responded equivocally: “I think it has been a very difficult experiment.” 584

But despite the adoption of some of the narratives white conservatives constructed, southern Republicans, black and white, supported racial equality in politics. North Carolina Governor William Woods Holden voiced concern at the increasing number of arms in North Carolina in an 1868 proclamation. He defined conservatives as “persons whose spokesmen deny the authority of the existing government, and who publicly declare that all government, to be authoritative and binding, must proceed alone from one race of our people.” 585 Holden, a white Republican strongly opposed to the Klan, also charged in 1870 that the oaths Klansmen swore “inculcated hatred by the white race against the colored race.” 586 While taking a strong voice for political equality for African Americans, he reified the idea that separate races existed and placed

582 Holt, Black Over White, 144.


584 Testimony of James L. Orr, KKK SC, 10.

585 Holden, “A Proclamation, by His Excellency, the Governor of North Carolina. Executive Department, Raleigh, October 12th, 1868;” in “Appendix,” Third Annual Message, 3.

the two in opposition to one another. But his strong actions to stop Klan violence, and that he blamed white conservatives for that antagonism, placed his racial politics on the progressive side of the white southern political spectrum.

And black Republicans, especially, used different language about the way race should operate in southern politics. A. J. Ransier, a black politician who succeeded B.F. Randolph after his assassination, argued against a declaration of martial law in the South Carolina despite the violence because it “would widen the breach and embitter the feelings between the two classes of our people.”587 While white conservatives—and some Republicans—would assert that there were two races at loggerheads in South Carolina, Ransier articulated that two sides—“classes”—were divided by factors other than the color of their skin. African American voters supported white Republican politicians.588 Similarly, Joseph Rainey, a black U.S. congressman from South Carolina, in a speech advocating for the Enforcement Acts, declared that federal intervention was equally desired for those loyal whites, some to the manner born, others who, in the exercise of their natural rights as American citizens, have seen fit to remove thither from other sections of the States, and who are now undergoing persecution simply on account of their activity in carrying out Union principles and loyal sentiments in the South.

He celebrated that “Their efforts have contributed largely to further reconstruction and the restoration of the southern states to the old fellowship of their Federal compact.”589 In addition to firmly declaring their suitability for inclusion in the national body politic, African Americans in the South during Reconstruction advocated for equal political protection for all citizens.

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588 James L. Orr recognized this, noting that black majority districts frequently elected white Republican representatives to constitutional conventions, state legislatures, and the U.S. Congress; KKK SC, 6.

The Ku Klux Klan clearly, unquestionably, supported the interests of the Democratic Party during Reconstruction. Violence that Klansmen committed, and the ways by which it was interpreted and justified by its members and sympathetic white conservative, worked to discredit Republicans and remove them from power. But the political work of both Klansmen and white conservatives was more multifaceted than simply restoring Democrats to office. They worked to depict any black political power as total subjugation for white southerners. As one later chronicler put it, “The powerless white man stood by witnessing the destruction of his country and the degradation of his race.”

The Republican Party was not destroyed by Klan violence. Democrats regained control of the North Carolina legislature in the 1870s, but Republicans posed a threat until the disfranchisement campaign of 1898. Even the “redemption” of South Carolina in 1876 did not end black political participation or destroy the Republican Party there. But the wide slate of attacks against Republicans seriously restricted their ability to gain electoral traction. And the narratives conservatives used to defend Klan violence had even greater longevity. A Klansman who survived into the 1910s wrote that the Klan was necessary because

      the negro, who outnumbered the whites many times over, ignorant, unprincipled and depraved, grew vicious under the prompting and teachings of the element which injected itself among them, living with them under conditions of social equality most revolting and debased, and who in order to secure and hold an influence and control in politics and otherwise, encouraged and cultivated the basest and most vicious and criminal instincts of the negro, having control of the Courts, the juries, and Civil as well as public positions. The daily life of the Southern white man—the property owner—became intolerable, unsafe, and hazardous, and their property was destroyed by incendiary negroes and worse white men.

591 John Lucas to Maude Stewart, April 19, 1918, Ku Klux Klan Clippings File, SCHS.
His claims reflected two intertwined narratives: the call to build “a white man’s government,” and the cry that the South was overrun by innately criminal African Americans, whose assertions of communal activism and independence were seen by Klansmen and their conservative apologists as evidence of the existence of “Negro Domination,” as the next chapter explores.
Chapter Five: Constructing “Negro Domination”: Klan Violence and Local Politics

John T. Freeman was in his room at the St. Charles Hotel in Kinston, North Carolina, when he heard a knock on his door after midnight on January 24, 1869. Opening the door, a man standing there told him to get his keys to the town jail. Freeman was working as the town jailer, and his visitor told him a new prisoner had been brought in for robbery. Freeman looked past the man at his door and saw two men on horses, one tied up with ropes—apparently the suspect. Freeman, unable to see clearly, asked if he was black or white; “he is a white man,” was the response. Freeman got his keys and led the small party to the jail, saying it was “a fine thing” that the men had brought him a new prisoner to add to the ten already locked up. Upon reaching the jail, Freeman unlocked the door—and promptly heard two clicks. Turning, he saw cocked pistols pointed at his head. The man said, “We are going to have these prisoners or your life. Give me your keys.” The bound man took out a knife and cut his own cords. It was a jailbreak.  

Within a few moments, about twenty-five white men on horses rode up to the jail, some in disguise, others not. They were all members of the Constitutional Union Guard. Several Klansmen forced Freeman to go upstairs to the cells and unlocked one. They dragged out four black prisoners: Robert Grady, John Miller, Cater Grady, and Daniel Smith. Robert Grady asked why he was going to be killed. Simpson Harper, one of the Klansmen, replied, “Damn you, I am not going to kill you; I am going to carry you down stairs, and you have got to tell me truth

592 Accounts of this raid are contained in NC Report, cvii-cxi, with court testimonies from Freeman and Hopp, as well as two witnesses: William White, a white man stopped and released by the crowd of Klansmen that night, and Thomas Parker, a black man who saw the crowd and later saw the bodies of the prisoners washed ashore. See also Massengill, “The Detectives of William W. Holden,” 461.
tonight.” They went downstairs, leaving behind two white cellmates, Richard Nobles and William Hopp, who hid under blankets. After some twenty minutes Klansmen returned and grabbed Nobles as well. Hopp was spared.

The moon was bright as the crowd took the five prisoners through the town of Kinston. They went about a mile to the bridge spanning the Neuse River. Townspeople awakened by the struggle heard a single volley of gunfire roughly half an hour after the prisoners were taken from the jail, and then nothing more that night. The bodies of the five prisoners washed ashore a mile downstream from the bridge. Though seen by many local residents, the bodies were not taken from the river for some eight or ten days. When the coroner finally recovered the murdered prisoners’ bodies, he found that their hands were still tied.

John Freeman might be forgiven for not knowing if the men who knocked on his door the night of January 24 were trying to deliver a prisoner or break others out. The area around Kinston in the late 1860s was rather like the lawless towns that populate so many clichéd Westerns—the line between criminal and lawman was blurry and a sense of lawlessness was pervasive. Many white men, including members of the Klan, were deputized to punish suspected black criminals. For example, one Klansman named Richard Sutton murdered Lewis Cogden, an African American suspected of robbery, in a drunken fit. His accomplices, also members of the Constitutional Union Guard, were sometimes deputized as policemen and on other occasions, like the night Cogden was killed, were not; that night they were “arresting without warrants.”

Sutton’s comrades were angry about Cogden’s murder because they had been ordered by a local

Testimony of Thomas Waters, NC Report, xcvii.
officer to question Cogden and find his accomplices. But after the murder they helped Sutton bury Cogden’s body in a nearby field.  

In addition to stories of robberies committed by black men like Lewis Cogden, there had been several reports of barns and mills burned, with rumor blaming local African Americans. On the night of the raid, one of the Klansmen who dragged the five prisoners from the jail was heard to exclaim to Robert Grady, one of the black prisoners, “God damn you, you have threatened burning me up long enough,” suggesting that perhaps the Klansmen suspected the men of having engaged in the barn burning thought to be rampant.  

Many white conservatives across the South shared the anxieties of those in Lenoir County about the local enforcement of law. As a consequence of widespread white fears of black criminality—more often imagined than real—white conservatives across the South joined groups like the Constitutional Union Guard to take the law into their own hands. In instances like the raid on the Kinston jail, Klansmen circumvented local courts through vigilante violence, resulting in the further destabilization of local legal structures throughout the South.  

White conservatives’ anxieties about crime and law enforcement that prompted the raid on the Kinston jail were only some of many issues in local communities during Reconstruction around which Klan violence coalesced. White conservatives constructed a narrative that claimed acts of vigilante violence worked to reverse what they saw as “Negro Domination” or “Negro Rule.” At no point during Reconstruction did African Americans have actual complete

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594 NC Report, xcvii-xcviii.
595 NC Report, cix.
596 Steven Hahn has written that “Negro Rule” “captured in the most direct way [white conservatives’] view that the dreaded revolution… came neither with the military defeat of the Confederacy nor with the abolition of slavery but with the enfranchisement of the freedmen and their participation in state and local government;” but despite the overstated nature of white conservatives’ claims “Radical Reconstruction occasioned a massive transfer of power at the state and local levels” from white to black southerners, in A Nation Under Our Feet, 237-238
control; even at the height of Radical Republicans’ control most Republican officeholders—even at the local level—were white, many of whom were tepid about expanding social rights for African Americans. Furthermore, Republicans, white and black, who held political office at the local level were frequently moderate and would extend concessions to conservatives. But the specter of “Negro Domination” held substantial currency to white conservatives, who sought to reverse it through violence and a narrative that justified violence’s use.

That narrative was founded upon an ideological response to assertions of black autonomy wherein white conservatives were convinced that race was a zero-sum game in the postbellum South. Klansmen and white southerners supportive of them saw any assertion of independence, communal or individual, by African Americans as part of a winner-take-all struggle between whites and blacks; where any African Americans had authority, white conservatives perceived total black domination over whites. White conservatives placed perceived incidents of criminal activity by African Americans, like those Klansmen accused of the prisoners in the Kinston jail, into the framework of “Negro Domination.” Combining a fear of black domination with antebellum justifications for slavery, white conservative southerners became convinced that African Americans were innately depraved. They believed that black southerners at best all wanted to commit petty crimes like stealing, and more likely were intent upon beginning a race war that would end with the murder of all white southerners—unless white men struck first.

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597 Previous historians have underemphasized the extent to which white conservative fears about black crime rhetorically bolstered the work Klansmen were doing, sometimes taking at face values conservative complaints about black crime. Allen Trelease, for example, took a conditional approach, writing “If the Orange County [North Carolina] Klan decreased Negro crime, as its apologists repeatedly claimed, it did so at great cost to the white crime rate,” in White Terror, 197.

598 Allen Trelease writes, “The possibility of an all-out race war was a matter of common speculation and concern throughout the Reconstruction period, just as the fear of slave revolts had tortured Southern minds earlier,” in White Terror, xliii.
David Schenck, in his diary, anticipated a “second ‘Irrepressible Conflict’… which must sooner or later end in the extinction of the negro race.”

The intertwined beliefs that African Americans were predisposed to criminality, held positions of complete authority during Reconstruction, and desired a genocidal war of the races provided white conservatives with ideological ammunition to justify Klan violence. Though these convictions stemmed in some ways from the ideological justifications for slavery from the antebellum period, Klansmen reworked them within the new context of a South that was no longer structured by racial slavery. As a result, vigilante violence by Klansmen silenced local activism by African Americans and those white Republicans who supported, however hesitatingly or haltingly, expanding black participation in the political, economic, and legal arenas of southern communities.

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When the Civil War ended, African Americans seized freedom in multiple ways, taking the opportunity to reunite with families, gain political power, build new churches and schools, and assert their personal independence. One of the primary ways that African Americans seized new opportunities for freedom at the local level was creating new community organizations. Though some scholars have downplayed schisms within the black community, instead emphasizing solidarity and the remarkably rapid political mobilizations that occurred after emancipation, both black and white communities were fractured and diverse in the

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599 David Schenck Diary, SHC; also quoted in Trelease, White Terror, 198.

postemancipation South.\textsuperscript{601} Many white southerners, including Republicans, shared significant ambivalence about equality with African Americans, and were split by divisions of class and region. African Americans also fractured along urban and rural divisions as well as “a whole complex of interrelated variables of class and acculturation.”\textsuperscript{602}

Despite fissures and fractures, political and social, African Americans shared a commitment to organizing, educating, and improving their communities after emancipation. That kind of community activism required institutional support from national organizations like the Republican Party, the Freedmen’s Bureau, the American Missionary Association, and the Union League.\textsuperscript{603} Members of the League worked to mobilize support for Republican politicians and to encourage voting among the freedmen. But its activities were not confined to electoral politics, as League members worked to educate southern white Unionists and African Americans, and to mobilize them for self-defense against conservatives.\textsuperscript{604} Members frequently brought arms to meetings, and Leagues often engaged in military drills.\textsuperscript{605} Such displays of militari

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\textsuperscript{601} Steven Hahn, most notably, has argued for the primacy of political solidarity among rural African Americans; \textit{A Nation Under Our Feet}, 2. \\
\textsuperscript{602} Holt, \textit{Black Over White}, 61. \\
\textsuperscript{603} As Steven Hahn has argued, “the reconstruction of black communities was increasingly seen to require institutional power at the local level,” \textit{A Nation Under Our Feet}, 234. \\
\textsuperscript{604} For an extended discussion of the Union League, see Steven Hahn, \textit{A Nation Under Our Feet}, 177-182. \\
\textsuperscript{605} Holt, \textit{Black Over White}, 31. \\
\textsuperscript{606} Interview with Tina Johnson, \textit{Born in Slavery}, Volume XI, Part 2, 22.
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Klansmen also targeted black schools for violence, particularly ones that worked to meet African Americans’ clear and consistent dedication to securing education after emancipation.\textsuperscript{607} Klansmen burned black schools or would threaten to unless they closed their doors. Precise numbers of schools and teachers attacked are difficult to ascertain, both because of the informal nature of southern education at the time, and because attacks on schools generated less attention than more overtly political attacks like assassinations. Surviving accounts are scattered and sparse. For example, in 1871 Governor Holden forwarded to the War Department a report of a “school-house burned at Ashboro, with Ku-Klux outrages.”\textsuperscript{608} A few incidents of schools being burned were reported to the Joint Select Committee. A white farmer from Chatham County, North Carolina recounted that a “colored school” that also served as a church on the edge of Moore County was burned by a group of some ten or fifteen disguised white men.\textsuperscript{609} James M. Justice testified that Klansmen burned two schools for African Americans in Rutherford County, North Carolina. Before one of the schools was burned, a notice was posted up … to the effect that if the teacher continued to teach school there for three weeks longer, they would burn the house. He continued the school, and after the third week was out the house was burned according to the promise in the notice that was put up on the school-house.\textsuperscript{610} The only apparent motive was that Klansmen did not want African American children being educated; no other misdeeds were charged to the teacher or the pupils.

\textsuperscript{607} See Heather Andrea Williams, Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). African American’s desire for education during slavery was even a trope of abolitionist literature ranging from slave narratives, the writing of Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin.

\textsuperscript{608} NC Report, xliv.

\textsuperscript{609} Testimony of Elias Bryan, KKK NC, 72-73.

\textsuperscript{610} Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 134.
A sympathetic Jim Crow-era chronicler of the Klan evinced ambivalence about violence targeted at teachers and schools. He wrote, “The white teachers in the negro schools were probably the class which suffered the most innocently, not ordinarily from violence, but from the countless other ways in which Southern society made them aware that they were unwelcome and that their mission was disapproved.” He claimed that many conservative white southerners ostracized white teachers of black students because those teachers “disregarded the boundary lines between different social classes, as rigid and cruel in democracies as anywhere else.” Such education was foolhardy, he asserted, as “the sort of education they at first offered the freedmen was useless, or worse than useless,—that theirs was a fool’s errand.” He finally acknowledged that beyond mere social ostracism, some teachers did suffer violence. “The worst work the Ku Klux ever did,” he decried, “was its opposition to negro schools, and the occasional expulsion or even violent handling of teachers.” Unlike this later chronicler, Klansmen during Reconstruction appeared to have few qualms about attacking schoolhouses.

Black churches were often also used as schools, both for religious education as well as teaching literacy (and political organizing), and were thus sometimes targeted by Klansmen for violence or intimidation. Interestingly, Klansmen seem to not have found black religious activity as objectionable as black education. In Rutherford County, where at least two schools were burned, one of them had been held in a black church. A white Republican testified that a member of the church told him “that some white men down there had told the colored people that if they did not continue to worship at that place they would make them do it, would abuse

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611 Brown, The Lower South, 216-217.

612 Steven Hahn has argued that churches formed the background of much of local politics among rural African Americans during Reconstruction, as “congregations and churches… had an unrivaled ability to mobilize community sentiment and action and to unify rural African Americas across district and county lines;” in A Nation Under Our Feet, 233.
them if they did not.” The congregation held at least one meeting on the grounds of the burned church, as Klansmen’s primary objection was to the education of African Americans, not black religious practices.613 Similarly, Samuel Allen, a black magistrate from Caswell County, North Carolina, was attacked by Klansmen, barely escaping with his life, because he had taught a Sunday school. Allen testified to a Senate investigation that Klansmen “told me that this thing of teaching niggers and educating niggers was something they did not allow; that the church they belonged to never sanctioned any such thing.”614 Similarly, black religious leaders were sometimes targeted by the Klan for violence if they were prominent in their communities and politically active. In the early spring of 1871, Klansmen whipped the wife and mother of Martin Parson; he had gone to court to pay his taxes the night Klansmen visited his house. Parson was known as “a class-leader” and “rather a prominent character in religious matters,” but was supposedly whipped because he voted Republican.615

Republicans, white and black, responded to Klan efforts to destabilize their community organizations on both individual and communal levels. Many procured arms for self-defense.616 Individual Republicans’ efforts to secure guns to protect their community received political support from prominent politicians, including Governor Holden in North Carolina.617 Despite

613 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 134.
614 Testimony of Samuel Allen, NC Report, 49.
615 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 109.
617 Holden made a proclamation in 1868 that included the assertion that “[The use of arms by the male population, for peaceable and lawful purposes, should rather be encouraged than otherwise;]” “Appendix,” in Third Annual Message, 3.
such support, many found it difficult to obtain arms they found suitable, and they had to rely
upon weapons intended for hunting like shotguns and single-shot rifles. Even those were hard to
come by. A North Carolinian testified that local African Americans had only “[s]ome old rifles,
some muskets, and some pistols,” and those were not numerous. “I do not think I ever saw a half
a dozen negroes have arms in their hands,” he recounted.618 Another white North Carolina
Republican bemoaned that the Republicans in his county, white and black alike, could not raise
more than “fifty double-barreled shot-guns in the whole county,” and that most ordinary farmers
would only have “long-barreled rifles to shoot squirrels with; a good bushwacking gun, but not
very good for fighting.”619 But Republicans used what guns they could purchase to guard each
other’s homes from Klan attacks, often meeting together for mutual protection.

Klansmen reacted to Republicans’ arming themselves by attempting to systematically
take away those guns.620 Hampton Parker and Joseph Miller, both black farmers working for
shares on the land of a white planter in Spartanburg County, South Carolina, were disarmed and
whipped by Klansmen—Parker because he had taken a rifle out to shoot what he thought was an
owl hunting his chickens.621 When Miller was whipped that same night, Klansmen asked for his
gun and pistols, and when he declared that he had no pistols, their leader said “Don’t lie to me or
I will blow your brains out.”622 Samuel Gaffney, also from Spartanburg, testified to members of

618 Testimony of J.B. Eaves, KKK NC, 168.
619 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 160.
620 For example, see the testimony of James M. Justice, who recounted that Klansmen took “a damned good piece”
away from an African American named Jonas Watts, who had never been a slave—telling “him that it was about the
way he had been voting that they visited him;” KKK NC, 138. And in 1868 members of the Constitutional Union
Guard in Lenoir County, North Carolina, robbed Jesse Parrott, an African American, of a “gun and pistol,” as well
as his horses and a pair of his daughter’s shoes; testimony of Jesse Parrott, NC Report, xcvii.
621 Testimony of Hampton Parker, KKK SC, 597-598.
622 Testimony of Joseph Miller, KKK SC, 600.
the Joint Select Committee when they visited his home county that he was whipped by Klansmen because he had voted for Republicans. He bought a shotgun while on his journey to testify, “to scare the crows out of my field,” by his telling. He was visited again by Klansmen four days later because they found out he had testified about the violence, and they stole his shotgun.  

Klansmen would seek to disarm their victims even if their victims claimed not to have useable firearms. Klansmen raided the home of Wallace and Charlotte Fowler, an elderly African American couple from Spartanburg, South Carolina. They murdered Wallace and then broke into the home, demanding guns from Charlotte. She later testified, “He says, ‘Hand me up your arms’—that is, the guns… I says, ‘There is none here; the old man had none in slavery, and had none in all his freedom, and everybody on the settlement knows it.’” After being beaten by two Klansmen, Charles Dennis O’Keefe, a white Republican official in South Carolina and for a time the state president of the Union League, remained politically active in the state. He finally left the South for New York after Klansmen broke into his uncle’s house where he had been living, meaning to kill him. Not finding him home, the Klansmen satisfied themselves with breaking an old gun stored in the house.  

A kind of arms race developed in the postemancipation South, as white conservatives responded to the arming of Republicans by arming themselves. Each side claimed the other was better equipped. In a 1868 proclamation wherein he declared his support for private citizens arming themselves, North Carolina Governor William W. Holden decried that “in time of peace, weapons of an extraordinary character are imported into the State by political organizations, and

624 Testimony of Charlotte Fowler, KKK SC, 387.
625 Testimony of Charles Dennis O’Keefe, KKK SC, 37.
deposited and distributed in a secret manner.”

Most troubling to Holden was that said political organizations were Democratic, not Republican, as Democrats “deny the authority of the existing government, and … publicly declare that all government, to be authoritative and binding, must proceed alone from one race of our people.”

Though Holden’s declaration that conservatives were securing “weapons of an extraordinary character” was intended to bolster support for Republicans, and likely itself fueled the southern arms race, his statement was probably true. On the whole it appears that white conservatives were more successful in procuring more—and more effective—guns than Republicans. D.H. Chamberlain, the attorney general of South Carolina, testified in 1871 that during the previous election cycle, “there was considerable excitement when it was understood that the democrats, as we call them, were arming themselves with Winchester and Henry rifles, or something of the kind.” Chamberlain said that though he had not seen evidence in person, “I heard it so often that it came to be a belief with me, but it was hearsay. I heard that one firm in Columbia, whose name I now recollect, Hope Brothers, shipped a great many arms into the up country—boxes of arms.” He made it clear “that they were not for sporting purposes. They were repeating rifles.” In contrast, James L. Orr, former Republican provisional governor of South Carolina, said that such rumors were overstated, testifying “If there has been any unusual arming [of conservatives], it has not come within my knowledge.”

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Republicans that conservatives had more numerous and more deadly arms was geared to garner political support for Republicans. As previously discussed, Klansmen were frequently heavily armed with pistols and shotguns, and repeating rifles might have been rarer. But the disproportionate violence committed by the Ku Klux Klan—and Klansmen’s sustained success in disarming their victims—suggests a truth to Republicans’ claims.

Republicans, particularly African Americans, seem to have responded to Klan violence and campaigns to disarm and destabilize communities by mobilizing increasingly militant rhetoric. In one instance, a white merchant from Branchville, South Carolina, wrote to a friend in Walterboro asking “how are the KKK’s in your county. The people here are very much excited. Have found a document nealed [nailed] on the Drug Store yesterday treatening the white people with fire and sword from Charleston to Columbia, the writing of which looks like a negroes.” Branchville was in Orangeburg County, in the eastern part of the state, where there was little or no Klan activity, but the rumor of the note suggests that either white conservatives had posted a threatening notice to incite violence against African Americans—or local blacks believed posting an incendiary threat would secure their communities and prevent violence.

White conservatives made frequent, sustained complaints about violent threats like those rumored in Branchville. Their fears undoubtedly stemmed in large part from longstanding white paranoia of slave uprisings, as well as shared white conservative notions of innate black depravity. As unsubstantiated rumors of black aggression were a central component to the narrative of “Negro Domination,” accounts of militant black rhetoric ought to be approached cautiously—especially given that African Americans did not engage in widespread violence like the whippings, hangings, and shootings that the Ku Klux Klan committed. It is difficult to

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632 A. Loryea to James J. Klein, April 12, 1871, James J. Klein Papers, SCL.
determine the extent to which such rumors were the phantasms of white conservatives, or if African Americans really did use militant language to inspire their own communities and threaten whites. But the specificity of some of the language attributed to African Americans suggests that many might have used aggressive rhetoric in response to Klan violence.

The threat of arson was one of the most frequent that African Americans seem to have made. Yorkville, South Carolina was frequently rumored to be under threat of torching by African Americans. The whole South Carolina upcountry had widespread incidents of Klan violence, and Yorkville was the frequent site of flashpoints. Mary Davis Brown, a white conservative woman from York County, recorded on Monday, January 30, 1871, that

there is great excitement to day. The negroes have threatened to burn York up to night and the men has most all gone to York and they are going to make the negroes give up the guns that Governor Scott gave them but General Anterson came up that night and said that he would have the guns all brought in the next day. They set one house a fire that night but it was soon put out and they had stirring times fore a while but they all got cooled down after a while and I set up till John and Lawson came home about one oclock in the night.633

Agnes McDill, a white schoolteacher from nearby Chester County who was sympathetic to the Klan, recorded a similar threat, recounting to a friend that “The negroes have threatened to burn Yorkville. The citizens are guarding it every night. The radical party (Negroes) are dissatisfied the way the K.K. are acting. They whip every negro that acts contrary to their wishes. And the negroes reason to burning for revenge.”634 Both accounts recorded not only that African Americans threatened to burn down Yorkville, but that local whites rushed to defend the town from the supposed attack. Contemporary newspapers encouraged white southerners to do so. The

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633 Mary Davis Brown, *Oil In Our Lamps: The Journals of Mary Davis Brown from the Beersheba Presbyterian Church Community, York, SC, 1854-1901* (Self-Published by the Descendants of Mary Davis Brown, 2010), 174.

634 Agnes McDill to William Dunlap Knox, February 1, 1871, William Dunlap Knox Papers, SCL.
Newberry Herald posted a notice that African Americans had made threats to Union County, and later reported

Since that notice, nothing more has appeared in print, and natural enough there is a feeling of suspense as to what may result. There is no fear, however; the citizens of Union are able to cope with and quell the ignorant rabble who it is reported are arrayed in hostility against them. And we are assured if any violence is done, a well merited retribution will follow, when it will be too late for these poor, miserable, misguided wretches to see their error.635

Regardless of the veracity of the reports of black threats to southern white communities, white conservatives saw such threats as real.

That there might have been actual threats by African Americans like those rumored against Yorkville and Union is perhaps corroborated by specific similarities in stories recounting militant black rhetoric threatening white conservatives. A white conservative from Columbia testified that “there was so much bitterness in the colored people” after a race riot in Laurens around the 1870 election, that “In half an hour after that news reached Columbia two companies [of black militia] were out in full uniform, armed and equipped, with wagons loaded with provisions… I heard them say that they were going up the country if Governor Scott would let them go, and they would not leave a house standing, and they would sweep even the cradles.”636

The threat of arson—that “they would not leave a house standing” matches the possible threats made against Branchville and Yorkville—and the threat to “sweep even the cradles” was cited numerous times by conservatives as one of the most prevalent and chilling of threats African Americans made, and it almost always referred to the South Carolina upcountry.

In February of 1871 Mary Davis Brown of Yorkville recorded in her diary rumor of another threat against Yorkville, as “a curerer [courier] has come with the news that the negores

635 “The Union Riot,” The Newberry Herald, August 5, 1868.

has threatened to rise down below york to night and kill from the cradle to the grave and oure young men is all ordered to go and has gone.” The phrase was most commonly attributed to Jim Williams, a black militia captain hanged by Klansmen. As one contemporary remembered,

There was at this time, too, in the district of York, one particularly dangerous character, a negro Captain of militia, who was still endeavoring to excite the negro population of York to massacre the white citizens. In his own strong and expressive language, he used them to destroy all the white population “from the cradle to the grave.” He was a bold bad man, and there were abundant reasons for believing that he had sufficient influence over his race to incite them to the attempt to carry out his terrible threat. He also fell a victim to the apprehensions that his sanguinary threat had excited.

It is possible that Williams made the threat white conservatives claimed he did. In a federal trial of Klansmen accused of his murder, three witnesses testified that they had personally heard Williams threaten to kill from the cradle up. Two were white men, and one a black member of Williams’s militia company; all were called by defense attorneys for the accused Klansmen. The witnesses suggested Williams was a brash and outspoken man, with one witness claiming that Williams was so radical that he denounced the governor and state Republicans as being weak and corrupt, and that he said he “had as much sense as any damned white man in York District.” Another defense witness testified that Williams “said the Ku Klux came down into that settlement, and bothered the colored people; that he would commence Ku Kluxing white women and children; gin houses, barns and stables with fire; and if he was in power and could rule the State in no other way, that he had the means of carrying on war, and if he carried on war he would kill from the cradle up.”

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637 Brown, Oil In Our Lamps, 175.
639 Testimony of William Bratton, SC Trials, 347-348; testimony of Bill Lindsay, SC Trials, 303, 306-307; and testimony of James Long, SC Trials, 311.
640 Testimony of James Long, SC Trials, 311.
Williams was a very active militia leader. After receiving arms and ammunition from Governor Scott in August of 1870, his company frequently drilled, publicly and with a full display of arms, through the fall 1870 election until Christmas.\textsuperscript{642} During the trials of Klansmen suspected of his murder, the principal defense attorney asserted that Williams had served as a Union soldier with Sherman during the Civil War.\textsuperscript{643} Given that Sherman’s army was made up entirely of white units, and given Sherman’s well-documented personal antipathy to African Americans, the charge seems unlikely. That he might have served as a Union soldier, however, remains possible, given the amount he drilled and trained his company.

Williams also embraced freedom in other, transformative ways. He had changed his surname to Williams from Rainey.\textsuperscript{644} Rainey was a popular surname among whites in York County; in 1850, a white man named Samuel Rainey owned forty-one slaves, included two men of the age Jim Williams would have been at the time.\textsuperscript{645} Though it is unclear when he changed his name, it is reasonable to suppose he did so after emancipation to assert a new identity divorced from his former owner and his enslaved past—especially as white conservatives continued to refer to him as Rainey after his murder, both in the trials and in private correspondence.\textsuperscript{646} They likely used what had been his name under slavery to deny the new identity that Williams was asserting as a free man.

\textsuperscript{642} Though the company seems to have never received more than three rounds of ammunition per soldier; testimony of Andy Timms, \textit{SC Trials}, 224-228.

\textsuperscript{643} Henry Stanbery, attorney general under President Andrew Johnson and a defense attorney in the Klan trials in Columbia, made the assertion that Williams had served under Sherman; see \textit{SC Trials}, 296.

\textsuperscript{644} Testimony of Andy Tims, \textit{SC Trials}, 224.

\textsuperscript{645} \textit{U.S. Census Bureau. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850} (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850), M432, Slave Schedules, York, South Carolina, Page 46.

\textsuperscript{646} Anonymous to John Bratton, March 28, 1872, Bratton Family Papers, SCL.
It is also highly likely that Williams never made the threat, but that it was made up to further the narrative of “Negro Domination.” Despite the fact that every defense witness had claimed Williams made the threat, every witness called by the prosecution—ranging from former Klansmen to other members of Williams’s militia—testified that they had never heard Williams say such things. His friends and acquaintances reported that he was temperate and kind, never swearing or using profane language.647 One friend recounted that he “always found him a genial, jovial and good-hearted fellow; he was a peaceable man, and not disposed to disturb anybody.”648 When asked if Williams had ever threatened to kill people “from the cradle up,” his friend said “No, sir; I never heard him make any threats of that kind; I have spoken to him in regard to threats of that description and always found him to be opposed to anything of that kind.”649

Williams was married, forty years old in 1870, and had four children: three boys and a daughter named Lula.650 One night in March 1871, a group of Klansmen came to his home demanding a stockpile of repeating rifles they believed he was hiding for his militia company. He hid under the house at first, but emerged when Klansmen demanded that his wife Rosy hand over the guns. They both protested that there were no such rifles, but the Klansmen dragged Jim out of the house, took him away, and hanged him. On his chest the Klansmen left a sign that read, “Jim Williams on his big muster.”651

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647 Testimony of Andy Timms, SC Trials, 359.
648 Testimony of P.J. O’Connell, SC Trials, 360.
649 Testimony of P.J. O’Connell, SC Trials, 360.
651 Testimony of Rosy Williams, SC Trials, 237.
Three days later Klansmen raided other members of his militia company, taking what the militiamen called their “Scott guns,” named for the South Carolina governor who had given them.\(^{652}\) Williams’s hanging attracted such significant attention that many of the Klansmen involved in it fled the state; Klansman James Rufus Bratton ended up fleeing to Canada to escape prosecution for the assassination, and his brother fled to Memphis.\(^{653}\) White conservatives celebrated the assassination, but African Americans had a different reaction. At an Emancipation Day celebration in the South Carolina upcountry in 1872, after several speeches by Republican politicians, the predominantly black crowd closed the event with a singing of “John Brown’s Body Lies A’Mouldering,” substituting Jim Williams’s name for the martyred abolitionist Brown—the chorus ending with the declaration that “his soul is marching on.”\(^{654}\) Local African Americans might have been inspired by the strong rhetoric he used—if indeed he made the threat. Perhaps he gave a voice to many black southerners sick and tired of the violence and intimidation of the Ku Klux Klan.

African Americans were not the only ones to use militant language to oppose white conservatives; some white Republicans were quick to use incendiary rhetoric. Perhaps the man most despised and feared by white conservatives in the entire South Carolina upcountry was Joseph Crews, a white state legislator from Laurens who served as a lieutenant colonel in command of several black militia companies. Crews seemed an unlikely advocate for Republicanism. A conservative chronicler of the Klan, who declared that Crews “was just as bad

\(^{652}\) Testimony of Andy Tims, _SC Trials_, 228.

\(^{653}\) A Statement of Dr. Bratton’s Case, Being Explanatory of the Ku-Klux Prosecutions in the Southern States (London, Ontario: Free Press Steam Book and Job Printing Co, 1872), 16. See also Bratton Family Papers, SCL.

as the worst,” noted that he “came of a good family,” meaning a conservative one. Joseph’s brother T.B. Crews was a Confederate colonel, a dedicated Democrat, and editor of the *Laurensville Herald*. But Joseph Crews was as outspoken a white Republican as existed in South Carolina. He sheltered Republicans afraid of assassination and denounced intimidation of black voters. Writing to Governor Scott before the 1868 election, he requested more troops to secure the peace. “If any officer will investigate and find the Prejudice out in this county,” he declared, “it will be easy seen that the Democrats are murdering and threatening people on account of Political Opinion.”

Crews was less temperate in public. Several sources alleged that in a campaign speech to a majority black audience in Waterloo in Laurens County sometime around 1870, Crews said that “matches are cheap” or “a box of matches would cost only five cents,” should white conservatives continue to use violence or intimidation against African Americans. His obvious implication was that arson could be an effective tool of reprisal against the Klan. His “match box speech” was not his only supposedly controversial one. A white conservative later claimed that he brashly defended his record by declaring that “I have lied and I will lie again. I have stolen & I will steal again.” The *Union Times* reported in September of 1870 that Crews, backed by three companies of black militiamen, made another “ranting, blood and thunder speech” wherein

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657 Joseph Crews to Governor Robert K. Scott, November 2, 1868, Box 3, Folder 21, Governor Robert K. Scott Papers, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, S.C. [subsequently cited as SCDAH].


659 Anonymous letter to Erastus W. Everson, summer 1871, Erastus W. Everson Papers, SCHS.
He told the negroes he never had promised them lands, but he now promised them a division of the lands after the election. He told them that they (the negroes) had bought these lands by their labor, while slaves, and the white people ought to and should divide them with the colored people.

And a white writer for the Federal Writer’s Project in the 1930s asserted that Crews “told his negro militia to defend their rights with torches as well as guns.” Though these claims were undoubtedly inflated, Crews was well known to use controversial rhetoric for political effect.

Crews was cautious about his safety but open about the steps he took for protection. A white Republican newspaper editor in Columbia received an anonymous letter from a conservative in 1871 recounting that Crews had been seen ostentatiously placing “his pistols & cartridges on his seat being plainly seen by every one” when he entered the smoking car of the train on which he was traveling. The same letter noted that troops from Laurens (likely black militiamen) had encircled that town, “allowing any one to enter but none to pass out,” to which the writer concluded that “Joe” was “weary [wary] about stragglers”—conservatives in Laurens who might follow and assassinate him. He was targeted for killing along with black militiamen during the Laurens riot after the 1870 congressional election, but avoided being killed and went into hiding until U.S. troops arrived in the riot’s aftermath. He began staying in Columbia for his own safety. His precautions were insufficient; he was later murdered by two or three local white men after returning to Laurens County. His conservative brother was

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660 Article from the Union Times reprinted in “A Radical Outrage in Laurens,” The Newberry Herald, September 14, 1870.
662 Anonymous letter to Erastus W. Everson, summer 1871, Erastus W. Everson Papers, SCHS.
rumored to have said “that he loved his brother but he loved his state and his country more, that it was best for his country that his brother Joe was killed.”

Crews’s use of militant rhetoric is significant for two reasons. First, white conservatives found it incredibly galling. Perhaps no one, white or black, from the South Carolina upcountry garnered as much disdain in both contemporary and later texts as did Joseph Crews. Contemporary newspaper articles railed against “old Joe’s extermination and fire speeches,” one claiming their effect was that “Every nigger in the land believed salvation would come of it. A little murder here and there, and a barn burning, were child’s play to the actual work of deliverance, and only done to keep their hands in.” A Klansman imprisoned in the Columbia jail in 1872 mentioned Crews in a poem he wrote for a friend, as the friend had joined the Klan “seeking this cause;/To spite both Joe Crews and the Debble [Devil].” Even later revisionist historians have not been very sympathetic to his memory. Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, writing in 1924, asserted that “the Negro militia was not wisely handled. Under Joe Crews, the white Lieutenant Colonel, the militiamen did so much parading and unnecessary talking about how they intended to keep order and they made so many arrests that the whites organized in opposition.”

Second, it appears that African Americans found Crews’s rhetoric appealing. Though there is scanty concrete evidence about what African Americans thought about Crews, accounts of his supposed “matchbox speech” invariably noted that he was accompanied by large numbers of black militiamen, and that it was given to a large crowd of black listeners. Klan sympathizers

665 McCravy, Memories, 14.
668 Taylor, The Negro in South Carolina, 190.
often said that he “had his negro following” or “was leader of them all.”\textsuperscript{669} That he held considerable influence and authority in the South Carolina upcountry between 1868 and 1872 is unquestionable, suggesting he had sustained popular support. The aggressive, militant rhetoric possibly wielded by Joseph Crews and Jim Williams seems to have inspired local Republicans while fueling white conservative aggression that eventually cost them their lives.

Militias were very important local organizations during Reconstruction. They were distinct from regular United States Army troops, of whom there were fewer in North and South Carolina than militia members. Army troops were also typically concentrated in larger cities unless specifically dispatched to suppress Klan violence. Militia companies more often drew from local communities and were scattered throughout states; they were also more closely aligned with political activity.\textsuperscript{670} In South Carolina, Governor Scott organized militias in 1868 and almost every company was black, as white militia companies were seen as tools of the Democratic Party and were denied recognition and arms. Several white Republicans would have preferred mixed-race militia companies, but believed that they were impossible to organize. “[T]here is no system that I know of,” testified James Orr, “by which you mingle the two races together in a military organization without running a greater hazard than even to allow marauding to go on.” Most white men would not volunteer to serve alongside black men, and a draft would not work as “you would fail if you attempted to do it by compulsion.”\textsuperscript{671} The situation was slightly different in North Carolina, where Governor Holden reported to the War

\textsuperscript{669} McCravy, \textit{Memories}, 13-14.


\textsuperscript{671} Testimony of James L. Orr, \textit{KKK SC}, 10. David T. Corbin, a vocal supporter of the Scott administration, “disapproved entirely of the manner of organizing the colored people and arming them, without doing it generally in regard to all the people, white and black;” testimony of David T. Corbin, \textit{KKK SC}, 77.
Department that though most of the militias used in North Carolina were all-white, a force stationed at Raleigh had 60 white and 100 black troops.\textsuperscript{672}

Conservatives and Klan sympathizers frequently blamed black militias for Klan violence, in particular in the South Carolina upcountry, where Klansmen attacked militia companies in several pitched battles in 1871. Such claims were specious. Not all militia activity prompted violence, and black militia members suffered the brunt of the violence. David T. Corbin, U.S. District Attorney for South Carolina, testified that there was no direct relation between the Union League and the state militia, but that many members of the League joined the militia when it was formed.\textsuperscript{673} But even more than the Union League, more than schools, more than individual self-defense, and more than incendiary rhetoric, militias tried to stop violence and intimidation by white conservatives in the Ku Klux Klan.

Black militias often assembled to protect the houses of Republicans targeted for Klan violence, and their public drilling was intended to serve as a deterrent against Klan activity.\textsuperscript{674} They were mobilized on election days to prevent voter intimidation.\textsuperscript{675} In other parts of the South Carolina upcountry the militia worked to stop the trade in illegal liquor among poor whites.\textsuperscript{676}

And in Newberry Court House, South Carolina, in September 1870, a company of black militia went to the house of a white man named Chappell, who had in a fight cut with his knife the

\textsuperscript{672} NC Report, xlv.

\textsuperscript{673} Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 77 & 85.

\textsuperscript{674} Edwin Whipple Seibels, of Columbia, testified to the Joint Select Committee that a man from the upcountry had told him that “the negroes had become perfectly ungovernable in that country; they were out with their guns marching and picketing the roads in every direction, stopping everybody who came along;” testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 99.

\textsuperscript{675} Steven Hahn has argued that “Voting required, in essence, a military operation,” and that black militia were the military organization that most effectively defended black voting rights, in A Nation Under Our Feet, 224.

\textsuperscript{676} Nelson, Iron Confederacies, 127.
captain of the militia company. They surrounded the house, threatening “to burn the house if he did not present himself… Information came to the sheriff, who is a very prompt and active officer, and he immediately went up there, went into the house, and arrested Chappell for this assault and battery, and carried him off to the court-house.” The sheriff ordered the militia company to disperse; they initially resisted but he threatened them with arrest, and after some heated conversation they left the scene. Though a handful of the militiamen were arrested, their actions also resulted in the arrest of the man who had assaulted the militia captain, demonstrating the potential power of militia companies to secure justice against white conservatives.

The actions of African Americans to support and defend their communities against Klan violence led to even greater violence in response. The relative success of black militias led to a concerted campaign of violence by Klansmen in the spring of 1871 in the South Carolina upcountry. Governor Scott later bemoaned the violence in a speech in Charleston in 1872, detailing the conservative campaign to disarm African American militiamen:

A systematic and organized attack was made upon these colored men and their guns taken from them. Six hundred rifles were taken in Laurens county. In York county, where the men kept their guns at their own houses, their houses were raided on, their guns taken away, and themselves maltreated. A company in Chester County was attacked, and similar scenes occurred in Newberry, Fairfield and Union. Altogether, out of four thousand guns furnished to the militia, the Ku-Klux captured over three thousand.

In one battle in early March 1871 in Chester County, eight to ten black militiamen were killed by a small mounted company of Klansmen, armed with repeating rifles, who used tactics learned from service in the Confederate army during the Civil War. Some twenty black survivors fled but were captured and taken to York.  

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677 Testimony of C.H. Suber, KKK SC, 143.
678 A Statement of Dr. Bratton’s Case, 12.
County, recorded on March 9 that “we have stirring times to day. Oure men has been fighting the negroes down towards Chester,” and after returning “They have got quiet again.”

Many white Republicans opposed or remained ambivalent about the activities of the militia. Some paternalistically believed that armed militias were ineffective if African Americans did not assume “responsibilities” themselves. William Stone, a New England Republican working in South Carolina for the Scott administration, wrote to a fellow Republican before the most horrific of the violence against the militia, saying

It does very well to talk about arming the loyal people, i.e. negroes, with Winchester rifles and letting them take care of themselves but how much shooting will they do after they get them if they haven’t a leader? They have not learned to be self-reliant for they haven’t had the time to learn their own power while the ex-rebels were always bullies and aggressors.

Stone claimed “I have seen enough of the South to sicken me with the crimes and brutalities committed on helpless negroes,” but declared that “the time has come now when they are no longer under any legal restraints and have every chance that a white man has and now, if necessary, they must fight for the preservation of their liberties.”

Everson and Stone were committed Republicans and, more than most, dedicated to improving the lives of African Americans. But their commitment had limits. The “crimes and brutalities” committed by white conservatives increased against African Americans after Stone wrote the letter in 1870, in large part because African Americans had asserted their self-reliance, not in spite of it.

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680 Brown, *Oil In Our Lamps*, 176. An account of the battle are also contained in *A Statement of Dr. Bratton’s Case*, 12-13. Such battles were even remembered into the twentieth century. An editor of a newspaper from Paris, Texas in the 1930s recalled a long past conversation with Joseph Banks Lyle, a Klansman from South Carolina who fled to Texas to avoid prosecution and ended up settling there. He recalled what was possibly a different fight, “the battle of Turkey Creek bridge;” “Backward Glances,” From the Scrapbooks of the Late A. W. Neville, Editor of the Paris [Texas] News, 1936-1956, September 6, 1933, Joseph Banks Lyle Collection, SCL.

681 William Stone to Erastus W. Everson, April 8, 1870, Erastus W. Everson Papers, SCHS.

682 William Stone to Erastus W. Everson, April 8, 1870, Erastus W. Everson Papers, SCHS.
That such fighting resulted in the disproportionate suffering of African Americans swayed some Republicans to become more vocal about the need for federal protection to stop the violence. Frederick Sawyer, a white Republican from Massachusetts who served as U.S. Senator for South Carolina from 1868 to 1873, took to the Senate floor in 1871 to thunder: “Unless we mean to abandon the districts in which [outrages] occur to anarchy, to civil war, to the rule of the Ku Klux Klan, we must either search out some power now given by the laws the exercise of which is adequate to the necessity, or we must frame and enact some statute effective, or likely to be effective, for the protection due to the citizen.” Such cries eventually led to the deployment of U.S. Army troops, but black militias were not adequately supported. Governor Scott, who had first advocated disarming the militia in 1870, disarmed and disbanded them in 1871 after the massacres in the upcountry. The efforts of individual white conservatives to disarm African American men were aided by Republicans in control of the state.

Furthering their narrative of “Negro Domination,” white conservative southerners generated two justifications for the violence against black attempts to strengthen communities after emancipation. The first blamed African Americans for that very violence. Benjamin Franklin Perry, former provisional governor of South Carolina, wrote a public letter to Governor Scott in 1871, claiming that

Never was there a more fatal mistake, or a more diabolical wrong committed, than when you organized colored troops throughout the State, and put arms into their hands, with powder and ball, and denied the same to the white people. It was atrocious. The bloody tragedy at Laurens was owing to this, and nothing else… The fearful murder and killing of a number of men at Chester was likewise owing to your colored militia.

684 Holt, Black Over White, 142.
Edwin Whipple Seibels declared that “It was the universal opinion of all the gentlemen… that it was the arming of the militia that had brought on the troubles… It was the cry from one end of the State to the other that that was the cause of all the disturbances, and all the acts of lawlessness and violence.”

Conservatives likewise positioned themselves as victims at the mercy of the militia. Seibels also declared that though “Arms were put into the hands of the colored people, and they were incited by the most incendiary speeches from the republican leaders,” excitement that led to violence stemmed from the fact that “the whites were not armed, but, on the contrary, it was persistently refused to let them have arms; we were not allowed to drill or to organize in any way whatever.”

White conservatives’ second justification was the assertion that violence against African American community organizations prevented the outbreak of a race war between white and black southerners. A white Republican observer said that “the impression that prevails among the white people in the upper part of the State, [was] that they were to be overridden by the negroes.” Seibels put it more bluntly, testifying that most whites “thought a war of races was very probable.” To his thinking, the fault would have entirely been that of African Americans, for “for we have everything to lose and they have nothing; we have every desire to keep the

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687 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 101. The charge that whites were disarmed was widespread among white conservatives, both contemporary to the violence and in later reminiscences. A former Klansman from Walterboro, South Carolina, in a 1918 letter claimed that “No native white man, except he was a renegade, was permitted to have fire arms of any description, except secretly and clandestinely, nor was he permitted to have any part in the State Militia;” John Lucas to Maude Stewart, April 19, 1918, Ku Klux Klan Clippings File, SCHS. See also McCravy, Memories, 278.

688 Testimony of Reuben Tomlinson, KKK SC, 86.

689 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 103.
Another contemporary conservative concurred, later asserting that “These Ku-Klux bands, as they were popularly designated, not only saved us from the horrors of a war of races, but checked disorders everywhere, among all classes… Their existence was a temporary expedient to meet a great evil.” Fearing a race war, Klansmen did their best to start one.

Even into the twentieth century, white conservatives considered the actions by African Americans to strengthen communities during Reconstruction as part of a concerted effort to advance “Negro Domination.” A white woman from Saluda, South Carolina who had been a young girl during Reconstruction recounted to the Federal Writers Project in 1938 that “After negroes were free, whites had to do something to keep niggers straight—many of them went wild. Those were rough times, then. Folks would meet in the churches, and have talks how best to do under the times.” She remembered the formation of the Klan in her part of South Carolina, but said that it was not until “Wade Hampton was Governor things begin to get better.”

Another white woman writing at the turn of the century claimed that “Those were trying days for the white people of the South. The Negroes seemed to feel afraid that the Whites would not realize that they were free unless they made their independence felt—& this they tried to do on all occasions.”

The result of Klan violence for the black communities that were trying to organize, mobilize, and defend themselves after emancipation was destabilization and unrest. Black families undoubtedly experienced fear as a result of the widespread violence. Conservative white

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690 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 134.
691 Ervin, “Notes,” SCHS, 10.
692 Belle Fowler, interviewed by G. L. Summer, Nov 16, 1938, Cabinet H Drawer 4 Folder 13, Federal Writers’ Project, SCL.
693 Ella Aiken Smart, unpublished manuscript, c. 1902, David Wyatt Aiken Collection, SCL.
claims that African Americans and white Republicans were cowed and terrified ought to be taken cautiously, as African Americans continued to engage in local community building and political activity during and after Reconstruction. But at some level Klan violence worked to ensure that Republican organizations, black and white, never had the strength or effectiveness needed to achieve their goals. One white South Carolinian, recorded in 1941 by the Federal Writers Project, after detailing memories of the hangings of several members of the black militia in Chester County, summed up the story with the assertion that “The promise to the negroes of forty acres of land and a mule was never kept in our section.” The militia never asserted the desire to redistribute land and did not try to reform the southern economy. But violence ensured that they never could.

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Attempts by black southerners and white Republicans supportive of them to remake the southern economy after emancipation also generated fierce reactions by Klansmen. The precise kinds of economic activities that Klansmen found distasteful varied by location (and likely within them); there was no one singular kind of economic action that Klansmen opposed. Many white conservative southerners were opposed to any economic development that benefited African Americans. As one former slave put it in an interview with the Federal Writers’ Project, “if they find a Negro that tries to get nervy or have a little bit for himself, they lash him nearly to death and gag him and leave him to do the bes’ he can.” Klansmen used violence to oppose assertions of economic advancement of African Americans, and white conservatives across the

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695 Interview with W. L. Bost, Born in Slavery, Volume XI, Part 1, 144.
South placed evidence of African American assertions of economic autonomy into the same narrative of “Negro Domination.”

Many scholars have discussed how African Americans desired a new economic order in the aftermath of emancipation, one that included a reduced emphasis on cotton production. There was also a push for land reform to secure for former slaves an economic toehold in the new wage economy, but that dream never materialized in politics.\textsuperscript{696} Land reform did not get anywhere in North Carolina, and initial efforts at it in South Carolina died out with insufficient political support and were never revived after the new state constitution was ratified in 1868.\textsuperscript{697}

African Americans also desired more equitable labor contracts. The Freedmen’s Bureau took an active role in labor contract disputes in the postbellum South, attempting to regularize contracts between black laborers and white plantation owners. In areas where the Freedmen’s Bureau had an active presence their agents were mostly successful, but conservative political opposition to the Bureau eventually neutered it, and the Bureau pulled out of North and South Carolina by the middle of 1868. Conservatives found the Freedmen’s Bureau galling, believing its advocacy for black labor contracts was particularly unfair to white planters. As one white South Carolinian saw it, the Bureau’s “ostensible duty was to see that the freedmen got their rights, but [its] practice was to adjudicate every claim as a right.”\textsuperscript{698}

With the disbanding of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the lack of interest in land reform by national or local Republican politicians, after 1868 economic reforms that African Americans

\textsuperscript{696} Thomas Holt has argued that “as with peasants everywhere, control of the land was an issue [rural African Americans] could understand and mobilize around. For this issue they would fight, with either the ballot or the gun;” \textit{Black Over White}, 68. Julie Saville put it more succinctly: “Freedpeople wanted land,” in \textit{The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870} (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, Sao Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 18.

\textsuperscript{697} Thomas Holt has found significant opposition to land reform even among black politicians in South Carolina, \textit{Black Over White}, 131.

\textsuperscript{698} Shand, “Incidents in the Life,” SCL, 139.
desired could not come from political institutions.\footnote{Robert Sharkey concluded, persuasively, that the national Republican Party was “hopelessly divided on economic questions” during Reconstruction, hindering its ability to create systemic change; see Money, Class, and Party: An Economic Study of Civil War and Reconstruction (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 11.} On an individual basis, many African Americans opted out of the cotton monoculture, making “considerable profits out of garden crops of watermelon, corn, sweet potatoes, poultry, and eggs.”\footnote{Holt, Black Over White, 47.} Black southerners also asserted their freedom to move to improve their economic condition. After the end of the Civil War, many African Americans migrated to new areas, reuniting with families torn apart by slavery or the war, and forging new economic lives. That involved asserting independence from white planters’ management and rejecting the notion that open access to market capitalism alone was sufficient economic reform after the end of slavery.\footnote{Saville, The Work of Reconstruction, 2.} African Americans instead worked to change the ways and products of their work as an essential assertion of freedom. Some white conservatives reacted to these black declarations of economic independence without reprobation, and even with support. When David Wyatt Aiken, a South Carolina conservative, moved his family to Abbeville County he moved several of his former slaves with them. But they objected; he “offered to hire them, but when they preferred to go he chartered a car & sent them back.”\footnote{Ella Aiken Smart, unpublished manuscript, c. 1902, David Wyatt Aiken Collection, SCL.}

Klansmen, on the other hand, seemed to have little tolerance for any black assertions of economic freedom. In eastern North Carolina in 1868, members of the Constitutional Union Guard were ordered not to employ African Americans using shares, but to pay them a fixed price.\footnote{NC Report, lx.} Shares in agricultural crops could be used by African Americans to build their own economic security; wages were easier to control and easier to limit. Insisting that white planters
pay black workers wages represented a clear break from slavery. Wages unfettered workers from the physical land. And with wages, planters had none of the pretensions to paternalism that accompanied slavery with slaveowners providing shelter, clothing, and food to enslaved workers.

Klansmen took other steps to punish assertions of black economic independence. Klansmen frequently stole from African Americans. Members of the Constitutional Union Guard in eastern North Carolina stole from one African American “one horse and mule and a pair of shoes”—the shoes belonging to his daughter. Several African Americans and at least one white man in the western part of North Carolina were also robbed by Klansmen. The thefts were simultaneously petty crimes on the part of Klansmen as well as efforts to keep African Americans poor. Many white conservatives seemed to think that economic advancement for African Americans in the war-torn South could only come at the expense of white southerners. Consequently, most actions by African Americans to secure greater economic autonomy were perceived by many white conservatives as acts of aggression.

Klansmen also targeted white southerners who supported greater economic freedom for African Americans. In Spartanburg, South Carolina, a white planter originally from the North kicked several poor white tenants off his land, replacing them with African Americans around New Years, 1871. That May, members of the Klan whipped one tenant and shot and killed another. The planter’s support of black tenants over white prompted Klansmen to use violence against the black tenants.

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704 NC Report, xcvi.
705 William Magbee and Charles Sumner, both of Lincoln County, were separately whipped and robbed by Klansmen, NC Report, xix; Henderson Judd, a white man in Chatham County, was whipped and robbed of $10, KKK NC, 78.
706 Testimony of Charlotte Fowler, KKK SC, 386-392.
Former Freedmen’s Bureau officials who remained in the South after the Bureau closed down were sometimes targeted for retributive violence. Erastus Everson, who worked for the Bureau in eastern South Carolina after the war and then the Internal Revenue Service in the upper South Carolina piedmont after the Bureau’s dissolution, was attacked in a riot in Laurens in 1870. Klansmen in Sumter County, South Carolina, drove out of the county a man named Captain Bigger, reputedly “in charge of the Freedmen’s Bureau after the close of the war.”

One of the most frequent charges made against African American laborers attacked by members of the Klan was that they were lazy and shiftless, frequently combined with assertions that African Americans were predisposed to petty stealing. Rather than reflecting reality, those accusations suggested the frequency with which African Americans attempted to opt out of the kinds of exploitative agricultural production that dominated the southern economy. White assertions of black indolence also highlighted white conservative anger at assertions of black economic independence. Klansmen used violence to force black southerners to engage in the kind of labor white southerners could control. Violence used to control workers was not unusual for southern society; whippings of recalcitrant slaves had been pervasive during slavery. But the violence of Reconstruction involving labor disputes was new in that it was extralegal violence used against free workers who had contract rights, and with the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment, were full citizens.

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707 See Erastus W. Everson Papers, SCHS, and his testimony, KKK SC, 330-349.
709 Many scholars have documented how violence during Reconstruction was used to construct a new system of labor in slavery’s aftermath. See, for example, Foner, Reconstruction; Charles Flynn, White Land, Black Labor: Caste and Class in Late Nineteenth-Century Georgia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Nelson, Iron Confederacies; and Glymph, Out of the House of Bondage.
African Americans were not the only victims of Klan violence accused of not working properly; white southerners were sometimes charged with the same infraction. Almon Owens, a white farmer of small means in Rutherford County, North Carolina, was whipped by Klansmen “Because he talked too much and worked too little”—though in his specific case, he was also suspected of reporting illegal bootlegging by Klansmen to internal revenue authorities.\footnote{Trial testimony of Julius Fortune, \textit{KKK NC}, 440.} James M. Justice testified that one of his conservative neighbors believed Klan violence was necessary for labor purposes. “The negroes are working well,” his neighbor had said, “and the fear of the Ku-Klux keeps them about right and proper.”\footnote{Testimony of James M. Justice, \textit{KKK NC}, 137.}

In addition to using violence in an attempt to shape a pliable workforce, many Klansmen opposed industrial development, particularly the building of railroads.\footnote{Nelson, \textit{Iron Confederacies}, 97-115.} There were two dimensions to Klan opposition to railroad building. One was their conviction that white southern men were not controlling railroad development. During an attack on the Chatham Railroad being constructed under the management of William Howle, some fifty (apparently drunk) Klansmen rode through the construction encampment, firing pistols and shouting that they had cleaned out one damned Union hovel, and they intended to make the damned Yankee railroad contractors leave their work; if they didn’t, and if they got hold of them, they would hang them to the first tree they could find; and if they didn’t find them, they intended to kill their stock.\footnote{Testimony of William Howle, \textit{KKK NC}, 59. See also testimony of A. Webster Shaffer, \textit{KKK NC}, 37, and Edwin Hull, \textit{KKK NC}, 65-72.}

Though he was a Virginian and a Confederate veteran, these Klansmen considered Howle a “Yankee.”\footnote{Testimony of William Howle, \textit{KKK NC}, 61. Howle had been a Whig and opposed to slavery before the Civil War, but owned slaves and voluntarily enlisted as a private in the Confederate army.} Despite the fact that many southern Democrats served on the corporate boards of
railroad companies (particularly former Confederate generals), and that both Democrats and Republicans supported railroad subsidies, many Klansmen saw industrial development like railroad building as stemming from and benefiting non-southerners.\textsuperscript{715}

A second reason Klansmen in the North Carolina piedmont and South Carolina upcountry violently opposed railroad construction was because it brought higher wages to black workers. Essic Harris had supplemented his farming by working on the local railroad construction before the two Klan attacks he suffered—probably the same railroad being built by William Howle.\textsuperscript{716}

Similarly, a white South Carolina Republican testified that in the upcountry

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a number of negroes are employed in building the air-line railroad which is being constructed… and these disguised men go there to the road, take these negroes out and whip them, and force them from the road back to the farms to labor. They receive higher wages for working on the railroad; and these men go there and force them back to the farms. In one instance an old negro man came to town from Broad River and stated that parties had taken his portion of the crop away and had forced him back to labor with his old master, stating that he was just as much a slave as ever.\textsuperscript{717}
\end{quote}

Klansmen were concerned with preventing African Americans—and white Republicans they considered outsiders—from gaining economic sufficiency after the end of slavery.

Klansmen’s actions were designed to further the economic sufficiency of white conservatives. They were working to get ahead themselves, not just to keep African Americans behind. Paying black workers low wages instead of shares of profit, preventing them from taking industrial jobs, and punishing those workers they claimed were lazy and shiftless were all attempts to ensure conservative white southern men profited most from the postbellum economy.

\textsuperscript{715} In South Carolina, black politicians also publicly supported railroad subsidies and the bonds and taxes they required; Holt, \textit{Black Over White}, 141.

\textsuperscript{716} Testimony of Essic Harris, \textit{KKK NC}, 87.

One of the most telling incidents comes from Sumter County, South Carolina, to the south and east of Columbia. John J. Neason, originally from Savannah, Georgia, was a white planter and merchant living in Sumter County. He had enlisted in the Confederate army while a young man; in the war he lost his father and two brothers and was wounded, receiving a long scar across his cheek at Ream’s Station. After the war he purchased a plantation in Sumter County for $17,000, moving near his wife’s family. In October of 1870 about forty disguised Klansmen, conducting themselves with military precision, came to tell him to stop buying unginned cotton from black workers.\footnote{Testimony of John J. Neason, \textit{KKK SC}, 41-42.}

Some white merchants like Neason would purchase cotton that had not been ginned and still had seeds in it. Neason would purchase as many as seven or eight hundred pounds of unginned cotton from farmers—both white and black—who could not themselves produce a bag of ginned cotton.\footnote{Testimony of John J. Neason, \textit{KKK SC}, 44.} Many southern whites felt that such practices encouraged African Americans to steal. As Neason put it, “The objection was that a negro could get over the fence and pick a bagful of cotton, carry it to a country store and sell it, and in that way buy enough to support him in the channel of the fence for a year.”\footnote{Testimony of John J. Neason, \textit{KKK SC}, 42.}

A conservative from Columbia testified,

\footnote{Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, \textit{KKK SC}, 124.}

One of the greatest annoyances in South Carolina are these little liquor establishments that will buy up anything that a negro will bring to them. You cannot help yourself now, because they are free and they have a right of course to sell anything they have got. The result is that they will get over into a cotton-field at night, pick a bag of seed-cotton, carry it to one of these dram-shops, and sell it for a song.

Other contemporary whites, including agents of the Freedmen’s Bureau, thought African Americans’ practice of selling unginned cotton or trading cotton amongst themselves was “a
dangerous activity,” and many “grog shops” or “cotton traps” where such activities were done were often threatened or closed.\textsuperscript{722}

In addition to seeming to support white conservatives’ belief that blacks procured unginned cotton through theft, the direct purchase of unginned cotton from African Americans by white merchants like Neason cut out potential profits for white southerners who owned and ran cotton gins. Whereas before the war cotton was mostly ginned in cities, the use of steam-powered cotton gins was more widespread across the South during and after the Civil War, thus enabling more white landowners to gin cotton themselves during Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{723} Neason testified that indeed black tenant farmers would usually go to the white landowners who employed them for either wages or shares to have their cotton ginned.\textsuperscript{724}

While acknowledging that the practice of purchasing unginned cotton sometimes “led to pilfering,” Neason saw no clear alternative to the practice. He explained:

In the first place, you cannot object to buying cotton of a negro, for this reason; every darkey had a small patch of his own. Almost every farmer who employs hands takes them on for shares or wages. If he gives them wages he allows them an acre or two of ground each, which they cultivate in cotton, corn, and potatoes. Now, we all know that the darkeys grow cotton for themselves, and when they come to the stores we cannot object to taking their cotton, for it is as good as anybody’s else.\textsuperscript{725}

Neason engaged in other business activities the Klansmen felt were objectionable. He extended credit to African Americans, taking liens on their crops ranging from $15 to $150, while he also extended credit to white farmers up to $200.\textsuperscript{726} He had no hesitation about lending to black

\textsuperscript{722} Nelson, Iron Confederacies, 124.

\textsuperscript{723} Julie Saville has argued “Wartime conditions probably facilitated a broader adoption of steam-powered ginning than had been possible during slavery,” in Work of Reconstruction, 64.

\textsuperscript{724} Testimony of John J. Neason, KKK SC, 45.

\textsuperscript{725} Testimony of John J. Neason, KKK SC, 45.

\textsuperscript{726} Testimony of John J. Neason, KKK SC, 43.
farmers, in general finding that they repaid their debts more consistently than did whites, who frequently turned in bankrupt notices. He eventually stopped extending credit to some local white farmers while still lending to black farmers, another practice that made him “obnoxious to the community.”\textsuperscript{727} Thus attacks against white men like Neason were designed to protect the economic interests of conservative white men who supported the Klan.

Neason also supported black community organizing. He recounted that Klansmen, in addition to denouncing his trade in seed-cotton, told him he would be whipped because, in their words, “you keep a country store, and you allow republicans to hold their meetings and their barbecues here, and you have been the manager of elections for the last five or six years; and we intend to stop it.” Furthermore he admitted he “had built a school-house on my place for the benefit of the colored children; nothing more than a shelter; Klansmen would not allow it to stay on the place, and burned it down.”\textsuperscript{728} At the local level, black economic independence and community activism were intertwined, and Klansmen used violence to undermine both. After being threatened by Klansmen, Neason stopped purchasing seed-cotton, and eventually was forced to close his business entirely. At the time he testified to the Joint Select Committee in the summer of 1871, he had not been home since immediately after the threats.

The depressed economy of the postwar South limited opportunities for all southerners. Compared to the antebellum period, credit was thin, productivity was down, and times were hard.\textsuperscript{729} Klan violence further depressed the southern economy, partially because many African Americans saw economic prospects stagnate. One white Republican testified that in the South

\textsuperscript{727} Testimony of John J. Neason, \textit{KKK SC}, 43.

\textsuperscript{728} Testimony of John J. Neason, \textit{KKK SC}, 42.

\textsuperscript{729} John J. Neason could not find anyone to buy out his business after he left Sumter County because “people, as a general thing, are bankrupt,” \textit{KKK SC}, 43.
Carolina upcountry around the construction of the Airline Rail Road, “The colored people are all intimidated—subdued.” 730 Most black farmers were forced to work for wages, limiting opportunities for advancement through farming for shares. 731

But all was not lost for African Americans, several of whom became landholders and established economic sufficiency. Same Rawls, an African American interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project in 1937 when he was 80 years old, recalled:

I heard dat Gen. Grant said de slaves ought to get 40 acres of land and a mule so dey could go to work; but dey never got any dat I knows of. Atter Freedom dey worked as wage earners and share-croppers. Some went to other farms to get jobs. Dat’s about what dey do now, but some of dem saved a little money and bought farms and some started little businesses of deir own. 732

Federal Writers’ Project interviewers were likely instructed to ask about the Klan; in response Rawls made seemingly contradictory statements. “De Ku Klux didn’t have much influence wid de slaves or ex-slaves,” he said, but then added “As soon as de war broke, dey went riding up and down de public roads to catch and beat niggers. My brother run off when dey got atter him.” 733 That the Klan “didn’t have much influence” despite their beatings—and despite that his own brother got run off—seem to be at odds. But coming as the statements did right after Rawls discussed black economic freedom, perhaps his recollection demonstrates that Klan violence, while widespread and destructive, did not eliminate black economic self-sufficiency.

The given motivations for Klan violence around local economies differed by location, but certain results of it were consistent. Railroad construction and the wages it brought black

730 Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, KKK SC, 28.
731 Julie Saville has called “Reconstruction agrarian policies… a narrow channel for emancipated workers’ aspirations to gain recognition of their interests in the crop apart from wages,” in The Work of Reconstruction, 197.
732 Same Rawls, interviewed by G.L. Summer, August 23, 1937, edited by Elmer Turnage, Federal Writer’s Project, D-4-18, SCL.
733 Same Rawls, interviewed by G.L. Summer, August 23, 1937, edited by Elmer Turnage, Federal Writer’s Project, D-4-18, SCL.
workers fueled Klan violence in the North Carolina piedmont and the South Carolina upcountry. In eastern North Carolina and in the central portion of South Carolina, where cotton was still a dominant crop, Klansmen used violence to prevent African Americans from working for shares, again to drive down wages. As a result, many black southerners, and white southerners supportive of their economic aspirations, faced increasingly limited economic prospects. In areas with incipient industrial development, particularly through railroad construction, Klansmen were eager to ensure that neither African Americans nor white men they saw as non-southerners would reap industrialization’s rewards.

Many historians have asserted that the southern economy did not functionally change much after emancipation. In many places, cotton production increased, rather than decreased, and many of the same planter elite of the antebellum period were again atop the economic ladder in the postbellum South. But emancipation had opened the door to an uncertain economic future for the South. The work of Klan violence was one of the things that helped to shut that door. As with violence against community activism, conservatives’ claims of the efficaciousness of Klan violence ought to be approached cautiously, but violence seemed to have had a marked effect on many people’s economic lives. And as with community activism, white conservatives fit Klan violence around local economies into the narrative of “Negro Domination,” claiming

734 Morton Sosna summarized: “(1) the institutional transition from slave labor to free labor did not fundamentally alter the South’s continuation as a plantation society; (2) the region’s economic problems were not the result of and indeed went far beyond the war’s destructiveness and the economic consequences of emancipation; (3) the same groups that dominated southern society and politics before the Civil War continued to dominate it afterwards,” in “More Important than the Civil War? The Impact of World War II on the South,” in James Cobb and Charles R. Wilson, ed., Perspectives on the American South: an Annual Review of Society, Politics, and Culture Vol. 4 (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1987). See also Jonathan M. Wiener, Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860-1885 (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). The case that the postbellum southern economy was radically different is made most persuasively and famously by C. Vann Woodward in Origins of the New South.

735 For example, cotton production increased 167% in North Carolina between 1860 and 1880; Escott, Many Excellent People, 175.
that it was necessary because of their belief that African Americans were criminal, corrupt, and unsuited to the freedoms they asserted.736

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Klansmen had what might be termed a complicated relationship to crime and law enforcement. They saw themselves as defenders of law and order, opposing what they asserted was innate black criminality and claiming they protected the life and property of white southerners. At the same time, the violence they committed was illegal, undermined southern communities’ abilities to prosecute crime, and was in direct opposition to Republican’s efforts to establish more just and effective legal system.

Klan violence highlighted how conservatives and Republicans repeatedly clashed over the effectiveness of the southern legal system. White conservatives repeatedly declared that the purpose of the Klan was to prevent crime. As Benjamin Franklin Perry, provisional governor of South Carolina in 1865 wrote to a female acquaintance in the summer of 1871, the Klan was not a political organization here, but one for the protection of property & the prosecution of crime. In many parts of the State the negroes have been encouraged to burn houses, barns, & c. They could not be detected & punished in Court, therefore the young men took upon themselves to catch & punish them. In no instance have I known the Ku Klux to attempt to influence elections. They were a terror only to evil doers.737

Perry connected black criminality to the actions of the militia:

Governor Scott had the negroes organized all over the state in militia companies & furnished them with arms & ammunition which he refused to the white people. This was placing us at the mercy of the colored race who are still a sort semi savage. In self defense we had to procure arms. With guns in their hands the negroes became most intolerable. The Ku Klux has quieted them very much.738

736 Scott Reynolds Nelson has argued that Klan sympathizers “suggested that white, southern men’s economic problems were a result of corruption, and that black people were responsible for it, because they were criminals at heart;” Iron Confederacies, 10.

737 Benjamin F. Perry to Mrs. A.P. Peters, July 16, 1871, Benjamin Franklin Perry Collection, SCL.

738 Benjamin F. Perry to Mrs. A.P. Peters, July 16, 1871, Benjamin Franklin Perry Collection, SCL.
Perry’s letter reflected how many conservatives viewed the enforcement of law in the Reconstruction-era South as incapable of dealing with innate black criminality because of the existence of armed black militia and the supposed incompetence of white Republican political control. His words suggested the ways that, to white conservatives, the narrative of “Negro Domination” connected opposition to black community activism, economic autonomy, and both criminal activity and attempts to change the southern legal system. The necessary corrective, as white conservatives like Perry saw it, was violence committed by the Klan.  

Republicans, white and black, perceived things much differently. They frequently bemoaned the inability of local southern courts to stop violence by conservative white southerners against African Americans and white Republicans. A report in early 1871 to Congress declared that there was not a single conviction for Klan activity throughout North Carolina, despite the possibility of hundreds of incidents of violence. Similarly, a judge of the Supreme Court of South Carolina in the summer of 1871 testified to the Joint Select Committee that, “in certain parts of the State [courts] are powerless to administer justice in certain classes of cases.” Those cases were ones “growing out of the contest for the civil and political rights of the newly enfranchised portion of the community.” The judge used a hypothetical situation:

> if, in certain portions of the State, a colored person, in endeavoring to exercise his political franchise, or in making some self-assertion in regard to his civil rights, were to lose his life, or suffer any great bodily harm in a conflict growing out of such self-assertion, I am satisfied it would be futile to rely upon the courts of justice for redress, where the intervention of a jury was necessary. 

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739 Even moderate conservatives who denounced the violence of the Klan related it to black criminal activity; see for example testimony of Pride Jones, *KKK NC*, 3, & testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, *KKK SC*, 96.

740 *NC Report*, xxxi.


742 Testimony of Ammiel J. Willard, *KKK SC*, 60.
Declaring that there was both an “interference” and “an obstruction” in the court system, he said that prejudice between black and white southerners “interferes with that impartiality which should exist in the jury-box—that absence of personal or political influence so necessary in the jury-box cannot be secured.”743 In contrast, many other Republicans were careful to say that the law was sufficiently enforced in many places throughout their respective states; they located charges of inadequate law enforcement to areas where Klan violence was most prevalent.744

The political changes of Reconstruction had led to a new legal environment in the South, and Klansmen opposed not only the ability for black men to vote, but the myriad legal reforms that accompanied black citizenship. W. P. Bynum, a lawyer from Lincoln County, North Carolina, told an early Senate investigation that prosecutions were difficult to secure against Klansmen because of both the violence and because there was a general “failure to administer justice in these cases. And I think it arises out of the opposition to the civil and political equality of the two races.”745 The two were intertwined.

The ability of black southerners to testify in trials was one of the many revolutionary changes brought about by Republican rule during Reconstruction, and many African Americans testified eagerly. They also participated in the search for Klansmen during prosecutions. After Klansmen shot and wounded an African American man in Chatham County, North Carolina, information about the attack by members of the local black community led to the arrest of several white men suspected of being Klansmen. One of the accused later recounted that “Out

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743 Testimony of Ammiel J. Willard, KKK SC, 60.

744 See for example testimony of C.H. Suber, who testified that “in the community in which I live public sentiment is averse to a resort to violence for the suppression of crime; and there have not been any great difficulties in enforcing the laws. Indeed I think the civil arm is sufficient for the suppression of crime in the whole State, so far as I know, if it is properly exercised;” KKK SC, 138; see also testimony of W. P. Bynum, NC Report, 52-53.

from the negro circles the rumor spread that some of the attacking party had been recognized.” The arrests were made by federal troops “piloted by Joe Dennis, a young negro of unsavory reputation.”746 Upon reaching Raleigh, the troops and their Klan prisoners were greeted by crowds of African Americans, eager “to express their joy at the prospect of seeing speedy justice meted out to the ‘negro killers.’”747 Rumors in the black community and the local knowledge of African Americans like Joe Dennis helped lead to arrests of Klansmen—which undoubtedly fueled Dennis’s “unsavory reputation” among white conservatives.748

Another Republican reform during Reconstruction was the use of mixed-race juries, though some white Republicans were ambivalent about their use. David Corbin, United States District Attorney for South Carolina, opposed mixed-race juries because he believed they led to mistrials, with whites voting one way and blacks another.749 D. H. Chamberlain, Corbin’s friend and the attorney general for South Carolina, countered that assertion by testifying that mixed race juries frequently resulted in convictions, as did fellow white Republican Reuben Tomlinson.750 In a tepid endorsement, James Orr, a moderate white Republican who served as governor of South Carolina from 1865-1868, testified to the Joint Select Committee that “We have gone through the experience of having mixed juries, and, so far as my experience has gone, I have had no occasion to find fault with it.”751 His successor, Robert K. Scott, a somewhat more

748 Similarly, J.B. Eaves of North Carolina testified that African Americans were used as an armed posse in the arrest of Klansmen in Rutherford County; testimony of J.B. Eaves, KKK NC, 169.
749 Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 69.
751 Testimony of James L. Orr, KKK SC, 1. Orr testified that there was in general a good administration of justice in South Carolina, and—in what was a stretch—claimed that “juries, as a general rule, would make more allowance or
ardent Republican, in his annual message to the General Assembly in 1869, declared that “A change is demanded in the system of selecting juries,” because they were frequently “liable, and perversed, to great abuse, on account of the character of the persons placed upon them.” Though he did not directly call for the use of juries of both black and white men, he did suggest filling juries “with our best and most intelligent citizens, whose reputation places them above reproach and above suspicion,” suggesting his desire that the system for selecting juries be substantially overhauled to deal with the new context of the Reconstruction-era legal system.752

Black southerners were more vocal about their desire for juries with both black and white jurors. Sandy Little, an African American from Walterboro, North Carolina, wrote to President Grant in 1873, after most Klan violence had stopped. He wrote, “we colored poor laboring class of workingmen are writing to you asking you to please to provided for us to have colored citizens on the Jury box. We colored citizens do not have Justice on the Jury box and it is on account of color.” North Carolina had effectively been returned to Democratic control after the impeachment of Governor Holden in 1871, and African Americans were rapidly losing gains in the civil rights brought about by Republican control. Rather than asking for single-race juries (either of the defendant or the plaintiff), Little told Grant that African Americans desired “colored Jury number 5 or number 6 with the whites.” Little promised that prompt action would return Republican control in North Carolina; “if you give us the power of the paper, ” he wrote, “that will bring old Anson county home to the Union.”753

752 Message of Robert K. Scott, Governor of South Carolina, to the General Assembly (November 24, 1869, Columbia, S.C.), SCL, 11.

753 Sandy Little to Ulysses S. Grant, March 1873, Letters Received, Source Chronological Files, 1871-1874, Box 4, “President April 1873-February 1874,” Folder “February 1873-March 1873,” RG 60, NARA.
White conservative southerners consistently denounced Reconstruction-era courts, but from a different position. Both contemporaries and later sympathetic observers frequently claimed that it was nearly impossible to prosecute African Americans in criminal courts, that white men were unjustifiably jailed, and that black judges and mixed-race juries were both ignorant and corrupt.\(^{754}\) H. W. Guion of Charlotte, North Carolina, testified that “the inferiority of our judicial system, in my opinion, gives rise to the whole trouble.”\(^{755}\) White conservatives would gripe that what few convictions were secured were often overturned by pardons by Republican governors. Edwin Whipple Seibels testified that Governor Scott of South Carolina pardoned hundreds of black criminals, for crimes that were “Mostly larceny, but a great many house-burnings.” “The pardoning of so many criminals, and turning them loose,” he declared, was “a source of great dissatisfaction” among most white southerners.\(^{756}\)

In addition to the rhetorical campaign by white conservatives, Klansmen used violence or the threat of it to attack Republican-led legal challenges. In Alamance County, North Carolina, John Foust, a black man, was whipped and “run off” by Klansmen for having served on a jury.\(^{757}\) Klansmen also castigated white Republicans who supported taking the testimony of African Americans. James M. Justice testified that during his attack a Klansmen berated him because he “would take the testimony of a nigger before [he] would that of a white man.” Justice replied, “No; I do not do any such thing; I would believe the testimony of a negro as soon as that of a

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\(^{754}\) See, for examples, testimony of Pride Jones, *KKK NC*, 4; John Lucas to Maude Stewart, April 19, 1918, Ku Klux Klan Clippings File, SCHS; and Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL 141. Certainly there was a great deal of corruption and were many incompetent local officials during Reconstruction. Even Republicans would admit that some judges, like Judge Vernon of Spartanburg, South Carolina, were incompetent—though, as one said, in his particular case “His incompetency arose from his habit of excessive drinking,” and not his character or training; testimony of C.H. Suber, *KKK SC*, 139.


white man when I think he tells the truth." He said he had viewed the accusation “as an insult, but I considered the source it came from—that he was an ignorant, insolent puppy.”

Justice’s support for racial equality in the courtroom galled Klansmen, who seem to have believed that the words of black and white southerners were by nature mutually exclusive—either one believed white men or one believed black men. Perhaps ironically, white conservatives seem to have had little compunction about falsely testifying themselves. White conservatives, men and women, would frequently provide alibis for each other when called to testify in cases where Klansmen were charged with committing acts of violence. John N. Neason, of Sumter County, South Carolina, testified that after a prominent Republican’s store was burned by Klansmen, in the local trial some twenty-five or thirty Klansmen were acquitted because they “brought women and children to swear that they were all at home and had not been out that night.” In Lenoir County, North Carolina, the Constitutional Union Guard specifically ordered its members to obstruct justice when a fellow member was on trial. They were “to get in the way of the sheriff,” meaning “hanging around the courts to get on the jury to acquit any members of the organization without any regard to the oath taken by the juror.”

Klansmen also used direct threats and intimidation to challenge Republican efforts at enforcing the law. D. H. Chamberlain, attorney general for South Carolina, testified that a prominent white conservative lawyer in Newberry, South Carolina, approached a white probate judge named Leahey—a man “of good character” and “competent to discharge the duties of his office”—to tell him that his life would be in danger unless he resigned. He went to Columbia to

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758 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 156.
759 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 158.
760 Testimony of John Neason, KKK SC, 46.
761 Testimony of George W. Tillon, NC Report, cii.
tender his resignation, but Governor Scott refused to accept it. Leahey remained in Newberry discharging the duties of his office, but slept away from his home in hiding to prevent being attacked by Klansmen.\textsuperscript{762} Trial witnesses were also targeted. Mary Anne Norvill Ramsey, the daughter of Aaron Biggerstaff, was beaten by Klansmen in Rutherford County for having testified about the attack upon James McGaha.\textsuperscript{763}

White conservative men would sometimes bring weapons into courtrooms to intimidate judges and juries when Klansmen were on trial. In the hearing of white men charged with “the whipping of some colored men” before a magistrate, “a number of young men came into court with pistols slung around them. The grand jury found no bill; and they cheered in the court-house when the grand jury made their return.”\textsuperscript{764} At the time it was the only case heard in the county in which Klansmen were charged for violence against African Americans. David Corbin also testified that prominent conservatives would pressure members of grand juries in cases where Klansmen were under trial.\textsuperscript{765}

Some Klansmen in eastern North Carolina went further in taking matters into their hands. Before their raid on the Kinston jail that resulted in the murder of four black and one white prisoner, members of the Constitutional Union Guard had broken into the same jail to spring two or three of their comrades held inside.\textsuperscript{766} And after the second raid that resulted in the killing of the prisoners at the bridge, several members murdered O.R. Colgrove, the sheriff of Jones County, after a meeting at which members had agreed “to raise a certain sum for Colgrove’s

\begin{footnotes}
\item[763] Trial testimony of Mary Ann Norville, \textit{KKK NC}, 470.
\end{footnotes}
scalp,” with at least ten Klansmen each pledging between $5 and $10. Colgrove had arrested one of the members of the group. After his murder, “a big barbecue” was given by several of the members in celebration. The same Klansmen also plotted to murder Lewis H. Mowers and Lorenzo Wilkie for serving as detectives employed by Governor Holden to suppress the group after the raid on the Kinston jail, but were unable to follow through on their plans. After having circumvented legal procedures to kill men they suspected were criminals, these Klansmen resorted to murder of local police to avoid prosecution for their own crimes.

The general result of Klan violence seems to have been an escalation of lawlessness—mostly committed by Klansmen. Klansmen would generally “expect immunity from civil conviction.” Even mixed-race juries did not solve the problem in the South Carolina upcountry. After a particularly violent riot in Laurens County, the grand jury in charge of investigating it returned no bills of indictment. Though there were five or six African Americans on the jury, the majority were white men who opposed finding a true bill bringing indictments against Klansmen—even though witnesses testified those particular Klansmen had whipped or shot at them. Republicans across both North and South Carolina complained that juries would not bring indictments against Klansmen, and both radicals and conservatives seemed to agree on only one thing: there was a crisis of law enforcement in the postemancipation South.

Just as white conservatives prevented Republicans from arresting Klansmen for committing crimes, they bemoaned that African Americans were not arrested for crimes they believed black southerners were predisposed to commit. Edwin Whipple Seibels claimed that in

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767 Confession of Thomas F. Williford, NC Report, lx-lxi; testimony of George Tillon, NC Report, ci.;
768 NC Report, xcvi.
770 Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 70.
the upcountry white planters no longer raised cattle or hogs because “the negroes steal them and
kill them.” Even some white Republicans shared similar beliefs. One white South Carolina
Republican, fairly committed to political racial equality, testified that because of widespread
poverty African Americans were predisposed to stealing. He disclaimed that such crime “is not
based upon any disposition on the part of the negroes to commit depredations upon white men as
white men; they would steal from their own race as soon as from white men if they had anything
they could steal.”

The other crime for which African Americans were accused was arson, particularly the
burning of barns, mills, and cotton gin houses. In fall 1869, a South Carolina newspaper reported
that “Two negro men were found hanging dead, about nine miles from Greensboro, N.C., last
week. On their backs were placarded, ‘For barn burning and threats.’” At the height of unrest
in the South Carolina upcountry, there were frequent fires—and even more frequent reports of
fires. Mary Davis Brown, a resident of York County, recorded in her diary in December 1870
that “Some ones tryed to burn up the ould Mr Allison last night, set his shuck house affire and
thought it would burn up the barn horses and all, burnt up his Gin house and seven bags of cotten
and his saw mill.” The next night she fretted that “the incendiaryes is coming nearer home.
Lawsons Meet house was burnt up last night but the house was providentially saved. Theire was
no one theire. The fire burnt with in a few steps of the house and died out.”

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771 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 121. The reduction of livestock in South Carolina after the Civil
War might more accurately attributed to the widespread devastation wrought by the war, and Sherman’s march
across the state in particular. Reuben Tomlinson, a South Carolina Republican, also testified that there was
considerable theft of hogs and chickens in the South Carolina low country because there were so many more African
Americans than white planters, and because of how widespread poverty was in the region; KKK SC, 87.

772 Testimony of Reuben Tomlinson, KKK SC, 87.


774 Brown, Oil In Our Lamp, 172.
continued with more barns and gins burned in early 1871. In February of that year, a woman from nearby Chester County wrote to a friend reporting that “There has been a great many barns, gin-houses, and mills burned lately in this county supposed to be the work of incendiary.” She recounted that threats had been made against Yorkville, and asserted that “the negroes reason to burning for revenge.” She feared that “some mean white men are indulging the negroes to do as they are doing or perhaps white men are doing the burnings themselves.” Such reports of black barn burning were widespread among white conservative southerners. There was also anecdotal evidence that white North Carolinians might have committed barn burnings in the western part of that state. According to James M. Justice, the only known barn burning in Rutherford was widely suspected to have been committed by James McGaha in retaliation for the assault upon his wife. Given the lack of fire departments in the rural South, inadequate fire prevention technology, and unsafe industrial practices, it is entirely likely that many of the fires resulted from less nefarious causes—especially since many cotton gins were steam-powered.

But if committed by African Americans, the burnings of barns and gin houses were possibly tactics to establish greater black economic freedom as well as to punish white efforts to keep African Americans economically subservient. Edwin Whippel Seibels, a conservative from Columbia, South Carolina, testified that there were “fifteen or sixteen gin-houses burned in one county,” in the upcountry, connecting the incidents to the rhetoric of Joseph Crews. Seibels also related the purported incidents of arson to economic problems of the period, bemoaning the destruction of property from “incendiaries.” The burnings of barns and gin-houses was done, he said, “By the negroes who become dissatisfied at the payment of their wages, or their portion of

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775 Agnes McDill to William Dunlap Knox, February 1, 1871, William Dunlap Knox Papers, SCL.
776 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 138.
777 Testimony of Edwin Whippel Seibels, KKK SC, 120.
the crops. My brother and myself had our gin-house burned. A negro claimed some cotton-seed and we did not let him have it, and our gin-house was burned up with seventy bales of cotton.\footnote{Testimony of Edwin Whippel Seibels, \textit{KKK SC}, 122.}

Seibels was somewhat unusual in his putting incidents of arson in the larger context of the economic situation of the South, but his statements demonstrated how interconnected these issues were. He tied together the use of incendiary rhetoric by Republicans with the efforts of African Americans to establish economic security, asserting that it was done through criminal activity. White merchants mobilized charges of black thievery to insist upon only purchasing ginned cotton, a practice that forced African American farmers to pay white middlemen to gin their cotton. Some black farmers might have responded by burning those gins in the hope that white merchants would be forced to buy unginned seed-cotton. And as some people speculated, perhaps African Americans used arson to try to stop Klan violence.

But rather than limiting violence, Klansmen responded to suspected arson by African Americans with increased attacks, physical and rhetorical, against what they saw as unchecked black crime. Though Klansmen did not burn crosses during Reconstruction, they were arsonists, wielding fire as a weapon to burn schools, churches, and homes.\footnote{Thomas Dixon, in his historical novels about the Klan, was the first to claim that Klansmen burned crosses, a practice that highland Scots had supposed used in medieval times. The practice was then adopted by the twentieth-century Klan, the first meeting of which was marked by a cross burning at Stone Mountain, Georgia; Nancy MacLean, \textit{Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan} (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5.} Klansmen also killed and whipped black southerners in their campaigns of terror, claiming that they were meting out just punishments that courts controlled by Republicans would not. But their violence was illegal, and it seriously hindered the ability of southern courts to mete out justice.
In a particularly notorious incident in the South Carolina upcountry, Klansmen broke into a jail in Union on two separate occasions to kill black prisoners held there. A white conservative in Union wrote his father in Columbia on January 5, 1871, to describe the first raid.

Last night, a party of men, variously estimated from 100 to 300 men, came into town about 12 o’clock. They came masked, had on dominoes, and their horses covered over with mantles. They rode directly to the jail, where they found the Sheriff only. He refused to give up the keys, whereupon, being well prepared with instruments, they broke open doors to outside and inside, picked out five and left the balance. They carried them a mile from town, and detailed six to shoot each one. Two were killed dead; two were wounded and escaped; the fifth fell when shot, but it is thought he feigned death and has probably got away.

David T. Corbin, the United States District Attorney for South Carolina, recounted that one of the prisoners who survived, despite being severely wounded, testified that the executions were carried out one at a time with military precision; “they were all shot precisely as we in the Army would shoot persons sentenced to be shot,” he recalled.

After news of the raid reached the state capital, the governor requested that the surviving prisoners be relocated to Columbia for their own protection. On February 12, 1871, three days after the sheriff in Union received by mail an order to move the prisoners, and the night before the next train to Columbia could have taken the prisoners to a safer location, Klansmen again returned and again removed several remaining prisoners, executing them in the same location and in the same manner as the previous raid. Again the prisoners were taken to a field just

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780 Various accounts of the raid are contained in testimony of James L. Orr, KKK SC, 4; testimony of James H. Goss, KKK SC, 63-64; testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 74-75; “Another Ku Klux Raid,” The Newberry Herald, February 15, 1871; The Newberry Herald, February 22, 1871; Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 142-143; E.F. Kennedy, “Incidents During Reconstruction,” April 3, 1936, unpublished manuscript, Cabinet F, Drawer 2, Folder 20a, Federal Writers’ Project, SCL, citing the Progress, October 15, 1915, Union, South Carolina, written by Mrs. J. Frost Walker, Jr., Historian, William Wallace Chapter U.D.C.

781 Robert W. Shand to Peter J. Shand, January 5, 1871, Shand Family Papers, SCL.

782 Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 74.

outside of town known as the “hanging ground” and were executed with military precision. As
David T. Corbin later testified, it was “just what the process was designed to prevent. The friends
of these parties alleged that if these negroes were taken down to Columbia they never would be
punished.”784 A white conservative observer later reminisced, “It was a gruesome sight to see the
ten negroes lying dead side by side in the grand-jury room of the Court House next morning; but
it had a most quieting effect on the negroes.”785

The black prisoners in the Union jail in South Carolina were charged with having killed a
one-armed Confederate veteran named Matt Stevens, a whiskey peddler illegally transporting
liquor between North and South Carolina. It was alleged a group of African American
militiamen, under the command of Ellick (or Alex) Walker, a vocal black opponent of the Klan,
stopped Stevens near Ducktown Church in Union, between Christmas and New Years in 1870.
Stevens fled after being asked to surrender his whiskey for confiscation, and several militiamen
fired their rifles, killing him.786 Local whites disarmed several members of the militia company
and locked them in the jail to await trial—where ten of them, including Walker, their captain,
met their death in the two raids.787 The prisoners in Union were doubly despised—not only were
they members of the militias that so incensed white conservatives in the South Carolina
upcountry, but to those conservatives they were debased criminals likely to escape punishment.

784 Testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 75.
785 Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 143-144.
786 Accounts of the killing of Stevens, are widespread, but differ in points of detail; see testimony of James L. Orr,
KKK SC, 4; testimony of David T. Corbin, KKK SC, 80; testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 98;
Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 142; E.F. Kennedy, “Incidents During Reconstruction,” Cabinet F, Drawer 2,
Folder 20a, Federal Writers’ Project, SCL. See also Nelson, Iron Confederacies, 127.
787 Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 142-143.
The night of the second raid, Klansmen had allegedly handed the jailor a note that declared the prisoners were “TAKEN BY HABEAS CORPUS.” The local newspaper reprinted the note, which with flowery language declared:

Once again have we been forced by force to use force. Justice was lame, and she had to lean upon us. Information being obtained that a doubting “Thomas”—the inferior of nothing, the superior of nothing, and of consequence nothing—who has neither eyes to see the scenes of oppression, nor ears to hear the case of humanity, even though he wears the judicial silks, had ordered some guilty prisoners from Union to the city of Columbia, and of injustice and prejudice, for an unfair trial of life, thus clutching at the wheel spokes of destiny, then this thing was created and projected; otherwise it would never have been… We want peace; but this cannot be till justice returns. We want and will have justice; but this cannot be till the bleeding fight of freedom is fought.788

The note used many of the tropes of the narrative of “Negro Domination.” It claimed that Klansmen were “forced” to use violence because of the “force” arrayed against them; it mobilized language of “oppression” and claimed that Klansmen “want peace.” Klansmen blamed the actions of the black militiamen for the violence that resulted in their own deaths and took extreme pains to downplay their own criminal actions.

There were at least two other unsuccessful jail raids in South Carolina. In Spartanburg in the spring of 1871 some fifty Klansmen tried to break into the local jail to release a man who had been convicted of murdering an African American, but the town sheriff “refused to admit them, and they finally went away without accomplishing their object.”789 In Newberry around the same time Klansmen attacked a black county commissioner at home before trying to break into the jail, but they also left without doing so.790 In North Carolina, Klansmen in Orange County raided

788 The Newberry Herald, February 22, 1871.

789 Testimony of Samuel T. Poinier, KKK SC, 29.

a jail in the county seat of Hillsborough in August 1869, taking out two prisoners, one of whom they murdered, the other who survived.  

The murders in Union took place in an especially charged atmosphere, as militant threats and rumors of arson were rampant in the South Carolina upcountry. There had been several unsubstantiated rumors of murders committed by African Americans. Edwin Whipple Seibels reported that there had “been a great many white people killed by negroes.” Though he lived in Columbia, he said that in York County, next to Union, “five whites and only two negroes have been killed there since the war.” And The Newberry Herald, on February 8, between the two raids, reported that three African Americans had been arrested for arson and were awaiting trial in the Union jail; it is probable they witnessed the attack on the militiamen, and likely feared for their own lives.

If Klansmen were merely concerned with ensuring that the black militiamen were punished for the murder of Matt Stevens, their fears were unfounded. The two militiamen who had managed to survive both raids were later tried and legally hanged on the very same “hanging grounds” where Klansmen killed their comrades. The hanging of the remaining two militiamen prompted even Seibels to have to agree with the conclusion that “when a negro commits a murder justice can be done through the medium of the courts.”

Some local white conservatives denounced the murders. The editor of The Newberry Herald declared that “however guilty these prisoners may have been, there was no justification

791 Testimony of W. G. Turrentine, NC Report, 41-42. See also Trelease, White Terror, 195.
792 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 122.
793 “Barn Burners Caught,” The Newberry Herald, February 8, 1871.
794 Testimony of James L. Orr, KKK SC, 4; testimony of James H. Goss, KKK SC, 64; E.F. Kennedy, “Incidents During Reconstruction,” Cabinet F, Drawer 2, Folder 20a, Federal Writers’ Project, SCL.
795 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 98.
in “taking their lives in the summary and unlawful manner”—though he also blamed the violence on “The irritated state of the country, the provocations heaped upon our citizens, the corruption of the party in power, and the diabolical outrages committed.”796 There was no inquiry into the two jail raids, and local Republicans feared that speaking too loudly about it would cost them their lives. As one later testified, “If I had been prominent at all, made myself conspicuous at all, I would have been killed… I am a good republican, and a white man; but I am situated so that I dare not say what I think.”797 Several months later the local circuit judge presented the case to a grand jury, but most members of the grand jury were rumored to be Klansmen, and they returned only a denunciation of Governor Scott and Republicans in Columbia and no indictments.798

In perhaps an ironic turn, the Union jail continued to be used to house prisoners of all kinds, and when several local Klansmen were arrested by federal troops during the fall of 1871, “members of the Episcopal Church took their stove out of the Church and put it in the sitting room of the jail to keep our friends warm.”799 Locals in Union remembered the murders for many years. In 1938, a white resident told an interviewer for the Federal Writers’ Project “I remember the Ku Klux, but I didnt approve of them. They did some good, but did many wrong things. I remember when they took seven or eight negroe prisoners out of jail and hung them.”800 At eighty-four years old the white man still recalled the murder of the prisoners with ambivalence. The jail still stands today as a prominent historic site in Union, though the historic markers detailing its construction and past make no mention of the deadly raid.

797 Testimony of James H. Goss, KKK SC, 64.
798 Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 144.
799 Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 146.
800 Interview of Longstreet Gantt by G. L. Summer, November 21, 1938, Federal Writers’ Project, Cabinet H, Drawer 4, Folder 13, SCL.
The violence Klansmen purportedly used to curtail crime and secure better law enforcement in the South had several results. Republicans and African Americans responded by demanding further federal intervention. Governor Scott of South Carolina in early 1871 first rejected the use of troops to stop the violence, declaring that it would be an admission “that there was no civil government in South Carolina, and that we are living in a condition of social anarchy;” instead he called for increased power for the state’s attorney general and for the employment of a group of detectives under the attorney general’s control. But increasingly Republicans, locally and in Congress, demanded federal intervention, and eventually troops were dispatched to western North Carolina and the South Carolina upcountry. In the fall of 1871 President Grant declared the state of South Carolina under insurrection and suspended the writ of habeas corpus. Numerous Klansmen were arrested.

At the local level, Klan violence seemed to have prevented Republicans, black and white, from reporting or denouncing Klansmen to local courts. James M. Justice speculated that “four or five, may be ten, outrages are committed on negroes and not made known at all, to every one that becomes publicly known” because “the negroes are generally afraid to tell anything, except one now and then.” Reports of the success of Klan violence in suppressing black crime were frequent in accounts from contemporary conservatives and early sympathetic Klan chroniclers. A white woman from Yorkville reported that as a result of Klan raids “it is certain the incendiary fires soon ceased, and a comparative sense of security prevailed through the neighbourhood for

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802 Senator Frederick Sawyer of South Carolina, for example, made a speech in March 1871 declaring “If there be power under the Constitution to cure this evil we cannot afford to refuse or postpone the labor of devising a remedy;” Sawyer, Removal of Disabilities, 10.

803 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 148.
seven or eight months.” A white conservative South Carolinian describing the situation in 1874, a mere three years after the height of Klan violence, recalled that in Sumter County, Klansmen “called upon two leading radicals, father and son—both of whom have since disgraced high official positions in the State—and warned them that their bodies would be hung over the reeking ashes of the next house swept away by the torch of their partisans.” He claimed, “It had an immediate effect. The faithful were warned to desist, and during the remainder of that winter no other house was burned in Sumter.”

On the whole, he said, “There was not a county in which their even-handed justice was not meted out to all alike. Pillage and robbery ceased as if by magic; and crimes became of infrequent occurrence… The Ku-Klux had accomplished their mission… Their existence was a temporary expedient to meet a great evil.”

Such accounts cemented for white conservatives the notion that Klan violence had been essential to reversing “Negro Domination.”

So too did such accounts solidify a lasting conviction among white conservatives of the innate, almost biological roots of a predisposition to criminality among African Americans. A Klansman from Walterboro, South Carolina, writing a letter detailing his memories of Reconstruction many years later described African Americans as “unprincipled and depraved,” made worse by white Republicans who “encouraged and cultivated the basest and most vicious and criminal instincts of the negro, having control of the Courts, the juries, and Civil as well as public positions.”

Other white conservatives, perhaps more moderate in their racial views, believed such supposed black depravity stemmed partially from social causes, asserting that

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804 A Statement of Dr. Bratton’s Case, 13.
805 Ervin, “Notes,” SCHS, 7.
806 Ervin, “Notes,” SCHS, 10.
807 John Lucas to Maude Stewart, April 19, 1918, Ku Klux Klan Clippings File, SCHS.
though crime came from “the natural inclination of the negro” and “his natural disposition to pilfer,” it was compounded by “the result of want of education.” In testimony for the Joint Select Committee, a white conservative from North Carolina agreed with Philadelphia Van Trump, Democratic representative from Ohio, that African Americans were “likely to be overbearing” because of “the nature of the negro when he is uneducated and becomes suddenly elevated by any means.”

White Republicans, while sometimes countering white conservative claims about black criminality, shared a belief that African Americans were somehow different from whites and defective in their character, and viewed those deficits as impediments to the process of Reconstruction. A prominent white Republican from York, South Carolina, wrote to the attorney general of the United States, declaring that

The difficulty is not in the Courts, it is in the negro character. They are timid, and lean upon the arm of those who freed them, rather than on their own strength. I think their own strength, and that of many whites who desire justice, is sufficient to sustain them, but it is to the interest of some people to make them believe otherwise, at the risk of the success of reconstruction.

Some white Republicans believed that African Americans needed supervision and education in order to achieve the full freedom emancipation promised. African Americans apparently believed that all they needed was assistance in stopping the violence of the Ku Klux Klan.

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808 Testimony of Edwin Whipple Seibels, KKK SC, 133. Seibels was somewhat of a racial moderate for South Carolina, claiming that he had “taken a very active part since the war, in public speeches, in advocating the rights of the colored people;” KKK SC, 95. He also agreed that there were “some intelligent negroes in South Carolina;” KKK SC, 114. For a South Carolina Democrat, these were both statements of racial moderation.

809 Testimony of Pride Jones, KKK NC, 11.

810 William M. Thomas to A.T. Ackerman, November 4, 1871, M947, RG 60, NARA. Thomas himself was accused of being a Klansman by a Republican member of the South Carolina state legislature; Thomas vigorously denied it, and there seems to be no veracity to the charge except that he was vocal in denouncing what he saw as corruption in the state legislature and governorship. See “Emancipation Day,” The Chester Reporter, January 4, 1872.
Klansmen’s conviction that the South was controlled by “Negro Domination” gave a kind of coherence to their opposition to the actions of African Americans and white Republicans at the local level. Local community organizations, black militias, economic reforms, efforts to reform the southern legal system, and even criminal activity all seemed to white conservatives to be evidence that white southerners were under the heel of black oppressors, controlled or aided by treacherous whites. As one Klansman recounted, “The Militia was negro; State Constables, County Constables, Policemen, Court Constables, Magistrates; all negro or worse, white scoundrels who catered to the worst traits in the character of the negro whom they controlled and dominated.”

That white conservative southerners’ understanding of “Negro Domination” was more imagined than real ought to be apparent. South Carolina, even with a substantial black majority and with many important legislative offices held by African Americans, never elected a black governor. Thomas C. Holt records that as of 1872, in South Carolina “there were no Negroes among the thirty-one county sheriffs, none among the thirty-one clerks of court, just one among the thirty-one county treasurers, another among the thirty-two county auditors, eleven among the thirty-one school commissioners, and only about one in every five trial justices.” From a purely numeric standpoint, whites held most of the most important local political offices. Political power derives from more than simple numbers, but African Americans were far from being the most powerful political agents in the Reconstruction-era South.

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811 John Lucas to Maude Stewart, April 19, 1918, Ku Klux Klan Clippings File, SCHS.
812 Holt, Black Over White, 98.
813 John C. Rodrigue, in his essay “Black Agency after Slavery,” has argued that attention to black agency, vitally important for reversing the racist trajectory of the Dunning School, has perhaps caused scholars to overemphasize the centrality of African Americans to the process of Reconstruction. While critical actors and agents during the period, Rodrigue stresses, they were no more central to it than white southerners or white northerners; Thomas J.
The textures of white conservative fears of black control at the local level during Reconstruction reflected that white conservatives’ major conviction was that black and white were diametrically opposed. The most significant result of Klan violence at the local level, however, was the destabilization or destruction of the very things that prompted white conservatives to see “Negro Domination” in any assertions of black freedom. Klansmen and their sympathizers had similar convictions about the more private structure of their own households, as Chapter Six explores.

CHAPTER SIX: PRIVATE LIVES AND PUBLIC VIOLENCE: THE POLITICS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

One night in the spring of 1871, a group of Klansmen broke into the house of Frances Gilmore, a black twenty-year-old mother of two who lived near the town of Oakland in Chatham County, North Carolina. Klansmen stripped her naked, beat her with a board, cut her with a knife, and burned off her pubic hair with a match. The reasons for the attack on her are unknown. Specific justifications Klansmen gave for the raid were not recorded in testimonies, and no account survives from Gilmore herself about the experience or its aftermath. We do not know the terror or trauma she experienced. Neither do we know what the Klansmen believed they were doing. Perhaps she was a prominent voice for Republicans; perhaps these Klansmen used the cover of Ku Klux membership as an excuse for the satisfaction of depraved sexual desires. Gilmore reported her attack to a United States commissioner in Raleigh, a white man, likely in the hope that her attackers would be punished. Despite all that we do not know, the broad outlines of the Klansmen’s intentions seem clear: Klansmen were asserting their authority to visit violence upon African American women as part of a larger campaign to construct a new gendered and racial hierarchy after emancipation.

In another raid, on another night in Chatham County, Klansmen committed a very similar act of sexualized violence on another young woman also named—apparently by pure

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814 1870 Census, Series M593, Roll 1129, Page 139; testimony of A. Webster Shaffer, KKK NC, 36-37.
happenstance—Frances Gilmore.\footnote{It is possible that A. Webster Shaffer, a United States commissioner assigned to prosecute the Klan in North Carolina, conflated the details of the two cases in his testimony. Shaffer believed Frances was the older woman of the house and Sarah was the one burned, but census records suggest that Sarah was older and that Frances was one of her daughters; 1870 Census, Series M593, Roll 1129, Page 37. However, that these two women were attacked is separately corroborated by the testimonies of Essie Harris, in the case of the black Frances Gilmore, KKK NC, 99, and Elias Bryan, in the case of the white Frances Gilmore, KKK NC, 74-75. See also testimony of William Howle, KKK NC, 65-67.} She was a young white woman around eighteen years old, who stayed with her mother Sarah and several siblings. They lived close to the new Chatham Railroad line being built near Cape Fear. One night a very large group of Klansmen broke into the rail yard, “firing right and left, and hooting and hallowing.”\footnote{Testimony of A. Webster Shaffer, KKK NC, 37.} Scaring off the contractors and workers, the Klansmen proceeded to a nearby house in which Gilmore and her family were sleeping. The Klansmen found two black men lying on pallets inside; one they dragged outside and whipped, the other they shot and wounded as he attempted to run. The white women in the house were whipped. Klansmen dragged out one young woman (likely Frances Gilmore, though accounts are not conclusive). The same U.S. commissioner who detailed the attack on the other Frances Gilmore recounted, “they took her clothes off, whipped her very severely, and then lit a match and burned her hair off, and made her cut off herself the part that they did not burn off with the match.”\footnote{Testimony of A. Webster Shaffer, KKK NC, 37.} In addition to mutilating her, possibly to scar her to the point of being unable to engage in future sexual activity, Klansmen made their victim perform part of the violence. Perhaps they wanted the appearance of Gilmore’s consent.

Similar to the attack on the black woman named Frances Gilmore, the young white woman’s reactions to her attack are unknown, though the attack upon her attracted more commentary in testimonies to the Congressional Joint Select Committee. Klansmen’s motivation for mutilating her was suggested by a local white farmer who testified that Gilmore and her
family were attacked because they ran a house of prostitution visited mostly by black men; she was known as “a woman of very bad character” and the women of the family were “generally considered as strumpets.”

The connection by name of these two women is a strange historical coincidence, but the similarity of the violence committed against them is not. Their stories help to illustrate how the new racial hierarchy that Klansmen and white southerners sympathetic to them wanted to create in the Reconstruction-era South was heavily gendered. Klansmen used women’s bodies, white and black, as sites where violence could be used to assert their authority and police southerners who challenged certain sexual and racial norms. That the white Frances Gilmore lived in a house where interracial sex might have occurred showed to Klansmen that she had abrogated her right to future sexual activity, and they enforced it with her mutilation. Both of these incidents of violence were part of a larger campaign by white conservative men across the South to rebuild rules governing supposedly private activities, particularly sexual behavior.

A major location for the battle over the construction of a new hierarchy of race and gender was the southern household. Some scholars have asserted that in the aftermath of the defeat of the Confederacy, southern white men turned their attention away from the public political sphere and went about the more personal work of rebuilding their homes after slavery’s demise, creating new structures of white patriarchy outside of the political realm. These historians have argued that two reasons drove white southern men to turn away from external

818 Testimony of Elias Bryan, KKK NC, 84.

819 Lee Ann Whites has written that “the public arena was apparently lost to the members of the defeated white citizenry,” who in response continued to assert “their power in the private arena of their households;” The Civil War as a Crisis, 158. David C. Willard has explored how Confederate defeat did cause personal as well as public disengagement for Confederate veterans, particularly older ones, as the defeat had “stripped them of any broader social purpose,” in “What a Fall Was There—My Country Ruined!”: Confederate Soldiers and Southern Society, 1861-1880 (PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012), 4.
politics: out of malaise or despondency over the perceived military and political impotence of the Confederacy’s collapse and the establishment of Military Reconstruction; and out of a necessity to rebuild their economic and social lives in a landscape ravaged by war and the new world of a South without slavery.

Women’s historians and feminist scholars have asserted that analyses of gender reveal that there is no clear demarcation between public and personal politics. As Thavolia Glymph has written, “Home as a political figure and space comes into focus only when a key misconception is set aside: that the household is a private sphere,” in Out of the House of Bondage, 3. Stephanie McCurry has also asserted that power struggles within households of the yeomanry in the antebellum South Carolina lowcountry were as important as external political ones. She writes, “bourgeois distinctions between public and private, work and home, men and women’s spheres had no meaning in yeoman households,” in Masters of Small Worlds, 75. The same was true after the Civil War.

Masculinity and femininity are not static, unchanging concepts but are dependent upon and reflective of historic contexts, race, class, and place. Both are also performative; individuals are not born with fixed internal characteristics but rather assert gender in both subtle and obvious

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821 Elsa Barkley Brown, “Negotiating the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom,” Public Culture 7 (Fall 1994), 107-146; Steve Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 227-228.

822 Peter W. Bardaglio, Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), xi. Stephanie McCurry has asserted the same was true of the antebellum period. In Masters of Small Worlds, McCurry examines the South Carolina yeomanry before the Civil War, finding that “in antebellum South Carolina households were the constituent units of society, organizing the majority of the population—slaves of both sexes and all ages and free women and children—in relations of legal and customary dependency to the propertied male head, whether yeoman or planter,” Masters of Small Worlds, 6.
acts. During Reconstruction some of these categories and their intersections were fluid and changing; before the Civil War, white men, regardless of political affiliation, were unquestionably at the top of a hierarchy within southern households. Notions about their manhood undergirded white men’s claims to household authority, and mastery over their households grounded white men’s claims to public power. The system was bolstered legally and ideologically by the system of slavery, even for those white men who did not own slaves. The death of slavery upended this system but did not destroy conservative white southern men’s desires to remain in authority over their—or others’—households. Emancipation freed and empowered many southerners, especially African Americans, to create new, alternate household structures; but for many conservative white southern men, it created a crisis of masculinity.

Southern white masculinity during the nineteenth century has been extensively analyzed, with writers like W.J. Cash asserting that southern white men of the yeomanry were principally driven by emotions instead of intellect and Bertram Wyatt-Brown declaring that elite white men were governed by a strict code of honor. More recently Stephanie McCurry has defined “the holy trinity of [antebellum] southern manhood” as “manliness, masterhood, and republican citizenship,” stressing the importance of notions of mastery for antebellum southern white

823 Judith Butler, in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), notably asserts that gender is socially constructed, it is largely based upon performances, and categories of it are relational to one another. However, she also notes, that it is socially constructed through discourse does not reduce how concrete it can seem; she suggests “that certain cultural configurations of gender take the place of ‘the real’ and consolidate and augment their hegemony through that self-naturalization,” 45.

824 For example, Peter Bardaglio has argued that “Southern slaveholding ideology ascribed a more important position to the male head of the household than did bourgeois ideology, and the rigid separation of home and work that characterized middle-class life in the North did not exist;” Reconstructing the Household, 24.

825 McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds, 7. As McCurry also argued, “slavery thereby gave shape to yeoman households as well, to their legal boundaries, and, most important, to the gender and class relations that prevailed within them,” 16.

men.\textsuperscript{827} Several scholars of gender have asserted that southern masculinity in the nineteenth century emphasized the pervasiveness of paternalism, which presumed authority with benevolence.\textsuperscript{828}

A focus upon Klan violence around the realm of the household and an attention to the structures of power that Klansmen and their supporters were attempting to construct prompt slightly different conclusions. White conservative men did make claims to benevolent, paternalistic control of their households after emancipation. But more powerful and common during Reconstruction seem to have been assertions of patriarchal control, more public and with greater outward displays of authority than perhaps existed in the antebellum period. Paternalism and patriarchy are not mutually exclusive categories, and the differences between them almost seemingly pedantic. The point here is less to parse those differences and more to demonstrate that white conservative men during Reconstruction made fewer pretenses in their assertions of masculine authority to the sort of kindly beneficence paternalism implied. More than honor, more than emotionalism, and more than a pretended assertion of benevolent paternalistic power, public displays of patriarchal authority were how white conservative men used their masculinity to assert how southern households ought to be structured during Reconstruction.

An interesting aspect to postbellum conservative white masculinity is that unlike their ideas about race, white conservative men including members of the Klan seemed not to have feared that the threats to their masculinity would have destructive impacts upon society. Whereas conservatives frequently bemoaned that any black political power would make all of society black, resulting in “Negro Domination,” Klansmen and their conservative supporters did not fear


\textsuperscript{828} Friend & Glover, eds, Southern Manhood, ix.
that larger society would become “unmanly.” Though they feared that southern society would lose its whiteness, they did not fear that it would lose its manliness. Instead, for Klansmen, Reconstruction’s challenge to their manliness was personal while the solution was public. By asserting their masculinity, white men could rebuild the social whiteness that “Negro Domination” threatened to destroy.

White conservative men desired an authority more complex than just total control over their own households. They also wanted the ability to dictate the private behavior of other southerners, including other white men. The existence of the Ku Klux Klan and specific patterns of Klan violence—such as the attacks on the two women named Frances Gilmore in Chatham County—argue against a model of white male postwar malaise and disengagement. Klansmen engaged in public struggles over the future political, economic, and social structures of the South. Much or most of the violence they committed was intended to function as a public spectacle, even as it took place in or near the households of victims. Klansmen brought spectacles of violence to the private households of their victims; in so doing they reinforced the political importance of the household itself. And though conservative men’s work stemmed from a crisis of white masculinity after the Civil War, and though it was geared towards cementing white male patriarchal authority, conservative white women were also engaged in the process of creating a new gendered hierarchy. Many of the wives, daughters, and friends of Klansmen supported their work, being knowledgeable about their activities and supportive of their goals.829

829 Thavolia Glymph has extensively explored how white southern women used violence, particularly during slavery, to assert their own place in a racial and gendered hierarchy above African Americans. She warns that “If the authority of planter women is defined by the restrictions, legal and customary, imposed by white male authority, their power and violence disappear,” in Out of the House of Bondage, 3. Fewer historians, however, have looked in depth at how white conservative southern women engaged in political activity during Reconstruction. Though the field of scholarship on white women’s support of and experiences through slaveownership have a long and rich history, scholars seem more apt to assume that white southern women after the Civil War turned inward. That was not the case with contemporary critics; as Bill Blair has noted, “northerners persisted in identifying women as the purveyors of Confederate sentiment who helped prevent the wounds of disunion from healing,” in Cities of the
Concurrently, other southerners, white and black, who desired alternate structures of power within southern households contested the work of the Ku Klux Klan. White Republican men shared some similar notions of masculinity with Klansmen, but held significantly different visions for how southern households could or should be structured. African Americans firmly opposed the kind of hierarchy that white conservatives believed should rule southern households, expressing alternate visions for the postbellum South through resistance to Klan violence and their own actions structuring their households. Neither the hierarchy desired by Klansmen nor alternatives to it being built by their opponents were simple, clearly defined, or entirely choate. Though the construction of the hierarchies were messy and at times contradictory, broad outlines were visible, as seen through incidents of violence.

The home was a central site for post-emancipation political struggles, and in turn struggles over domestic hierarchies of power shaped the larger politics of Reconstruction. This chapter’s first part explores the contours of the kind of white patriarchal authority conservative white men and women wanted to enact in emancipation’s aftermath, looking at what membership in or support of the Klan provided as well as what violence committed by Klansmen worked to build. The second part of the chapter explores the actions of victims and opponents of the Klan, who were building alternatives to the specific form of white patriarchy desired by white conservatives.

Looking at the impact of Klan violence in the context of the household shows all southerners to have been politically minded and calls into question a simplistic division between

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Dead, 77. An exception to the argument of white southern women’s disengagement is Drew Gilpin Faust, who explored how white southern women’s politics were a “paradox of progressivism and reaction,” in Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), description from Blair, Cities of the Dead, 78. For works on white women in the nineteenth-century South, see Catherine Clinton, The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982; Clinton & Silber, eds., Divided Houses.
public and private. In emancipation’s aftermath, the boundaries new gendered and racial hierarchy many white southerners sought to build was forged through vigilante violence upon people like the two young women in Chatham County named Frances Gilmore—young women who suffered unspeakable violence from white conservative men who were using membership in the Ku Klux Klan to reconstruct a form of white masculinity through violent assertions of authority over the private lives of others.

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Conservative white southern men’s conception of the kind of men who would stand atop the racial and gendered hierarchy of the South—their idea of the proper form of white masculinity—was based on a complex formula of religious and political beliefs and public and private conduct. White conservative men openly asserted that their masculinity was a solution to the problems of Reconstruction. One, discussing the activities of the Klan, wrote in 1874 that “A dependence upon their own manhood and courage were all that was left to the white race of the State” during Reconstruction. For many white men of the time period, military service in the Civil War had provided the opportunity for both those external accomplishments and interpersonal friendships that could define them as men. Stephen Berry has argued that most southern white men in the Civil War-era were driven by two emotional desires: for immortality through social accomplishments, and for love through either homosocial friendship or heterosexual romance. Membership in the Klan, and violence that accompanied it, gave coherence and definition to the lives of many conservative white men, some of whom had missed

830 Ervin, “Notes,” SCHS, 9.

831 Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover have also asserted the historic connection between claims of manhood and military service in the South; Southern Manhood, vii.

the opportunity to serve in the Confederacy during the war and others who had seen their service result in defeat.833

Whiteness was the central component of the kind of masculinity Klansmen believed could claim patriarchal authority. Indeed for Klansmen, only white people were deserving of full humanity. In 1872, John Adams Leland, a Klansmen from South Carolina, wrote a poem while in jail in Columbia to his friend W. Simeon Pearson, who had been transferred to a jail in Charleston. In it, Leland quoted Pearson’s “motto:”

“Whatever is—is right,  
Let it come day or night,  
From Heaven, earth, or hell, man or nigger.”834

As seen with his use of the conjunction “or,” Leland did not feel that African American men were actually men. Leland was not the only Klansman to separate out African Americans from the categories of men or women. A Klansman from Sampson County, North Carolina, swore in a deposition that he was supposed to participate in a raid to whip Julia Ann Hudson, a white woman, “& some niggars,” whom he did not bother to name.835 Perhaps he did not know their names, but the effect was to define only white people as deserving of being named, and to deny African Americans rhetorical inclusion in full manhood or womanhood. Klansmen also emasculated black men physically. They castrated or sexually mutilated at least two black men, Nathan Trollinger and Caswell Holt, both of Alamance County, North Carolina.836

833 Whites, The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender, 9; Williard, “What a Fall There Was;” Shivelbusch, The Culture of Defeat.
834 “Epistle of John, The Prisoner,” April 29, 1872, John Adams Leland Collection, SCL.
835 Deposition of Wiley C. West, in J. S. M. Evans to A.T. Ackerman, November 24, 1871, M1345, RG 60, NARA.
836 Nelson, Iron Confederacies, 112.
But white masculinity was a complex construct wherein whiteness alone was not enough. Klansmen launched against many southern white men whom they believed had abrogated their rights to whiteness and manliness. That Klansmen desired a South composed of individual households structured by patriarchy did not mean that every white man was equal. Rather, many things governed that which Klansmen believed held claims to household mastery, as many white conservative men asserted that either the personal conduct or political beliefs of other white men undermined their claims to control of their households.

The oaths that many Klansmen reflected the contours and definitions of their visions of masculinity, and made clear that the household was key to the patriarchal authority they celebrated. Members of the “Invisible Empire” in both Lincoln County, North Carolina and York County, South Carolina (and likely many neighboring counties) swore:

I, (name,) before the great immaculate Judge of heaven and earth, and upon the Holy Evangelist of Almighty God, do, of my own free will and accord, subscribe to the following sacred, binding obligation:
I. I am on the side of justice and humanity and constitutional liberty, as bequeathed to us by our forefathers in its original purity.
II. I reject and oppose the principles of the radical party.
III. I pledge aid to a brother of the Ku-Klux Klan in sickness, distress, or pecuniary embarrassments. Females, friends, widows, and their households shall be the special object of my care and protection.
IV. Should I ever divulge, or cause to be divulged, any of the secrets of this order, or any of the foregoing obligations, I must meet with the fearful punishment of death and traitor’s doom, which is death, death, death, at the hands of the brethren.\footnote{KKK 25}

Klansmen’s ideas of masculinity were more complex than this simple oath appears, but were indeed wrapped up with beliefs about religion, politics, homosocial friendship, and the public and private behavior of most southerners.

As suggested both by the use of the term “brethren” to describe fellow Klan members and that they swore to “the Holy Evangelist of Almighty God,” religion was a component of the
masculinity they celebrated. Many elite Klansmen held positions of authority in local churches, and seemed to be sincere in their piety. In the upcountry South Carolina and western North Carolina, Presbyterianism was common among many Klansmen. John Adams Leland, the man who wrote poems from the United States jail in Columbia, South Carolina, was an elder in the Mount Pleasant Presbyterian church. Perhaps the structure of the Klan, with constitutions and relatively independent leadership, were influenced by or based on the structure of southern protestant Christian churches. Other Klansmen were Baptists; John Thomas Gaston of Edgefield was a deacon in the Second Baptist Church of Edgefield.

Like Klansmen, conservative white southern women valued Protestant Christianity as a key part of the way southern households ought to function. Mary Davis Brown, of York County, South Carolina, recorded many incidents of violence and unrest in her home county, but spent most of her diary writing about her Presbyterian church and asking God for guidance and support. On a Sunday in March 1871, during the height of violence in York County, she wrote

\[
\text{This is the sabbeth. I have been trying to spend it in a right and profitable way. These are trying times. A time when the people of God ought to be awake to theire duty that we be not as Sodom and Gomorrah that theire could not be ten richous persons found in it. Oh that we would imitate that citty Ninavah that repented at the preachen of Jonna and repent of oure wickedness and return unto the Lord our God that he may have mercy on us and put an end to these days of fear and sorrow.}
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838 W. Scott Poole has explored the intersections between Confederate memory, southern white conservatism, and evangelical religion, in Never Surrender.

839 R.A. Shotwell, who was imprisoned in Albany penitentiary and who wrote a memoir about the experience, was the son of a Presbyterian minister; testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 147; while David Schenck, a lawyer from Lincolnston, North Carolina and member of the Klan, was a Presbyterian and his diary contains many pious appeals to God for guidance and support, Diary, David Schenck Papers, SHC.

840 John Adams Leland Collection, SCL.

841 Undated anonymous biographical sketch, John Thomas Gaston Papers, SCL.

842 Brown, Oil In Our Lamps, 176.
The “wickedness” she wrote of about her town was its lack of adequate prayerfulness; she was not denouncing the violence her own relatives were committing. The Ku Klux Klan was not a form of Christian evangelism; members did not see themselves as spreading Protestant Christianity, and contemporary women did not see the work of Klansmen as being particularly godly. But conservative whites, men and women, definitely saw religion as playing an essential part of the way southern households ought to be structured.

The relationship between the Klan and evangelical Christianity, however, was complex. As of 1865 large numbers of white southern men, perhaps even the majority of them, were unchurched. The chief of a den in Rutherford, North Carolina, testified that he was not a member of a church. Thomas Williford, of Lenoir County, North Carolina, was on his way to Sunday school with his wife when stopped by members of the Constitutional Union Guard and encouraged to join. He stopped to attend the meeting, where many Klansmen were drinking and carousing instead of attending church, and there he was sworn into the order. His wife continued alone to church. The Klan would take otherworldly, and potentially seemingly un-Christian, trappings. Klansmen in Sampson County, North Carolina, also met on Sundays, and when they swore to join the Klan, they placed one hand on a Bible and the other on what was said to be a human skull. Klansmen frequently claimed to be ghosts, come back to life for vengeance—not a cosmology fitting with traditional evangelical Protestant Christianity.

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844 Trial testimony of J.R. Depriest, KKK NC, 427.

845 NC Report, lix.

846 Various depositions, in J. S. M. Evans to A.T. Ackerman, November 24, 1871, M1345, RG 60, NARA
Some of their victims denounced their violent attacks as un-Christian. A white female victim of violence in Spartanburg, South Carolina, was asked how she knew one of her attackers. She replied, “I have been acquainted with him all my life. I would see him of a Sunday, and I am sorry to think it of him.”\textsuperscript{847} That she expressed sorrow at his activities in the same sentence she mentioned that she saw him on Sundays suggests both that Klansmen could belong to churches and yet that many southern Christians were dismayed at their behavior.\textsuperscript{848} Klansmen apparently resolved whatever tensions they felt about the troubling nature of the violence they committed or the superstitious nature of the rituals they practiced, as seen in the religious language they swore in their oaths and the centrality of religion to the way white conservatives felt southern households ought to be structured.

Describing Klansmen with the term “brethren” had not just religious connotations, but also reinforced that the Klan was an opportunity for friendship. In some cases the brotherhood was literal; many families, like the Jones in South Carolina or the Depriests in North Carolina, had several sons join the Klan. For others the connections were social. In John Adams Leland’s poem to his friend transferred to a Charleston jail, Leland declared,

\begin{quote}
I have missed you, my friend.
In my snug little den,
Tho’ friends have been kinder than ever.
I miss all your capers.
Your burning my papers,
Your cooking and sweeping, so clever.\textsuperscript{849}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{847} Testimony of Margaret Blackwell, \textit{KKK SC}, 375.

\textsuperscript{848} Ted Ownby, in \textit{Subduing Satan}, explored the history of southern whites as a dichotomy between a male recreation culture that emphasized violence and a middle-class evangelical Christian culture that attempted to “elevate” or “subdue” it, a tension perhaps reflected in the ambivalence of many white southerners towards Klan violence.

\textsuperscript{849} “Epistle of John, The Prisoner,” April 29, 1872, John Adams Leland Collection, SCL.
Beyond the interesting evidence of a Klansman being celebrated for his domestic chores while imprisoned, the heartfelt feeling Leland expressed for his friend in the poem was striking. Many Klansmen used their membership as a means for recreation with like-minded white men. On some raids Klansmen would stop between houses they raided and dance to a fiddle. Alcohol also frequently played a role in Klan violence, and many Klansmen would drink before or during raids. A young member of the Cherry Mountain den in Rutherford County—who had joined from neighboring Cleveland County—was asked in a trial why his den met on that mountain. He replied, “There were many cherries there, and we used to go there and eat them often.” The idyllic image of young men sitting and eating cherries contrasts the horrific violence Klansmen, including this den, committed. The Klan was deadly business, but many Klansmen saw fellowship with other white men as an essential part of its appeal.

Participating in the Klan also allowed some Klansmen to play around with standard notions of masculinity. The Klan began in Pulaski, Tennessee, as an imitation of antebellum fraternities, mostly for the purpose of bonding with friends by joking and pulling pranks on them, frequently by the use of strange and humorous costumes. It evolved into a violent vigilante organization as it spread across the South, but many Klansmen continued the practice of wearing costumes that in some way tweaked customary notions of masculinity. Scott Reynolds Nelson has even suggested that many of the rituals of initiation and the patterns of sexualized violence suggested a certain homoerotic appeal, as costumes had exaggerated horns perhaps phallic in nature.

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850 Testimony of Essic Harris, KKK NC, 88.
851 Trial testimony of John Harrill, KKK NC, 445.
852 Richardson, Historic Pulaski and Romine, A Story of the Original Ku Klux Klan.
853 Nelson, Iron Confederacies, 111.
A Klansman from Mississippi recorded in his memoir a story about his Klan robe made of calico. In the early weeks of the Civil War, when some southern white men had not yet volunteered, he remembered that “As much as to say, ‘you are a girl,’ or ‘you are too effeminate to go to the war,’ a few girls would get together, and to a young man who had not yet volunteered, they would send by a negro slave a hoop-skirt, a huge sun bonnet and a Mother Hubbard calico frock.” In September 1861, not having yet volunteered for Confederate service, he was sent such an outfit. Rather than being upset about the potential insult to his manliness, he responded with humor. He recalled,

I donned my complete outfit—hoop, frock, bonnet—and went to a photographer and had my picture taken. There were three young ladies in the company that furnished me with the outfit and I presented each one a copy of the picture... I kept my Mother Hubbard frock until after the war, when it served me a good purpose. I had it transformed into a Ku Klux robe.  

He transformed what had been a symbol of potential cowardliness into a symbol of his participation in an organization founded for the purpose of rebuilding white patriarchal authority after the Civil War. This story also demonstrated that white southern women were actively engaged in the process of defining white southern masculinity.

This Mississippi Klansman was by no means the only one to use women’s clothing to make his Klan robe. Essic Harris reported that all fifteen of the Klansmen who raided him were disguised, and “some of them had on some women’s clothes.” And a white man threatened by the Klan in Sumter County, South Carolina testified that of the Klansmen who visited him, “Some of them had calico dresses; others had on homespun dresses, paper hats,

854 Robuck, My Own Personal Experience, 15.
855 Lisa Cardyn’s “Sexualized Racism/Gendered Violence” has a discussion of Klansmen wearing women’s garments, see 829-831.
856 Testimony of Essic Harris, KKK NC, 87.
Though many Klansmen wore calico dresses, which were symbols of effeminacy, their costumes seem not to have undermined their claims to masculinity. Rather, the Klan provided its members a space within which they could play with some unusual performances of white masculinity, while using violence and intimidation to promote a strict hierarchy of race and gender atop which southern white men stood supreme.

Assertions of respectability were another inseparable part of conservative white men’s claims to masculinity. Respectability, like masculinity itself, is a complex and nebulous concept, about which southern white men disagreed and of which they made varying claims of ownership. But the language of respectability was never far from discussions of the Klan and their activities. As previously discussed, these assertions of respectability, interestingly, contrasted some with other conservative declarations that young, poor, debased criminals had committed the majority of Klan violence. An article from the *Raleigh Sentinel* about arrested Klansmen being transported from the Rutherford jail to Raleigh for federal trial in August, 1871, bemoaned the “spectacle” taking place in “a free country and a civilized community! To appreciate it, you must understand that these prisoners were gentleman of respectability.” The article contrasted the crimes Klansmen committed with those of “desperate outlaws,” claiming that these respectable Klansmen “were charged not with high crimes, such as murder and arson, but with assault and battery and forcible trespass.” Whether the author of the article felt that murder would have revoked these men’s claims to respectability is doubtful, given that arson was considered a more severe crime than the whipping and murder of Republicans.

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Even more than respectability and religion, however, conservative white southern men believed that patriarchy provided them with the authority to control southern households. Antebellum discourse defending slavery used the “specific analogy of slaves with women, masters with husbands, and slavery with marriage.” The power of husbands within their households, even those without slaves, had thus been shaken by emancipation. But though the legal practice of coverture, in which a woman had no legal identity outside of her husband’s or her father’s, was under attack in the postbellum South, it still had significant support from white conservative men. Furthermore, two thirds of Klansmen were married in 1870, and by 1880 89% were, and their wives played active roles in supporting their membership in the Klan. Part of what made a Klansman a good husband was securing his wife’s support for his activities.

There is little evidence that women served as active members of the Reconstruction-era Klan. Given its roots in young men’s fraternal organizations it would be very surprising if any white women actually swore into the group as members, or were even remembered afterwards as members. It appears that only two women, Mary Avery and Louisa Chambers, were ever arrested for participation in the Klan, and they were released and not convicted. Both were likely the wives of Klan chiefs. The only other account that women served as active members was from a 1941 book by a white man born in Abbeville, South Carolina in 1873, who—without

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859 Stephanie McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds, 215.

860 The North Carolina constitutional convention of 1868, outlawed coverture, however Peter Bardaglio as found that coverture was widespread throughout states in the Reconstruction South, in Reconstructing the Household, 31. See later discussion.

861 See Chapter Two for demographics of Klan families.

862 David T. Corbin to the Attorney General, February 19, 1872, M947, RG 60, NARA.
citation or further elaboration—claimed that “a few of the women rode with” the Klan in
Laurens County, South Carolina.  

But white women were very knowledgeable about what their male relatives were doing.
When U. S. troops in York County, South Carolina, seized a copy of the local Klan constitution,
Jennie Brown, the daughter of a Klansman, showed the troops where it was hidden in her father’s
desk drawer. Women stayed awake when their husbands, sons, or brothers were out riding at
night. On January 30, 1871, rumors were swirling in York County, South Carolina, that African
Americans had threatened to burn down the town of York. Mary Davis Brown, who lived in the
county outside of town, recounted in her diary staying up until one o’clock in the morning for her
brothers John and Lawson to return from York. They had gone to defend it in case the wild
rumors of a black uprising were true, though it is unclear if they were active members of the
Klan or merely went to York to participate in the event of wide-scale violence. But Brown was
likely not alone in having spent a restless night waiting for her male relations to return from
night riding. Empty beds testified to what husbands and brothers and fathers were out doing.

The most frequent kind of support white women were said to have provided to Klansmen
were making robes. A booklet published in 1924 celebrating the works of the Klan claimed that
“the women of the South… designed and made with their own hands more than four hundred
thousand of these Klan robes for both horses and riders, not a word was said by these women to
any one about them and not one single secret concerning them was ever revealed.” The
estimated numbers were overstated, and the valorization of the dutiful sacrifice of white southern

863 McCravy, Memories, 15.
864 Testimony of Lieutenant Godfrey, SC Trials, 164-166.
865 Brown, Oil In Our Lamps, 174
866 Romine, A Story of the Original Ku Klux Klan, 15.
women were a classic trope of Jim Crow-era accounts of Reconstruction. But given both
women’s roles in charge of domestic chores in southern households, and given that many
Klansmen seem to have worn robes made out of dress material like calico, most Klansmen
probably did wear robes sewn by women. There are even stories that making robes put women in
danger of arrest by federal authorities. An elderly white woman from Union County, South
Carolina, said in a Federal Writers’ Project interview that

Mrs. Betty Crawford who lived in the old Union Hotel was a maker of the Ku Klux
regalia. Her work which confined her closely in her room most of the time began to
arouse suspicion. The Northern officers who were stationed at Union learned of her
activity and planned a raid on her apartment. Learning of this in advance, she was
secretly carried to Santuc by a Mr. Murtishaw, where she boarded a train for Augusta,
thus escaping with her material which she had packed into suitcases. 867

The Federal Writers’ Project papers contain several stories of white women providing other
kinds of domestic assistance to Klansmen. The same elderly white woman also told about how
“Aunt Frankie,” the wife of a Klansman named Dan Shelton, would cook for large Klan
meetings. She was just one of several women “who would take turn about cooking a supply of
food for the Klansmen who had hide-outs in big gullies and other places that offered protection
for them. The negro servants often got suspicious about so much food being prepared but were
afraid to say much about it after being told to keep quiet.” 868

White southern women, even if
confined to domestic chores, worked not only in sympathy with but also to facilitate the violence
committed by male members of the Ku Klux Klan.

867 Elmer Turnage, from interviews with Mrs. L.A. Layton of Union County, March 24, 1936, Federal Writer’s
Project Papers, Cabinet F, Drawer 2, Folder 20a, SCL.

868 Elmer Turnage, from interviews with Mrs. L.A. Layton of Union County, March 24, 1936, Federal Writer’s
Project Papers, Cabinet F, Drawer 2, Folder 20a, SCL.
White women were participating in supporting a hierarchy that supposedly kept them subservient but protected. In so doing they were asserting that their own whiteness gave them a form of power and authority that trumped the fact that their gender restricted their political power. But in turn those limits shaped the ways in which women could support Klansmen: they were confined to the domestic realm, making costumes and preparing food. But those limits also provided white women a measure of protection, either from counter-violence on the part of targeted victims or, when the federal investigation began, from arrest and conviction.

Furthermore, white conservative men believed women needed to be confined solely to the domestic sphere, and that belief shaped both how men communicated about the Klan as well as how women worked to support it. Though conservative white men shared details about Reconstruction-era politics with women they knew in correspondence, they often did so with professed ambivalence in order to stress the primarily domestic role they believed women ought to take. Charles Duke Stanley, of Charleston, South Carolina, wrote about the Ku Klux Klan in courtship letters to a childhood friend Sallie Rives, of Alabama. “What vast changes, Miss Sallie, aside from our personal appearances, have taken place since we last met,” he wrote.

I often contrast those halcyon days of peace with the days and years that have since intervened, and even with the present, a time of peace so called. You no doubt are informed to some extent of noble So Carolina’s degradation, but I believe one half is not

\[869\] As Hannah Rosen has written, “white southern women generally joined with the men of their families, and the overall politics of their class, in either opposing or, in rarer instances, supporting the exercise of citizenship and suffrage by African Americans.” Though they did not participate in violence, “they often supported at least the goals of vigilante action.” See Terror in the Heart of Freedom, 18. Similarly, Kathleen Blee asserts “Although women did not participate openly in the actions of the first KKK, the idea of ‘white womanhood’ was a crucial rallying cry for postbellum Klan violence. Klansmen insisted that white women benefited from the Southern racial state, even as strict gender hierarchies within white society ensured that women would not be consulted on this matter,” in Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 13.

\[870\] My thinking on the extent to which the domestic realm provided both limitation and protection for conservative white women owes a great deal to Thavolia Glymph, particularly her work in Out of the House of Bondage, 28-29.
known abroad. From all I can learn, La is in very much the same condition. I must not further intrude such thoughts into your peaceful and sequestered home.\footnote{Charles Duke Stanley to Sallie Rives, April 16, 1872, Charles Duke Stanley Papers, SCL.}

By “degradation” Stanley meant the federal investigations into the Klan. It seems curious that he would mention them in a courtship letter, suggesting how present they were in his thoughts.

Several days letter he wrote a follow up letter, again mentioning the Klan.

Here in the political world, there is so much of the novelty and ridiculous, and I might add so much trouble, that it proves a topic of unceasing interest to us. Out of this grows the Ku Klux trials, which is now the order of the day. One of our Sunday school teachers while paying a visit to his dying sister in one of the counties under martial law, was summarily arrested and incarcerated. Innocent perhaps of any crime whatever. I did not intend dwelling upon this subject.\footnote{Charles Duke Stanley to Sallie Rives, April 26, 1872, Charles Duke Stanley Papers, SCL.}

Stanley’s belief that Rives’s home ought to be kept “peaceful and sequestered,” and his ambivalence about discussing his obsession with the political debates about the Klan with Rives is consonant with conservative southern white men’s conviction that white women’s proper sphere was a domestic one.

In contrast, white conservative women would express their political beliefs about the Klan’s activities in letters back to white men. Agnes McDill, a schoolteacher from Chester County, closely followed local events, recounting to a male friend in North Carolina

There has been a great many barns, gin-houses, and mills burned lately in this county supposed to be the work of incendiary. The negroes have threatened to burn Yorkville the citizens are guarding it every night… I fear some mean white men are inducing the negroes to do as they are doing or perhaps white men are doing the burnings themselves.\footnote{Agnes McDill to William Dunlap Knox, February 1, 1871, William Dunlap Knox Papers, SCL.}

The clear expression of McDill’s racial and political beliefs—that African Americans were being persuaded by white Republicans to rise up against conservative whites—conflicted slightly with the ways white conservative men expressed ambivalence about discussing Klan violence with
white women. Perhaps women like McDill chafed that they were to be relegated solely to the
domestic realm. But her beliefs mirrored closely those of white conservative men, supporting the
use of vigilante violence. And McDill made several visits with her brother to Klansmen jailed in
Yorkville in the later federal investigation. “They are looking well,” she later wrote, and “say
they get plenty to eat & nothing to do. Oh! I am sorry for them but cannot do anything for them
except to visit them. I baked them some cake & took with me. The lawyer who is working in
their behalf told me he was hopeful he would get bail for them in a few days. Oh, where will this
trouble end?”

In addition to the conviction that women ought to be kept in the domestic sphere, a
critical portion of patriarchy conservative white men espoused during Reconstruction was
authority that male household heads had over children. Paternalism had been a key, inseparable
part of the claims white men made to slave ownership in the antebellum period. Fatherhood
had been linked to slavery, grounding the rights of white men to enact violence on their children
as well as their slaves. In the aftermath of emancipation, Klansmen continued to assert complete
paternal authority, but perhaps with fewer pretensions to kindheartedness. Klansmen targeted a
sixteen-year-old African American boy named John Beckwith because he fought with a white
boy. “Dat night I slipped in de woods,” he later remembered, “an’ de nex’ day I went ter
Raleigh.” It is unclear whether the white boy was the child of a Klansman, but the incident
reflected Klansmen’s twin belief that they needed to protect white children and that they had
authority to use violence against black boys.

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874 Agnes McDill to William Dunlap Knox, January 8, 1872, William Dunlap Knox Papers, South SCL.
875 See Bardaglio, Reconstructing the Household, 89, and McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds.
876 Interview with John Beckwith, Born in Slavery, Volume XI, Part 1, 90.
Nearly half of all Klansmen were fathers themselves in 1870, and two thirds were in 1880. Their roles as fathers were important components of their claims to household authority.\textsuperscript{877} But their relationships with children were more complex than simple assertions of power. John Adams Leland, the Klan poet from the Columbia jail, penned another poem for his friend “S.W.,” assuming his friend’s voice talking to his friend’s three-day-old son.

> When I heard that a Boy
> Filled my house full of joy,
> My heart fully shared the emotion;
> How can I caress you,
> How can I bless you,
> From this rock in the midst of the ocean?\textsuperscript{878}

In the poem’s telling, the hardest thing about Leland’s friend’s imprisonment was not raising his son. But the poem was not solely about the affection a Klansmen felt for his child. It included several stanzas about the political situation that led to their imprisonment, claiming

> My son, you have come
> To a desolate home,
> And your country you’ll find still more dreary.
> We’ve surrendered our rights,
> After bloodshed and fights,
> And are hunted down, worn out, and weary.\textsuperscript{879}

The poem suggested a relationship between conservative white men’s assertion of patriarchal control and their interpretation of the politics of Reconstruction. They taught their children that their authority had been smashed by the defeat of the Confederacy and that their imprisonment for having committed a violent reign of terror throughout the South was unjust.

Indeed part of the texture of patriarchal authority as asserted by Klansmen involved

\textsuperscript{877} Lee Ann Whites has asserted that it was primarily in their roles as fathers and husbands that conservative white southern men had an opportunity to assert their household authority, and thus rebuild their masculinity, \textit{The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender}, 134-162.

\textsuperscript{878} “S. W. TO HIS LITTLE SON, THREE DAYS OLD,” April 1872, John Adams Leland Collection, SCL.

\textsuperscript{879} “S. W. TO HIS LITTLE SON, THREE DAYS OLD,” April 1872, John Adams Leland Collection, SCL.
familiarizing white children, either their own or others, with the Ku Klux Klan and its activities.

Mary Sanders, seventy-seven years old in 1937, remembered as a child during Reconstruction being terrified by her older cousin when he came down the stairs of their house in his Klan mask and robes. She told a Federal Writers’ Project interviewer

I screamed and he caught me. I closed my eyes and he spoke kindly to me. His arms felt friendly, and imagine my surprise when I opened my eyes and looked up to see his face and the mask hanging around his shoulders. He told me that they did not bother little girls or people who were loyal to the high principles and ideals of loyal Southerners. That meant nothing to me, and after he had gone it took a long time to make me understand what it was all about.\(^{880}\)

Another Federal Writers’ Project piece recorded the memory of a fourteen-year-old boy who was taught a secret handshake and given a note to take to another Klansman, the men fearing that even carrying messages might provoke their arrest.\(^ {881}\)

Conservative white women took similar roles in familiarizing children with the activities and goals of the Ku Klux Klan. Mary Sanders, the little girl terrified by her cousin wearing his Ku Klux Klan mask and robes, also told the Federal Writers’ Project about a time when her grandmother

was going to take some things to the Ku Klux. She took me and my eight-year-old cousin, Milton Kennett, with her. I was scared but Milton said he was not, and grandmother said that there was nothing to be afraid of. But just the same, I was scared. I thought that the Ku Klux were going to get grandmother. When we got there, she knocked on the wall. One man came out and got the things she had. I screamed and he laughed… This is about my earliest recollection.\(^ {882}\)

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\(^{880}\) Mary Sanders of Spartanburg, S.C., interviewed by Elmer Turnage, February 4, 1938, Cabinet D, Drawer 4, Folder 18, Federal Writer’s Project Papers, SCL.

\(^{881}\) Anonymous, “A YOUNG KU KLUX, DR. J. W. BABCOCK,” June 11, 1941, Cabinet B, Drawer 1, Folder 16, Federal Writer’s Project Papers, SCL.

\(^{882}\) Mary Sanders of Spartanburg, S.C., interviewed by Elmer Turnage, February 4, 1938, Cabinet D, Drawer 4, Folder 18, Federal Writer’s Project Papers, SCL.
Elderly white women like Sander’s grandmother knew enough about Klansmen’s activities to know their hiding place, facilitated their activities by bringing them food and supplies, and also calmed white children’s fears about the Klansmen. Though white conservative men seemed to have expressed some ambivalence about discussing the Klan too much with their female friends and family members, there was less hesitation by either Klansmen or the white conservative women who supported them about involving white children in their activities.

These various components of the forms of patriarchy supported by white conservative men were given shape by violence. Violence had been a common component of white southern masculinity in the antebellum South. Through duels, brawls, and mob violence (like tarring and feathering or charivaris), many white southern men had used violence to settle conflicts. White conservative men’s claims to authority through violence upon the bodies of African American men stemmed in large part from their legal authority as masters during slavery. Slave owners had had essentially complete freedom when it came to punishing their slaves, though that power was sometimes mediated by laws or at least the fear of the financial loss of a dead slave. During Reconstruction, Klansmen used vigilantism to take matters in their own hands, sometimes meting out the same punishments used during slavery.

But the violence Klansmen committed during Reconstruction was not simply a mirror of that committed before the Civil War. After emancipation, former slave owners had far less legal control over the bodies of their former slaves. The white men on a Klan raid did things they

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883 See Wyatt-Brown, Honor and Violence in the Old South. Peter Bardaglio has written “many white men in the Old South preferred to settle private disputes and matters of morality and sexual misconduct outside the legal system, and they viewed the courts as a last resort,” in Reconstructing the Household, 5.

884 For example, Peter Bardaglio details laws in North Carolina and Georgia that prevented masters from committing castration in cases of alleged rape, Reconstructing the Household, 64. In a similar vein, Dianne Sommerville argues that even castration was, for slave owners, preferable to capital punishment for rape because black men were property, Rape & Race in the Nineteenth-Century South (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 75. The 1829 court case State of North Carolina vs. Mann, however, had established that white people had absolute authority to visit violence upon slaves.
mostly could not do during the antebellum era: using violence against other whites (though the antebellum period certainly saw violence between white men, it was not nearly as widespread as Klan violence); using violence against African Americans they had no legal authority over; and using violence against people many of them might not have personally known.

Violence, or the threat of it, was the central means by which Klansmen enforced their notions of acceptable behavior when it came to structuring southern households. As suggested by the heavy emphasis on secrecy in the oaths Klansmen swore when joining the Klan, there was a critical tension between public and private behavior as Klansmen asserted their right to regulate the private lives of other southerners. Though they went in disguise and swore to secrecy to protect their own privacy, Klansmen made public spectacles of violence to assert the authority that they believed conservative white men ought to have over all southerners. They also explicitly targeted the supposedly private realm of the household for their victims, where the vast majority of Klan violence occurred.885

Klansmen used violence to police the marriages of other white southerners, asserting that there was a particular kind of patriarchal authority a husband should have over a wife, one with rules and boundaries. James M. Justice, in discussing with the Joint Select Committee whether all victims of Klan violence were always Republicans, offered one counter-example, when Klansmen whipped a Democrat because “he was vicious and unkind to his wife, and in the habit of associating with bad persons.”886 This account is surprising coming from Justice, who was

885 Hannah Rosen has written “Night riders’ intrusion into African American homes asserted that claims to a secure and autonomous domestic space, a man’s authority over his home and his dependents and a woman’s protected status when in the company of her family were exclusively privileges of whiteness,” in Terror in the Heart of Freedom, 192.
886 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 104.
never one to shy away from indicting Democrats for Klan outrages and would never have agreed that the Klan was doing a positive social good.

Klansmen also used violence to keep women subservient to the authority of male household heads. Justice also testified that in an attack on a white man, Klansmen “whipped him pretty smart and abused his wife some, pulling her and knocking her about. I do not think there is any crime charged against him. He is a sort of lazy, do-nothing kind of young man; his wife was a very respectable, nice girl,” who came from parents with some property. The Klansmen in this raid specifically targeted the husband because he was a Republican, but his wife was, to the Klansmen’s thinking, subject to violence even if she was more propertied and respectable than the husband. Because she fell under her husband’s household authority, in the Klansmen’s way of thinking, she also deserved punishment. In attacking her, they also demonstrated his inability to protect her, thus emphasizing that her husband was doubly an inadequate man.

Klansmen also used violence to assert their authority over the children of their victims, as seen in how Klansmen talked about some raids. John Harrill, a young Klansmen from Cleveland County, North Carolina, testifying in federal trials in Raleigh, said that he had been on a raid against Ben Maize. When asked why, he replied, “His daughter had a fight with a white man, and we whipped her.” The violence was done to the daughter, but Harrill said the raid was against the father. As coverture declared a woman to be legally subsumed by her father or husband, Klansmen sometimes rhetorically subsumed the identity of their female victims under those of their male guardians, illustrating that one of the chief purposes of such violence was to solidify patriarchal authority.

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887 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 135.
888 Trial testimony of John Harrill, KKK NC, 443.
Though most conservative white women supported the work of the Klan in ways that stayed within the domestic realm, a few strayed outside those boundaries, with some even using violence. An unnamed white woman from Chester County, interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project, remembered that “One night while William Carter and Mose Faris were sleeping at my father’s home, my sister, Laura Robbins, with a stick routed a negro, Bill Palmer, out of the fence corner. The negro was watching to report the whereabouts of Carter and Faris.”

That a white woman would chase away—and possibly whip with a stick—an African American man whom she suspected of spying is an unusual story, one that challenges an easy dichotomy between women as passive, domestic supporters of the Klan and white men as the sole practitioners of violence.

A few later accounts claimed that some white women seem to have threatened the use of violence to protect male family members from arrest by federal forces during the investigation into the Klan in the fall and winter of 1871. One anecdote that survived well into the twentieth-century about Joseph Banks Lyle—possibly the chief of the whole South Carolina Klan—detailed that when federal marshals arrived at his house to arrest him, they were met by his two twin sisters, both unmarried. The sisters were each armed with shotguns, and threatened to kill any of the marshals who entered their front gate. Lyle avoided arrest and moved to Texas, where he built and ran several schools.

Another anecdote about “Aunt Frankie” Shelton told that when two federal cavalrymen came to her house to arrest Bob Lamb, a Klansman who was staying at her house but was not her husband, “Aunt Frankie” asked her black domestic servant to bring her “the master’s gun.” Picking it up, she pointed it at the troops, saying, “Now I’ll see

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890 E. O. Parker to the Archivist, University of South Carolina, February 15, 1957, Joseph Banks Lyle Papers, SCL.
who comes in this house.” Layton remembers, “The Yankees stepped back off the porch into the yard,” and left without arresting the Klansman they were seeking.\textsuperscript{891} These memories of white women using or threatening violence in support of Klansmen might be exaggerated, as they were twentieth-century anecdotes about colorful, humorously aggressive female ancestors. But if true, that these women would threaten violence to protect Klansmen suggests that some white women were willing to challenge traditional notions of how women ought to behave in order to support the work of male family members in the construction of white supremacy.

Though some conservative white women could threaten violence in support of the actions of the Klan, violence against women, white and black, was the primary means Klansmen asserted patriarchal authority. Even white conservatives sympathetic to the Klan admitted that white women were frequent victims of Klan violence. A conservative Democrat from Orange County, North Carolina, conceded that “There were some instances of white women who had their heads shaved, and were otherwise maltreated; I have no recollection of any white men being maltreated.”\textsuperscript{892} The shaving of women’s heads was intended as public humiliation; the violence they suffered was not a private pain, but rather evidence of their supposed infractions.

Violence against women also frequently took on a sexualized nature. During the antebellum period, individual white men could rape black women with relative legal impunity, so long as their victims were chattel property.\textsuperscript{893} As with other kinds of violence, sexualized violence during Reconstruction took the previously unusual form of extralegal vigilantism, with groups of whites attacking black as well as white women. In so doing, Klansmen were asserting

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\textsuperscript{891} Caldwell Sims, from interview with Mrs. L.A. Layton, March 10, 1936, Cabinet H, Drawer 4, Folder 13, SCL.
\textsuperscript{892} Testimony of Pride Jones, \textit{KKK NC}, 4.
\textsuperscript{893} For example, see White, \textit{Ar’n’t I a Woman}. 


a new hierarchy—one that echoed back to certain features of slavery, including sexual access to black women, but which asserted the ability to visit sexual violence on white women, too.\textsuperscript{894}

It is impossible to quantify how many women were raped by Klansmen. Only three rapes were individually described in extant sources. But sexual violence against women could take a wide spectrum, and few women directly testified about sexual violence to the Joint Select Committee or in federal trials of Klansmen.\textsuperscript{895} Stories by or about rape survivors usually were usually vague or ambiguous, alleging activities but not naming perpetrators or victims. Martha Allen, 78 at the time of her interview with the Federal Writers’ Project, was of mixed black and Indian heritage and had moved to the North Carolina piedmont after the Civil War. She recalled that Klansmen used to “go ter de Free Issues houses, strip all de family an’ whup de ole folkses. Den dey dances wid de pretty yaller girls an’ goes ter bed wid dem.” Klansmen’s predilection for partying and rape defined Allen’s overall understanding of them: “Dat’s what de Ku Klux wuz, a bunch of mean mens tryin’ ter hab a good time.”\textsuperscript{896}

\textsuperscript{894} As Hannah Rosen has asserted, “Rape emerges not as the product of unrestrained sexual impulses or simply as the conscious pursuit of power but, rather, as a performance of social and political inequality whose very possibility is conditioned upon a broader discourse investing gendered identities and sexual practices with other, and in this case racist, meanings, and whose effect is not only physical pain and emotional suffering but also a rearticulation and reproduction of the very gendered discourse of race that made it possible;” \textit{Terror in the Heart of Freedom}, 8.

\textsuperscript{895} Rosen has documented that rape statistics are incredibly difficult to determine because of the historic underreporting of rape as well as particular historical circumstances that made it difficult for women during Reconstruction to report it. “The documentation of rape in this period,” she writes, “was conditioned by factors beyond freedpeople’s readiness to testify. Whether or not a freedwoman or a friend or family member who decided to report a rape could do so depended on her or his access to a Freedmen’s Bureau agent, federal prosecutor, or congressional hearing;” \textit{Terror in the Heart of Freedom}, 202.

\textsuperscript{896} Interview with Martha Allen, \textit{Born in Slavery}, Volume XI, Part 1, 15. The choice to describe these the women that Klansmen raped as “yaller,” suggesting they were of mixed-race, is interesting, suggesting that Klansmen idealized lighter skin at the same time they asserted that women of color were available sexual objects.
Men were more likely to make charges that Klansmen were committing sexualized violence. A white North Carolina Republican man testified that he was told by an older African American woman,

and one entitled to credit, I think—her word, I think, would be believed by everybody who knows her—that some of her kinfolk who lived down in the country were in great trouble about things of that sort. She said that when the Ku-Klux had gone after a negro man in some places they had attempted, and in other places they had actually committed, rape upon colored women in the presence of their husbands. 897

Similarly, Essic Harris testified that “Some of the girls said they [Klansmen] ravished them. I do not know anything about it. They said they were ravished that night.” When pressed, he could only specify one; “she is a single woman who stays right there. We all farm on the same place.” 898

The very existence of sexualized violence was part of an assertion of conservative white male control over women, black and white, whom those men considered objects. That the oaths they swore and the violence they practiced were contradictory is perhaps unsurprising, but it is worth again noting that the most wide-spread and oft-used constitution by Klan dens included a promise that “Females, friends, widows, and their households shall be the special object of my care and protection.” 899 Women like the two named Frances Gilmore were seemingly objects to Klansmen, but not of their protection. Similar to the ways white conservative men thought black men lacked any recognizable masculinity, Klansmen did not believe their female victims were women. White victims could be named, whereas black victims were not deserving of it. Klansmen believed female victims of sexualized violence, either through their identities or their actions, had abrogated claims to femininity and thus were available as sexual objects.

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897 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 148.
898 Testimony of Essic Harris, KKK NC, 88.
899 KKK 25.
There are no extant sources about what Klansmen themselves actually thought about sexual violence, either in support or opposition to it. The attack on the black woman named Frances Gilmore was fairly typical in that contemporary observers either did not provide or did not know the stated reasons for the attack, and testimonies by victims of sexualized violence by Klansmen were rare. Similarly, there is little or no record of whether conservative white women tacitly supported or loudly denounced sexualized violence Klansmen inflicted. Given many white southern women’s vocal support of Klansmen, conservative white southern women most likely believed that the stories Republicans told of sexual assaults made by Klansmen were overwrought or outright fabrications. Conservative white women certainly knew that the Klansmen they knew were participating in violence, and given that testimonies were public, they almost certainly knew Klansmen were accused of engaging in sexualized violence. Perhaps they felt such accusations were fabrications or exaggerations. Or perhaps they, too, believed that certain women were deserving of violence, whether or not it was sexualized.

It is more certain that Klansmen believed that they were protecting the right kinds of white women, over whom they desired to maintain a measure of sexual control. Because Klansmen wanted a hierarchical household with white male patriarchs at the top, they desired control over, and sometimes access to, the sexuality of white women lower in a household’s hierarchy. This control supposedly necessitated protecting women from the threat of rape. Scholars continue to debate when the myth of the black rapist emerged as the incendiary issue it became in the late nineteenth century, when it was mobilized to justify lynchings, mob violence, and disfranchisement. Some scholars trace it as far back as the colonial period, while others

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900 Peter Bardaglio, in *Reconstructing the Household*, writes “The rape of white females by black men provoked such profound rage among southern white men because they viewed female sexuality as property that they owned, like slaves, and protection of this property was a key to preserving their position in society,” 65.
assert that during Reconstruction it was not yet the obsessive cultural issue it became in the Jim Crow-era. An important distinction lay in the difference between the rhetoric around the issue of black-on-white rape and the actual experiences of Klan violence.\(^{901}\)

Klan violence against actual, accused, or imagined black rapists was scarce. Few known victims were attacked because of being accused or suspected of raping a woman. Klansmen castrated Caswell Holt, of Alamance, North Carolina, charging him with exposing himself to a white woman.\(^{902}\) Ben Johnson, 85 years old when he was interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project in 1937, remembered the hanging of Cyrus Guy in Orange County, North Carolina. Johnson, who said he “neber will fergit” the hanging, told that Klansmen “hung him fer a scandalous insult ter a white ‘oman an’ dey comed atter him a hundert strong.” Johnson vividly remembered the hanging:

Dey tries him dar in de woods, an’ dey scratches Cy’s arm ter git some blood, an’ wid dat blood dy writers dat he shall hang ‘tween de heavens an’ de yearth till he am daid, daid, daid, an’ dat any nigger what takes down de body shal be hunged too.

His body was left hanging, with the sign of his sentence, for four days before the sheriff took it down.\(^{903}\) Johnson had not said what precisely the insult Guy was supposed to have lodged

\(^{901}\) Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*. Peter Bardaglio asserts that emancipation made a white patriarch’s control over his household more tenuous, and thus increased the saliency of the fear of the rape of white women with black men, in Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household*, 189. In contrast, Dianne Sommerville has cautioned against two assumptions made by most historians of the nineteenth-century South: that white southerners were obsessed with black male sexuality, and that black men never raped white women at all. “Once we acknowledge that neither position is tenable,” she writes, “we are free to engage in an in-depth study of how race, class, and gender interacted in local settings when charges of black-on-white rape were aired.” She has argued that most historians have dwelled too heavily on the cultural phenomenon of the fear of the rape of white women as opposed to actual incidents of it, in *Rape and Race*, 3.


\(^{903}\) Interview with Ben Johnson, *Born in Slavery*, Volume XI, Part 2, 10. Cyrus Guy was also listed as having been hanged in a list of Klan victims included in a 1909 undergraduate thesis from the University of North Carolina; see Ray, “The Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina,” 11-14.
against the white woman, and this particular incident, more than most, matched later patterns of lynchings of black men supposedly predisposed to rape white women.

Only a handful of other Klan victims were said to have threatened violence against white women. Jim Williams, a black militia leader in York County, South Carolina, was hanged by Klansmen in 1871. A publication arguing against the extradition of one of his murderers, John Rufus Bratton, from Canada cited a report from the federal Klan trials in Columbia to assert that “what most alarmed the white people and exasperated them against Jim Williams, was the threats he uttered against the white women, and the designs he avowed against some in his neighbourhood.”904 Williams was killed because he was a militia leader who stridently advocated for political equality for African Americans, but his hanging was one of the few incidents of violence for which apologists even mentioned the direct threat of rape to white women.

As with their attitudes about sexualized violence committed by Klansmen, it is difficult to ascertain what most conservative white women thought about the supposed threat of rape from black men. White women did not mention of fear of rape in the Congressional testimonies, but the majority of women who testified were victims of Klan violence, not sympathizers to it. Neither did they mention it in their private correspondence.

White conservative men claimed that white women were afraid of rape by black men. One white conservative from Charlotte, North Carolina testified that “rapes are much more common now than you have any idea of,” though the particular incidents he related of black men raping white women were stories he had read about in conservative newspapers.905 Pride Jones, a

904 A Statement of Dr. Bratton’s Case, 16.
905 Testimony of H. W. Guion, KKK NC, 269.
conservative Democrat from Orange County, North Carolina, who did not actively participate in
the Klan, claimed in congressional testimony that

the poorer classes in the community, women who carry blackberries, cherries, eggs, butter, and things of that sort to town to sell, were afraid to go to town by themselves; they would only go when they could form large companies for mutual protection. Formerly, and even now, they could go singly just when they were ready. But just about that time they were afraid to go to town alone for fear of being insulted or ravished by negroes.\textsuperscript{906}

Jones’s contention was one of few to mention the threat of black rape to the Joint Select Committee. He used rumors of fear to partially justify the outrages of the Ku Klux Klan, and most white women might have had no such fears as the myth of black rape was still inchoate during Reconstruction. Then again, it is possible that some conservative white women feared black rape, particularly those whom Jones termed the “poorer classes.” Dianne Sommerville has documented that most legal charges of rape in the postbellum South came from poor and middling white women.\textsuperscript{907} But actual charges of rape were different than its perceived threat. As there were very few incidents of actual rape by black men, the fear of it on the part of southern white women was inflated—but those fears might have seemed quite real to some white women. Given women’s support of the activities of the Klan, regardless of how much conservative white women might or might not have feared rape, they supported the ability of white men to use violence against black men.

Sympathizers frequently would make general, vague pronouncements that the Klan worked to protect white womanhood. Edwin Whipple Seibels explained the Klan’s rise and prominence in this way:

\textsuperscript{906} Testimony of Pride Jones, KKK NC, 8.
\textsuperscript{907} Sommerville, Rape & Race, 5.
Some outrage is committed in the neighborhood, some negro burns a gin-house, or commits a rape; or some officer conducts himself in such a way that he becomes so perfectly odious and obnoxious to the community that the people cannot submit to it any longer, and then a parcel of dare-devil young men get together, sometimes disguised, and sometimes not, and they go to his house and tell him he must leave; that if he is caught there after such a day they will deal with him, kill him, or something of that sort. I believe that is all there is of it in South Carolina.908

He mentioned rape almost casually, as equivalent to arson. A vague anxiety about black rapists was almost all that existed in contemporary discourse concerning the rape of white women by black men. Dianne Sommerville has documented instances of black men raping white women (far rarer than white conservatives claimed, but not nonexistent), but also has shown that during Reconstruction, in most cases white southerners “overwhelmingly submitted willingly to legal processes, abiding by the outcomes.”909 Rather than an overwhelming preoccupation driving them mad, most white conservatives, men and women, seem to have seen the threat from which white women needed “protection” as a tool for political debate. But conservative white men saw it appropriate to visit extralegal violence upon African American men to maintain control over the sexuality of the white women within their own households—a trend that became more pronounced during Jim Crow.910

The relative insignificance of concerns about black male rapists during Reconstruction is more striking when contrasted with the accounts of former Klansmen during the Jim Crow period.911 John F. Lucas, of Walterboro, South Carolina, claimed to be one of the last surviving

908 Testimony of E. W. Seibels, KKK SC, 97.
909 Sommerville, Rape & Race, 4.
910 Sommerville sees this as a direct result of Reconstruction policies that made rape “race neutral”, thereby changing the relationship between conservative southern whites and the law; Rape & Race, 17.
911 Crystal Feimster has found that many southern whites asserted that black rape was not a cause of Klan violence even near the turn of the twentieth century. At a performance of a play based on Thomas Dixon’s The Clansmen, a white audience in Columbia, South Carolina, booed and hissed because they did not like the depiction of the Klan as arising from fears of black rape; in Southern Horrors, 190-191.
members of the Ku Klux Klan in a 1918 letter to Maude Stewart, a student writing a thesis about the Klan in New Jersey. He ranted, as hysterically as one can in a typewritten letter, about the threat white women faced from black men:

In answer to the query, “Why did you resort to such methods?”, our answer is, it was the lesser of two evils;… We took the liberty of the negro which had grown to be license, rather than take his life, and we are still holding what we took then. For it is as necessary now here as it was then to uphold White Supremacy and to protect the White Women of the South from insult and outrage… Whether others, not so conditioned, like our way of handling the matter or not WE WILL CONTINUE TO PROTECT OUR WOMEN.  

Other early chroniclers of the Klan, though usually not as vitriolic as Lucas, also claimed that the Klan arose to protect white women from black male rapists.

But unlike the Jim Crow period, during Reconstruction white conservatives were more concerned with consensual interracial sex than they were the threat of rape by black men. Some historians suggest that in the immediate postwar years, most white southerners held a certain “toleration” for consensual interracial sex. Even so, Klansmen might have attacked black men for even speaking of interracial sex. John Reeder, a white man from Newberry, South Carolina, interviewed for the Federal Writers’ Project in 1938 when he was 85 years old, recalled the Klan being active in Newberry during his childhood, saying: “The Ku Klux had some trouble in town with negroes, one of them going about and bragging what he was going to do with some whites and was going to marry a white woman. He was hunted down, and was killed in lower part of town by a white fellow, who shot him in front when he was coming out of house.” Perhaps Reeder used the phrase “marry” as a euphemism, when the African American had threatened

912 John Lucas to Maude Stewart, April 19, 1918, Ku Klux Klan Clippings File, SCHS.
913 Rose, The Ku Klux Klan; Romine, A Story of the Original Ku Klux Klan; McCravy, Memories.
914 Hodes, White Women, Black Men, & Sommerville, Rape & Race, 9.
915 John Reeder, interview by G. Leland Summer, October 18, 1938, Federal Writers’ Project, Cabinet H, Drawer 4, Folder 13, SCL.
rape; or perhaps the entire episode was misremembered (intentionally or not). His interview also took place during the Jim Crow period, when the myth of black male rape was used to defend lynchings. But taking the incident at face value suggests that Klansmen used violence against African American men to prevent or punish all interracial sex.

During North Carolina’s 1868 constitutional convention, Plato Durham proposed a constitutional prohibition on “all intermarriages between the Caucasian or white race, and the African or black race” because “the Caucasian and African races are distinct by nature.” Durham was one of few white conservative delegates at the convention, serving from Cleveland County—where he also was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. It is unclear when Durham joined—before or after the convention—but when called before the Joint Select Committee in 1871, he denied the accusations. He claimed “I know of no such organization—no political organization,” and that “The whole thing, from beginning to end, is a falsehood. I am not the chief of the Ku-Klux organization, or any other secret organization, or any organization.”

Durham served as a defense attorney in the trials of several Klansmen accused of beating Aaron Biggerstaff. He also was one of the handful of white conservative men to accuse black men of raping white women, saying that there were “frequent rapes by negroes,” including three in his own home county, where he claimed that one rape was of a white fourteen year old girl. Durham recounted that the accused man was convicted but had his sentence pardoned by the

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916 1868 NC Convention, 216.
917 See various testimonies, KKK NC, 24, 30, 110-111, 175.
918 Testimony of Plato Durham, KKK NC, 316.
919 Testimony of Plato Durham, KKK NC, 308.
920 Testimony of Plato Durham, KKK NC, 310.
governor. But on the whole he blamed Republicans for the violence in the South, arguing that “the cause of the troubles in the whole southern country is bad government.”

Klansmen punished consensual interracial sex when white men had sex with black women. Henderson Judd, a white man in Chatham County, North Carolina, was whipped by Klansmen; he had “been a very wealthy man; but he always slept with one of his negro women,” both before and after the war, “and got children by her, and is looked upon as rather a low character.” Judd, while not unusual among elite white men for having a sexual relationship with a black slave or servant, had abrogated his claim to respectability by continuing to live openly with her after the war. Judd’s household was subject to violence by Klansmen because of the conspicuous nature of his interracial relationship.

Black women who had sex with white men were also subject to Klan violence. In Rutherford County, North Carolina, Klansmen whipped a black woman named Adeline Beam, who “had a baby that was very white, that favored white folks very much in color.” James M. Justice testified that she “had been the house servant of a very respectable gentleman… as substantial and prominent a citizen as there is in Rutherford” who had raised her and kept her as a house servant. “By some trickery she gave birth to a very light-colored child,” he recounted, possibly the child of the white man with whom she lived. The law in North Carolina required the mother of an illegitimate child to swear on record who had fathered the child. Local whites told her “that if there was no swearing about the child there would be no whipping by the Ku-Klux.” Despite such assurances, Klansmen

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921 Testimony of Plato Durham, KKK NC, 315.
922 Testimony of Plato Durham, KKK NC, 309.
923 Testimony of Elias Bryan, KKK NC, 78.
came in and whipped her at night, and told her not to talk so much about the young men in the country, or something of that kind. She said she had been afraid they would whip her, and had never told who was the father of the child, and never intended to. She does not tell now.

Klansmen were concerned with the implications of interracial sex as much or perhaps more than the act itself. In this instance they did not punish the white man for sleeping with an African American woman, but rather targeted the black woman to prevent her revealing with whom she had had sex. In this instance Klansmen were more interested in protecting a white man’s reputation and sexual prerogatives than a black woman’s security. Sex between either white men and black women or black men and white women was intolerable to Klansmen.

White conservative men desired absolute patriarchal authority over white women and children within their households, and also demanded the right to assert their authority over other, less respectable white men and all African American men and women. White conservative men’s notions of masculinity gave shape and structure to the violence Klansmen used to enforce them.

Klansmen asserted their right to sexual access to women outside of their households, black or white, and used violence to control sexual access to the women within their households. The kind of racial and gendered hierarchy Klansmen were trying to build for southern households was new to the South that emancipation had made, but also drew from the past ideologies that justified slavery’s racial and gendered hierarchies. It was not yet fully articulated, and had contestations and contradictions. But it was built on public violence against people like the two

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924 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 134.

925 A similar concern for the social implications of interracial sex was evident in laws limiting it. Peter Bardaglio has analyzed antimiscegenation laws, which were more concerned with regulating it than eliminating it entirely. He writes, “The legal process was relatively tolerant of white males who had sexual relations with black females, as long as the liaison was kept casual and discreet,” in Reconstructing the Household, 49. See also Julie Novkov, Racial Union.
women named Frances Gilmore in Chatham County, North Carolina, for the victims of Klan violence were in fact working to build alternative structures for southern households.

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In many ways Klansmen were attacking a chimera; the threat to their patriarchal control during Reconstruction was almost as imagined as it was real. White southern men’s authority was never upended by a concrete alternative hierarchy within southern households during Reconstruction. Klansmen and their victims sometimes held similar notions of masculinity and femininity. Conservatives and their opponents even shared some specific ideas about how southern households should be structured.

For example, cursory research also shows little significant difference between victims of Klan violence and participants in terms of church membership; many victims were church members. James M. Justice testified that he was a member of the Baptist Church.\textsuperscript{926} John J. Neason had just joined the Methodist Church at a revival when Klansmen approached him to join the Klan; he refused, and the Klansmen later visited his house to threaten him with a whipping.\textsuperscript{927} Research on African American religion after emancipation has demonstrated that though there was little organized Christian church membership among most rural African Americans, there was “intense faith and spirituality” among freedpeople.\textsuperscript{928} An important difference between how white and black southerners approached religion during Reconstruction involved the retention of African religious practices. But while spiritual beliefs or practices differed between Klansmen and their victims, it appears that both considered religion an essential part of their claims to household authority.

\textsuperscript{926} Testimony of James M. Justice, \textit{KKK NC}, 160.

\textsuperscript{927} Testimony of John J. Neason, \textit{KKK SC}, 45.

\textsuperscript{928} Steven Hahn, \textit{A Nation Under Our Feet}, 230.
Klansmen and most of their male victims additionally shared a strong desire to control and protect their households. That desire might lead one to assume that Klansmen and their victims held identical notions about the importance of patriarchy for southern households. But salient alternatives to the racial and gendered hierarchy that Klansmen were working to build emerged from the very desire of victims of Klan violence to structure their own households, rather than have rules imposed upon them by white conservative men. Even though white conservatives and their opponents might have shared some similar ideas about gender roles and how southern households should be structured, the many opponents of the Ku Klux Klan held contrary conceptions of the role and shape patriarchy ought to take in southern households. Those alternate structures were even less well defined than the kinds of patriarchy white conservatives supported, but they held considerable currency for many southerners, black and white. Though white conservatives fears of losing control were often inflated, many southerners were indeed working to upend the system of patriarchy that Klansmen desired.

Southern men and women who opposed the goals and methods of the Ku Klux Klan were an even more fractured and disjointed group than white conservatives. Some were politicians, vocal in their Republicanism and active in local affairs, while others avoided politics and kept to themselves, being targeted because Klansmen perceived their behavior to be infractions of various codes governing of public and private behavior. The Republican Party, though of substantial political power, did not take unified positions on policies that effected the structures of the household. African Americans, male and female, targeted by the Klan were a diverse group about whom it is difficult to make historical generalizations in terms of the various household structures they desired in the post-emancipation South.\footnote{For African Americans the problem is exacerbated by extant sources; black southerners left fewer diaries or correspondences than whites through which we can learn the ways they wanted their households to be structured.} Black Republicans fractured
along lines of class, gender, education, place, and background; so too did their ideas about how southern households should be structured.\textsuperscript{930} White Republicans also did not pose a unified opposition to the Klan, but rather held a host of alternate visions for the domestic sphere of the South. Most victims of Klan violence were simply living out their own dreams for home and family, which ran counter to the wishes of Klansmen and their supporters. But Klan violence, and the discourse that surrounded it, revealed how Klan victims and the people who vocally denounced Klansmen and their goals sought to craft different ways of structuring their households in the aftermath of emancipation.

Many Klan victims were attacked because they had—to Klansmen’s thinking—lost claim to notions of respectability. Partisan politics were a critical component of how Klansmen viewed respectability among men: to white conservative southerners, virtually no white man claiming Republican or radical politics could lay claim to respectability. Klansmen frequently called their victims “radical sons of bitches.”\textsuperscript{931} Rather than suggesting Klansmen were simply uncreative in their profanity, the commonality of this insult illustrates a relationship between notions of masculinity and partisan politics. To Klansmen, supporting radical politics meant that southern men’s families lacked respectability; not only were Republicans’ politics wrong, but their mothers were also disgraceful. But politics were not the only thing that defined respectable behavior on the part of white men. Whom white men chose as sexual partners, how they ran their

\textsuperscript{930} Thomas C. Holt has documented the splits between black politicians and everyday African Americans in Reconstruction-era South Carolina in \textit{Black Over White}. Steven Hahn has asserted that the process of figuring out how gender roles were to function in the absence of slavery was difficult, as “shifting boundaries, and … potentially explosive tensions and conflicts” were pervasive in rural black gender roles after emancipation; \textit{A Nation Under Our Feet}, 172.

\textsuperscript{931} Testimony of Charles Dennis O’Keefe, \textit{KKK SC}, 37-38. For a similar insult, see testimony of Jefferson Huskins, \textit{KKK SC}, 580. Samuel Allen, a magistrate in Caswell County, North Carolina, was often called a “very mean nigger,” a “son of a bitch,” and a “damned rascal,” by the white conservatives in his home county; testimony of Samuel Allen, \textit{NC Report}, 49.
households, and how they asserted masculinity all played into notions of respectability. Crossing the boundaries of any of these categories could result in violence.

Many of the women Klansmen assaulted had engaged in behavior that, to Klansmen’s thinking, abrogated their claims to respectability. Women were attacked for selling illegal alcohol to men, for instance.932 Women suspected of prostitution were also targeted for violence. Conventional thinking about gender and sexuality positioned prostitutes, white or black, as disreputable in the eyes of most southerners. In yet another way they portrayed victims, particularly African Americans, as predisposed to various forms of criminality, conservatives would use the accusation that female victims of Klan violence were prostitutes in order to justify the attacks they suffered.933 Those rhetorical attacks were somewhat effective, as even Republicans declared that such women were “of very bad character,” or “not virtuous at all.”934 Victims of the Klan countered the claims that they were disreputable. John J. Neason of Sumter County, South Carolina, saw the threat of whipping as worse than death. He told the Joint Select Committee,

When they took me out and told me they were going to whip me, I said, “Gentlemen, if there is any honor about this party, I beg you, in the name of God, not to put the lash on my back; you can cock your guns and discharge their contents in my breast.” They said, “If you say nothing about it nobody will know it.” I replied, “I will know it.” I begged off in that way, and at last they let me off.935

932 Testimony of William Howle, **KKK NC**, 64.

933 This was a pattern that Hannah Rosen also uncovered in the rhetoric that surrounded sexualized violence during the Memphis race riot of 1866. “By speaking and acting with a seemingly nonchalant or normative discourse of sexual exploitation toward the women they assaulted,” she writes “the assailants cast the victims as prostitutes or ‘loose’ women.” That rhetoric had very real consequences, as “the conservative white press prior to the riot that had identified virtually all black women as ‘loose,’ ‘lewd,’ or prostitutes and that implied that they were the ‘sort of women’ who had no role in a legitimate public as active citizens,” thus influencing the violence that resulted. Terror in the Heart of Freedom, 72-73.

934 Testimony of J.B. Carpenter, **KKK NC** 28, in regards to Ann Warren and Mrs. Simmons, two white women whipped by Klansmen in Rutherford County, North Carolina.

935 Testimony of John J. Neason, **KKK SC**, 43-44.
Neason risked death in order to prevent the humiliation of a whipping—even though Klansmen said it would have been kept private—because he viewed an attack upon his body as an insult to his masculinity. Several other white Republican men similarly challenged Klansmen to spare them injury when attacked, professing that they feared shame and disrespectability more than injury or death. Such declarations suggest that some Republican men, white and perhaps black, placed masculinity at the center of how they believed southern households should be structured in ways not completely dissimilar from white conservative men. They strongly countered the charges Klansmen made that they were unworthy of running their own households.

The desire to govern their own households was especially strong for African American men, who were newly able to have legal control of their own households. The legal and social hierarchy of slavery had placed African Americans below whites within antebellum households. Black men were not afforded any legal or social authority over their households during slavery; black women had no legal rights to children born into slavery. Enslaved African Americans frequently saw their households split up as wives and children were sold to other owners. Free African Americans had possessed circumscribed legal rights, but the ideology that underpinned slavery had charged that African Americans were not fit to be their own masters, let alone control their own households. Popular white discourse discounted the ability of black men to be fathers and husbands and of black women to be mothers and wives.

With the end of slavery, African Americans gained the opportunity to create new kinds of household structures, and they seized the opportunity with alacrity. They rejected any return to

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936 See testimony of Erastus W. Everson, KKK SC, 330-349, and trial testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 419.

937 Kidada Williams has uncovered that “The status of head of household—which was granted for the first time to emancipated men by Reconstruction—bestowed on all black men the cultural and legal right to control their families and to chart the destiny of their communities,” in They Left Great Marks, 22.
the model of white paternalism that white southern men had used to assert their antebellum claims to mastery over black households. Black women frequently removed themselves from field agricultural work, or their husbands forbade them from it. African Americans often wanted women to work inside the home rather than in the field, even at the risk of their economic security, in order to secure an exclusively domestic role that had been denied to black women during slavery. By contrast some black women asserted their own right to wages for their agricultural work or sought to dictate the labor contracts their husbands would sign.

At the heart of African American’s attempts to construct their own household structures was an assertion of equality with whites. White Republicans were eager for black men to gain the electoral franchise, out of political opportunism as well as moral conviction. Through overturning the Black Codes, passing the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and advocating political equality between black and white men, white Republicans set political power as the cornerstone for household independence. But though allied across lines of race, several Republicans maintained a stricter hierarchy of gender. Some African American men desired firm control over their households, particularly over the women within them; the removal of black women from field labor was both an assertion of household independence as well as potentially the establishment of a kind of patriarchal authority within black households. Working with white

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938 Amy Dru Stanley has described how after emancipation, black women “strove to control their own bodies, to possess their labor and its proceeds, and to enforce voluntary relations of exchange,” in From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 52. See also Bardaglio, Reconstructing the Household, 162; Williams, They Left Great Marks, 21-36; and Heather Andrea Williams Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

939 Steven Hahn called such a shift a “withdrawal’ of freedwomen and children from field labor,” A Nation Under Our Feet, 171.

940 Stanley, From Bondage to Contract, 51.

941 It is likely that such support stemmed from the abolitionist movement before the Civil War. See Stanley, From Bondage to Contract, 35.
Republicans, some African American politicians procured the same legal household authority that white men had. Though the North Carolina constitutional convention of 1868 gave married women ownership over all property they had acquired before marriage, many other southern states kept coverture laws during Reconstruction.942

Some southerners, black and white, sought a more equitable gender hierarchy through politics.943 Several Republican politicians supported universal suffrage, notably William James Whipper of South Carolina, an African American legislator who during South Carolina’s 1868 constitutional convention suggested that women were superior to men and deserved the right to vote.944 Though his motion was rejected, Whipper was not marginalized for his radical beliefs; he served several terms in the South Carolina legislature after the convention.945 Several white Republicans also supported female suffrage. Governor Robert K. Scott sent his best wishes to a meeting of a woman’s suffrage organization in Columbia, declaring that “the cause” had his “warmest sympathy.” “I indulge the hope,” he wrote, “that the time is not far distant when women shall be the peer of man in political rights, as she is peerless in all others, and when she will be able to reclaim some of the privileges that are now monopolized by the sterner sex.”946

Such suffrage campaigns were largely driven by women, black and white, who asserted their desire for political equality with men. It is difficult to know exactly how many women

942 See 1868 NC Convention, 220 & 278; also Michael Fitzgerald “Reconstruction Politics and the Politics of Reconstruction” in Brown, ed., Reconstructions, 103.

943 For example, in analyzing a Convention of Colored Citizens in Arkansas before that state’s Reconstruction constitutional convention, Hannah Rosen found that African American delegates “made no appeals to patriarchal identities and duty to ‘protect’ hearth and family. Not one reference to ‘manhood’ was recorded during the convention’s proceedings.” Terror in the Heart of Freedom, 106.

944 Taylor, The Negro in South Carolina, 141-142.

945 Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 213; Holt, Black Over White, 185.

946 “Imposing Spectacle,” Newberry Herald, February 8, 1871.
championed suffrage, and it does not seem that Klansmen targeted specific women because they were suffragists. It is possible more African American women than white asserted a desire for political power during Reconstruction. The president of the main women’s suffrage organization in South Carolina during Reconstruction was Lottie Rollin, an African American, and her sister Katie served as its secretary. Some black women might have seized their political rights without waiting for men to give it to them; one witness to the Joint Select Committee testified that some black women voted in place of their husbands and brothers in the 1870 congressional elections. Women’s suffrage was not established during Reconstruction, and it did not become a divisive political issue. But the support of universal suffrage by prominent Republicans, black and white, suggests that some southerners opposed the stark gendered hierarchy Klansmen and their supporters tried to enforce for southern households.

Another central difference in how Klansmen and their victims believed it was appropriate to structure southern household involved their conceptions of the people with whom it was acceptable to have sex. Though to many white Republicans, social equality and interracial sex were almost as distasteful as they were to white conservatives, others clearly felt otherwise—evidenced simply by the presence of victims of Klan violence who were targeted because they engaged in interracial sex. Many southern women, white and black, tried to establish

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947 Holt, Black Over White, 34-35; Brown, “Negotiating the Public Sphere,” 107-146.

948 “Imposing Spectacle,” Newberry Herald, February 8, 1871. State Senator William J. Whipper was married to a woman named Frances Rollins, whose sister was also very socially prominent; Holt, Black Over White, 70. It is possible that the article in the Herald misspelled the name of the sisters, or that Lottie was an informal name for Frances Rollins.

949 Testimony of E. W. Seibels, KKK SC, 132. It should be noted that Seibels’s testimony to the Joint Select Committee was filled with numerous, unsubstantiated stories about black criminal activity and the widespread corruption of all Republicans in the state; he was inclined to believe the worst of Republicans generally and African Americans especially, so his testimony should be taken cautiously.

950 See Bardaglio, Reconstructing the Household, 177, for evidence of Republicans denouncing social equality.
household structures in opposition to those advocated by members of the Ku Klux Klan. The very existence of interracial sex suggests that some women, white and black, sought to establish households with men of their choosing regardless of race.\footnote{Dianne Sommerville among others has documented “a significant measure of interracial interaction on numerous fronts. In practice, the worlds of poor whites and blacks, both slave and free, converged in economic, social, and sexual arenas.” Sommerville, Rape & Race, 6.} Certain choices women made prompted the disapproval of conservative white southerners and increased the likelihood that they would be attacked by the Klan. Many women like the white Frances Gilmore engaged in prostitution, and were subject to horrific violence by Klansmen. Others, like the black woman named Frances Gilmore, were seemingly subject to sexual violence solely because conservative white men felt it was within their right to visit it upon them.

But some Republicans supported tolerating interracial relationships. When Klansman Plato Durham proposed a prohibition of interracial marriage in North Carolina’s 1868 constitutional convention, the Republican majority tabled the proposal, and the constitution was drafted with no such ban. Republicans then wrote a public letter to be distributed with the new constitution, emphasizing

\begin{quote}
Some persons have been so bold or ignorant, as to alledge … intermarriages between the races are encouraged. All these assertions are false, as any reader of the Constitution will see. All these matters are left now, as they were by the Constitution of 1776, by the Constitution of 1835 and by the proposed Constitution of 1865, to be regulated by the representatives of the people in the General Assembly.\footnote{1868 NC Convention, 485. Emphasis in original.}
\end{quote}

Interestingly, North Carolina did not actually outlaw intermarriage until a provision was added to the state constitution in 1875 after Democrats had regained political control.\footnote{However, the convention did pass a resolution that declared, “That it is the sense of this Convention that intermarriages and illegal intercourse between the races should be discomtenanced, and the interests and happiness of the two races would be best promoted by the establishment of separate schools,” 1868 NC Convention, 473.} Similarly, South Carolina abandoned its prohibition against miscegenation in 1868 while under Republican
control.\textsuperscript{954} Though southern Republicans—particularly white ones—often declared publicly themselves opposed to interracial marriage, in the Carolinas they established constitutions that allowed people the freedom to decide with whom they could have intimate relations.

Similarly, white Republican men worked to counter the myth of the black rapist. James M. Justice denied that there were any cases of the rape of white women by black men in his home county. He was asked if he knew any cases “concerning rapes committed by negroes on white women.” He replied, “I have never heard of any case of the kind in the county. There has been but one case of rape in Rutherford County since I have lived there, that was brought to the attention of the court; and that was the case of a rape of a white girl by a white man.” Saying that there was “no fear of it,” as far as he had ever heard, he blamed newspapers for the fears of black rape.\textsuperscript{955} There is not much extant evidence about how African American men rejected the nascent myth of the depraved black male rapist, but that absence might be largely because the charge was not as common as it became during Jim Crow. Furthermore, to black men the thought that they were pathologically driven to rape white women was likely so ludicrous that it did not require a rejoinder.

Male opponents of the Klan also resisted Klansmen’s attempts at engaging in sexualized violence against women. There were a few instances of white men seeking retribution upon Klansmen for attacks on their wives, though there are no known incidents of black men attacking Klansmen for the specific purpose of stopping or punishing a rape.\textsuperscript{956} African American men told United States authorities about incidents of rapes likely in order to slow or stop sexualized

\textsuperscript{954} Bardaglio, Reconstructing the Household, 180, also note on pg 289-290.

\textsuperscript{955} Testimony by James M. Justice, KKK NC 148.

\textsuperscript{956} The murder of Decatur Depriest by James McGaha of Rutherford County, North Carolina, is the most notable instance of a white man avenging the attack upon his wife. See Chapter Four.
violence. Essic Harris testified that Klan rape of black women had become so prevalent that “it has got to be an old saying,” which might have been an attempt to bring to Congress’s attention the problem.957

Black women also used their ability to testify to punish or prevent rape by Klansmen.958 Among the legal changes brought during Reconstruction was a redefinition of rape as race neutral, allowing African American women to file charges of rape against rapists black or white.959 Some scholars have suggested that it is possible that African American women reported rape and sexual assault more often than white women, because they lacked other avenues of protecting their public reputations. White women might have been less likely to report attacks because they did not want to admit to being raped for fear of the loss of social prestige accompanying a loss of their perceived virtue.960

Many African American women trusted federal officials and the U.S. military more than they trusted local whites, even when doing so did not guarantee prosecution of white attackers. The black woman named Frances Gilmore went to a United States commissioner to report her assault, and she did not hide or conceal the sexualized violence that was perpetrated against her, even though he could not prosecute the Klansmen. The commissioner remembered,

I asked if she could identify any of the parties. She said she could not. I asked if there was anybody there who could do so. She said nobody was there who knew any of them

957 Testimony of Essic Harris, KKK NC, 100.

958 Crystal Feimster has argued that white women’s denunciations of rape, at least in the post-Reconstruction world, were assertions of political empowerment and reflected a “preoccupation with protection against sexual violence,” in Southern Horrors, 6. See also the work of Hannah Rosen, who analyzed how black women’s resistance to both physical violence and racist rhetoric “is evident in the lengths to which freedwomen and freedmen to document to federal officials the sexual violence they and their communities suffered,” in Terror in the Heart of Freedom, 8.

959 Sommerville, Rape & Race, 17.

960 See Feimster, Southern Horrors, 6-7. This point was also made by Hannah Rosen in panel comments, “Black Reconstruction in America after 75 Years: A Retrospective” (Black Reconstruction in America 75th Anniversary Symposium, Duke University, November 11, 2010).
except by suspicion. It is so very difficult to prove anything where they do identify them, that it is very discouraging to undertake to arrest persons purely on suspicion for such an offense as that.\textsuperscript{961}

Essic Harris testified that even when women were threatened with death to keep silent, several went to federal authorities. He said:

Miss Sally said she never thought she would have to go out of her own county to get help to keep back her enemies; she always thought the people would stand up to her, and that she would not have to go out of her own county to get help. She thought when the “Yankees” came in and whipped them, she saw a heap of trouble; but she said the “Yankees” were gentlemen compared to these Ku-Klux. She said that she had seen more trouble lately since these men had been there than the Yankees ever made.\textsuperscript{962}

That federal officials seemed to be “gentlemen” certainly helped African American women trust them with details of their assault. Then again, it was almost certainly the power white officials held to arrest and prosecute Klansmen that was the chief factor in prompting black women to testify about assaults they suffered.

For African American women, the right to testify against white men in court was newly gained, and they seized the opportunity to make their political voices heard with sometimes mixed results. The wife of an African American man shot by Klansmen in Wake and Chatham County, North Carolina, testified in a trial in Raleigh that she recognized four of the Klansmen who had attacked her husband, but when called to identify one of them in court she gave the wrong name for one of the arrested Klansmen. The wrongly identified man remembered “The effect of the witness’s mistake was like an electric shock; it broke the force of her evidence, relaxed the high tension to which all minds had been wrought, and brought the evidence on the part of the prosecution to an end.”\textsuperscript{963} The accused man remembered the incident as an example

\textsuperscript{961} Testimony of A. Webster Shaffer, \textit{KKK NC}, 37-37.

\textsuperscript{962} Testimony of Essic Harris, \textit{KKK NC}, 100.

\textsuperscript{963} Pegram, “A Ku Klux Raid,” 511.
of the kinds of injustice suffered by white southerners at the hands of African Americans with newly gained freedom during Reconstruction, but the incident also demonstrates that African American women were eager—in this instance perhaps too eager—to use the courts to punish white men they suspected had committed violence against their families.

Giving testimony in trials, either local or federal, or to the Joint Select Committee frequently came to no success. James M. Justice said that many black women were afraid to report rapes by Klansmen for fear of being murdered by their attackers. “The fact is the negroes are generally afraid to tell anything,” he claimed, “except one now and then; I think that four or five, may be ten, outrages are committed on negroes and not made known at all, to every one that becomes publicly known.”964 Both black and poor white women found it more difficult to get successful prosecution of rape cases (both against Klansmen and against ordinary black and white southern men) because of negative stereotypes about their disrespectability or innate depravity.965 Despite occasionally inconclusive results, women during Reconstruction used the ability to testify against Klansmen as both tactics against violence by Klansmen as well as assertions of political rights that challenged the patriarchy white conservative men were constructing.

In other instances, women demanded stronger political power to oppose the Ku Klux Klan. Several wrote to President Grant or southern governors to condemn both Klan violence and governmental hesitance to prevent it. Grace G. Cochran of Anderson, South Carolina, wrote Governor Scott in October 1868, to ask for troops to guard her home and protect her husband John R., who had been threatened with violence. “My husband is engaged in guarding our

964 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 148.
965 Bardaglio, Reconstructing the Household, 189; Sommerville, Rape & Race, 10.
house,” she began, “as we expect an attack tonight from the Ku Klux Klan. He wishes to give you some information, therefore commissioned me to write to Your Excellency.” She denounced that no one had been arrested for various Klan activities in Anderson, describing several attacks, including one where “Mrs. Hick a colored leader who is here from Albany was met on the street by a young man who slapped her face. She applied for a warrant but she did not succeed in getting it although the young offender was bound over.” After describing other events in the county against “Union men & colored citizens” since the end of the Civil War, Cochran declared that she believed her husband would not have been threatened had he not been a Republican. “America is called a free country!” she bitterly declared. But, she continued, “In this county a man must be ostracised, his family & self put in peril, if he has the moral courage to assert an opinion contrary to the popular one. This jeopardy of life which is so sweet to all is almost more than the human heart can bear, without a desire for revenge.” Her forceful letter ended with a request that Scott himself reply and destroy her letter for secrecy’s sake. Her husband included a shorter and far less eloquent endorsement of his wife’s account of affairs in Anderson County and a similar request for support from Scott.

Cochran’s letter was not unique either in her eloquence or political acumen. Other Republican women wrote similar epistles. Sallie Adkins of Warren County, Georgia, was traveling with her husband, Joseph, a Georgia state legislator, when he was assassinated by Klansmen May 10, 1869. She wrote President Ulysses S. Grant, declaring her piety to God and fealty to the Union. She appealed to Grant for help in the aftermath of her husband’s murder,

966 Mrs. John R. Cochran to Robert K. Scott, October 27, 1868, Governor Robert K. Scott Papers, SCDAH. Cochran and her husband survived the threats against them; in 1880 Cochran was a teacher still living in Anderson County, while her husband was farming; 1880 Federal Census, Anderson, South Carolina, Roll: 1219.
asking for both physical protection and also saying that she needed his help at the farm. And then
she turned to politics. “I am no Statesman,” she disclaimed,

I am only a poor woman whose husband has been murdered for his devotion to his
country. I may have very foolish ideas of Government, States & Constitutions. But I feel
that I have claims upon my country. The Rebels imprisoned my Husband. Pardoned
Rebels murdered him. There is no law for the punishment of them who do deeds of this
sort. The men who set the law in motion the magistrates the Juries the baliffs don’t care,
the most of them are Glad—no body moves—the murderers go unpunished—I do not
know that you can help this.

She then denounced the very form of American government, speculating that “It may be that
Republics have no remedy for such a state of things. If so Republics are bad things and there
may arise a doubt if Republics had not better be done away with.”967 Women in North and South
Carolina who lost husbands or fathers to the Klan certainly shared Adkins’s doubts about the
government’s ability to protect them and their households, illustrating both the political
engagement of southern women in general and the specific opposition many of them lodged
against Klan violence. Cochran’s and Adkins’s letters also show that several Republican women
opposed the primarily domestic role dictated for women by the system of patriarchy favored by
white conservative men.

In addition to using political and legal methods, opponents of the Klan fought back in
immediate moments when they were attacked. Southerners who opposed the Klan also desired
safety and security for themselves and their homes. Like Essic Harris, many southern men, black
as well as white, defended their households with violence. When Harris’s family was attacked,
the wife of the white farmer from whom they rented land approached to ask if all was right.
When Harris told her that he had shot two Klansmen, she asked how he knew. He responded,

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967 Sallie Adkins to Ulysses S. Grant, May 20, 1869, Letters Received, Source Chronological File, Container #7,
“1868-1870: President’s Letters,” Folder “May-Dec 1869,” RG 60, NARA.
“Miss Sally, I have been shooting a gun long enough to know when I hit anything.” *James M. Justice* testified that black men in Cleveland County killed two or three Klansmen with axes. *That rumor might not have been the only instance, as Charity McAllister, a former slave from Harnett County, North Carolina interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project, testified that “George Matthews, killed two Ku Klux. Dey double teamed him and shot him, and he cut ‘em wid de ax, and dey died.”* "Samuel Allen, a black magistrate in Caswell County, North Carolina, reached for a saber when Klansmen broke into his house, and stabbed one named Bob Burton in the side with it." *Simeon Young, a county commissioner shot by Klansmen in Newberry, South Carolina, also fired back at his attackers and hit a white man named Faulkner, who later was murdered while recovering from his wounds (likely by Klansmen trying to prevent his turning states’ witness).* "White Republican men also fought back against the Klan. Dr. John Winsmith, a prominent white physician in Spartanburg, South Carolina, did not wait for Klansmen to get near his house before emptying two pistols at them, wounding several (and himself suffering serious wounds when the Klansmen returned fire)." *Many southern men, white as well as black, used violence because they believed deeply in their positions as protectors of their households.*

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968 Testimony of Essic Harris, *KKK NC*, 91.
There were fewer incidents when women took matters into their own hands to defend themselves and their households, but some women used or threatened violence against Klansmen. Ibby Jenkins, an elderly black woman in Rutherford County, North Carolina, fired a pistol to scare off men she suspected were chicken thieves, but were instead (or also) a group of local Klansmen traveling through the yard of the white widow with whom Jenkins lived and who had been Jenkins’s owner before emancipation. Klansmen returned a few nights later and whipped Jenkins, also striking the white widow—named Sopha Jenkins—on the head in their effort to attack Ibby.\textsuperscript{974} For these white men, Jenkins’s effort to protect her former owner’s property did not mitigate that she had the temerity to fire a pistol at them. They also did not respect the wishes of the white woman who previously had had total legal authority over Jenkins.

Female resistance against the Klan often resulted in more violence in response. Margaret Blackwell, a twenty-two year old white woman living near the old Cowpens battlefield in Spartanburg, South Carolina, was attacked by the Klan at the home of her brother Jason.\textsuperscript{975} Jason was the Klansmen’s intended target attack because he was a “damned radical;” Klansmen came to take away his guns or kill him. But Jason was not at home; he had taken to sleeping outside the home in fear for his own safety. Margaret, her mother, her sister-in-law, and several children were in the cabin, the women having been weaving. Approximately twenty-five Klansmen broke down the door of the cabin, demanding to know where Jason was. Margaret resisted the Klansmen, told them that Jason was gone and had no guns. Then John Black, one of the Klansmen, berated her: “You are the d—d b—h that took the pistol from me when your brother

\textsuperscript{974} Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 105. Her name is not included in subsequent Congressional or trial testimony, but the name “Ibby Jinkins,” listed as “colored” and having been whipped by the Klan, is included in an extensive list of victims of Klan violence in North Carolina in Ray, “The Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina,” 11-14. For both Ibby and Sopha Jenkins, see 1870 Census, M593, Roll 1159, Page 112A, Image 247.

\textsuperscript{975} Testimony of Margaret Blackwell, KKK SC, 373-379.
and me had that fuss.” He hit her on the head twice with a gun and kicked her out of the cabin. The previous fight that the Klansmen mentioned was not reason for a raid to target Blackwell, but it was provocation enough for John Black to strike her and call her a “damned bitch.”

Such resistance by women could seem to substantiate charges by conservative men that their female victims were disrespectful. During her testimony to the Joint Select Committee, Blackwell refused to agree with Representative Philadelph Van Trump of Ohio that her house was used for immoral purposes.

Question [by Van Trump]. Do you know that a great many strange men sleep in your house?
Answer. That sleeps in it? I don't know whether there is or not. I know we are not there of a night. I am not at home of a night. I have not staid a night at home for two months and a half. I am afraid. I don't go even to the settlement.
Question. Previous to two months and a half ago, and between that time and the election, had not a good many men slept in your house?
Answer. No, sir.

If he did not think they were prostitutes, he at least suspected that certain immoral activities—perhaps just drinking—took place at her house.

Question. Had there not been a good many frolics at your house?
Answer. No, sir.

Van Trump’s supposition seems to have been that Blackwell invited the attack based on her own behavior; it is unclear if he had information that she or her relatives engaged in anything he

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976 John Black had had a previous argument with Margaret’s brother Jason Blackwell; she testified that Black “and Jason was on a little spree a little while ago, and they fell out. Jason was drinking and John was drunk, and he drewd his repeater on Jason, and I snatched his repeater to keep him from killing Jason;” KKK SC, 378.

977 Testimony of Margaret Blackwell, KKK SC, 376.

978 Testimony of Margaret Blackwell, KKK SC, 378.
considered immoral at their house. Blackwell contrasted Van Trump’s charges by strenuously asserting her innocence of any transgressions that might have justified an attack from the Klan.

Blackwell’s attack was also typical because she suffered violence despite not being the intended target of the raid. Attacks on women sometimes occurred almost as an afterthought while Klansmen were on raids targeting other victims. Several women were shot by Klansmen as they fired indiscriminately into houses, seeking to kill the men inside. Simeon Young’s wife and child were shot when Klansmen fired into his house. 979 During the raid on the white woman named Frances Gilmore, the Klansmen’s first targets were railroad workers, and Klansmen only proceeded to attack the suspected house of prostitution after those workers were scared off.

Women were also frequently forced to witness the violence inflicted on men. Klansmen intended their violence to function as terrifying spectacle, and the most frequent spectators of it were the wives or female family members of the victims. Wallace and Charlotte Fowler of Spartanburg, South Carolina were taking care of three of their grandchildren when Klansmen knocked on their door in May 1871. Wallace opened the door, and two white men in masks grabbed him while one shouted, “God damn you, I have got you now.” They fired a single fatal pistol shot into his head. One of the little boys ran out as Wallace opened the door and saw the murder right in front of him. Charlotte Fowler then watched her husband die. “They had shot him in the head,” she remembered, “and every time he breathed his brains would come out.” 980 Sometimes Klansmen dragged male victims out of their houses, leaving wives behind to wonder what would happen. John J. Neason of Sumter County, South Carolina, was seized from his house in his nightclothes. Klansmen let him put on pantaloons and a coat, and said, “Tell your


980 Testimony of Charlotte Fowler, KKK SC, 386-388.
wife we do not intend to harm you." Their assurances were likely less than convincing, though Neason escaped without harm.

When Klansmen hanged Jim Williams, a black militia captain in York County, South Carolina, they knocked on his door and were first met by his wife, Rosy Williams. Jim emerged when Klansmen demanded that Rosy hand over a stockpile of repeating rifles they believed he kept. Though they both protested that there were no such rifles, the Klansmen dragged Jim out of the house. From inside, Rosy Williams thought she heard a strangling sound. She opened the door, seeking to beg for her husband’s life. Klansmen shouted at her to remain inside and take her children to bed. She cracked the door and peeked out, and saw the Klansmen take Jim under the shadow of the trees. She shut the door. It was the last time she saw him alive. Months later she testified about what happened the next morning. “I went and looked for him,” she said, “but I didn’t find him. I was scared, too. Then I went for my people, to get some one to go help me look for him; and I met an old man who told me they had found him, and said he was dead. They had hung him; but I didn’t go out there until 12 o’clock.” She found him hanging dead from a pine tree.982

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The result on southern households for much of the violence Klansmen committed was destabilization. Male victims of Klan violence asserted their own authority over their households, protecting their children and valuing fatherhood no less than did Klansmen. The violence many suffered, however, led to many homes without fathers, which Republicans both white and black, saw as one of the most nefarious of the results of Klan violence. Republicans loudly denounced

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981 Testimony of John J. Neason, KKK SC, 42.
982 Testimony of Rosy Williams, SC Trials, 237.
how attacks by Klansmen left southern households without patriarchal control and protection.

Joseph H. Rainey, a black Congressman from South Carolina, spoke in support of the Klan Act.

“I need not, Mr. Speaker, recite here the murderous deeds committed both in North and South Carolina,” he said, proceeding then to dwell upon how Klansmen killed fathers, not just men.

I could touch the feelings of this House by the story of widows and orphans now wandering amid the ravines of the rural counties of my native State… I could dwell upon the sorrows of poor women, with their helpless infants, cast upon the world, homeless and destitute, deprived of their natural protectors by the red hand of the midnight assassin. I could appeal to you, members upon this floor, as husbands and fathers, to picture to yourselves the desolation of your own happy firesides should you be suddenly snatched away from your loved ones. Think of gray-haired men, whose fourscore years are almost numbered, the venerated heads of peaceful households, without warning, murdered for political opinion’s sake.\textsuperscript{983}

South Carolina politicians purportedly created a special pension “for the relief of the widows and orphans of persons killed because of their political opinions,” in nine counties, paying widows $10 per month, and orphaned children $6.00 per month, raising a special tax for the purpose.\textsuperscript{984}

Klan attacks also broke up southern homes by forcing Republican men out of their homes and into hiding. One white Republican wrote to the chairman of the Joint Select Committee about violence in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and included in a postscript that “P.S. I am trying to sell my property, with a will to get away from this rebel cursed region. I can not consent to raise my children in such a community.”\textsuperscript{985} African American men often slept outside their homes, one white conservative South Carolinian remembered. “The negro men feared to be at home at night,” he wrote, “and for many months of this year [1871] most of the negro men slept

\textsuperscript{983} Rainey, “The Southern Situation,” in Woodson, \textit{Negro Orators and Their Orations}, 301-302. Rainey was “generally conservative” in his politics, relative to other African Americans from South Carolina; Holt, \textit{Black Over White}, 106.


\textsuperscript{985} A. W. Cummings to Senator John Scott, August 10, 1871, Letters Received, Source Chronological Files, 1871-1874, President, Box #1, “January 1871 to December 1871,” Folder “August 1871-October 1871,” RG 60, NARA.
every night in the woods.” Hampton Parker, a black farmer from Spartanburg, South Carolina testified the same thing to the Joint Select Committee. “The colored people have to rest in the woods,” he told, and “They are pretty nigh shuffled out of that neighborhood.” White men were no more secure. Charles O’Keefe, of Union County, was deputy collector of state taxes, assistant marshal for the census, and president of the Union League, for which he was beaten and called a “radical son of a bitch.” He testified to the Joint Select Committee that he was “in dread of the Ku-Klux. I was sleeping in the woods for about twenty-five nights previous; during that time I never slept in the house—never took my clothes off me.” O’Keefe eventually left South Carolina for New York. James M. Justice testified that “quite a large number of respectable farmers… have not slept in their houses any time… I do not believe there is an exception, where the men of the family are known to be republicans, … I do not believe there is a single family but what is in terror to-day.”

White women also saw their households broken up by Klan violence. Several slept outside for fear of being attacked by Klansmen. Margaret Blackwell, the Spartanburg, South Carolina victim of a Klan raid, testified that sleeping out was a common occurrence with women and children as well as men, as she her mother, brother, and children had been sleeping outside for “some two and a half months.” She told the Joint Select Committee, “I am afraid of them, candidly I am. Every night that passes over my head I fear, and it is on the ground, too, in the woods; not in the house. I am afraid to go to a neighbor's house, and if there was anything I had

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986 Shand, “Incidents In the Life” SCL, 144. See also Williams, They Left Great Marks, 40.
987 Testimony of Hampton Parker, KKK SC, 599.
988 Testimony of Charles Dennis O’Keefe, KKK SC, 37.
989 Testimony of James M. Justice, KKK NC, 136.
ever done that I should be afraid I don't know it; but there was nothing.”

Even White conservative women also fled. One night in March of 1871, at the height of Klan violence in the South Carolina upcountry, Mary Davis Brown, who had several family members join the Klan, recorded in her diary that her guests for the night did not stop by. “Polly Brown and Wille and his wife was to be here to,” she wrote, “but I think Polly got scarred at our times here and left fore the ould North Carroliny state.”

In what was perhaps an ironic turn, federal investigation into the Klan caused many Klansmen to abandon their own households. Numerous Klansmen slept outside in the woods at night to avoid federal marshals and cavalry troops seeking to serve arrest warrants. In Union County, South Carolina, locals remembered into the 1930s the story of the “K.K.K. Holly Tree” in which three Klansmen spent a night hiding from U.S. cavalry troops. South Carolina Klansmen fled to Tennessee, Texas, and even Canada. North Carolina Klansmen similarly fled their homes, while many who stayed were arrested by state militia or federal troops.

The temporary absence of patriarchs from white conservatives’ households caused by Klansmen being arrested or fleeing prosecution provided an opportunity for their wives and children to govern households in their stead. It also provided more chances for southern white women to support Klansmen. When men were arrested, women would frequently provide alibis; several Republicans complained that suspected Klansmen would bring “women and children to swear that they were all at home and had not been out that night.”

Women were in a unique

990 Testimony of Margaret Blackwell, KKK SC, 374.
991 Mary Davis Brown, Oil in Our Lamps, 176.
992 W. A. Wofford, “Historical Holly Tree,” no date, & D.A. Russell, Jr., “The Confederate Tree,” May 11, 1936, both in Federal Writer’s Project Papers, Cabinet C, Drawer 3, Folder Tour 12, SCL.
position to know whether their husbands, brothers, or sons had been out committing acts of violence. Had suspected Klansmen not been out on the specific raid for which they were arrested, women would be able to testify to their innocence. Conversely, that knowledge gave women an opportunity to help some Klansmen avoid conviction by claiming that they had been home if in fact they had been out raiding.

When Klansmen were arrested, conservative white women took extra steps to support them. Mary Amarinthia Snowden, from a very prominent South Carolina family and one of the chief organizers of the Home for the Mothers, Widows, and Daughters of Confederate Soldiers of the City of Charleston, visited the Charleston House of Corrections several times in May of 1872, getting passes to allow her and two additional ladies to visit “from time to time as she may desire.”

White women brought clothing and food to men arrested for Klan activity in the Columbia jail. As John Adams Leland, recounted:

We had ice cream to-day,
A large churn without pay,
Brought by these same ladies, God bless them!
We each ate his dish up,
And even friend Bishop
Was so full, he wished to caress them.

While in prison Klansmen wrote many letters to their wives, mothers, and friends requesting visits and food alike. Iredell Jones, the chief of a Klan in Chester County, South Carolina expressed delight at his wife’s upcoming visit, writing that “There is no objections to ladies visiting us. Ladies visit the prisoners every day. You only have to be prepared to look with composure on iron bars and W.S. Muskets.” In a separate letter, he told his mother that all he

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994 Pass from U.S. Marshal’s Office of South Carolina, May 2, 1872, & letter to Major Callahan from William Stone, Assistant District Attorney, May 6, 1872, Mary Amarinthia Snowden Papers, SCL.

995 “Epistle of John, The Prisoner,” April 29, 1872, John Adams Leland Collection, SCL.

996 Iredell Jones to his (unnamed) wife, November 3, 1871, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.
wanted was “another can of nice butter packed as before so we can use from the can.”\textsuperscript{997} Later in life he remembered his mother and her influence by declaring that “The wisdom and teachings of my mother have been the strongest and most potent factors in my life-work, always present to guide and instruct, as living principles.”\textsuperscript{998}

In addition to providing domestic support, white women raised their voices in the political arena in response to the federal investigation. Harriett Bratton, wife of John S. Bratton of York County, who fled to Memphis for fear of being arrested in late 1871, petitioned President Grant and helped lead the successful campaign to get her husband pardoned. Part of the petition read:

That notwithstanding this her husband dreads to return to this State, and she is without his protection. That during his absence she has met with a severe fall which has broken her limb. And that under the tension of feeling occasioned by her health, now most seriously impaired and her life in danger.\textsuperscript{999}

Bratton used the language of female dependency in order to try to secure both a personal and political goal: the pardon of her husband for Ku Klux membership.\textsuperscript{1000} Similar language was used in a petition from Jacob R. Davis to Grant in May of 1872 for him to pardon the prisoners from South Carolina held in the federal penitentiary in Albany, New York. Davis’s petition requested the President, “in behalf of suffering innocent Women, and helpless children, to pardon their husbands, fathers, and sons who are known as Ku Klux. The offense they are

\textsuperscript{997}Iredell Jones to his (unnamed) mother, November 1, 1871, Iredell Jones Papers, SCL.

\textsuperscript{998}Hemphill, Men of Mark in South Carolina, 261.

\textsuperscript{999}Petition of Harriett Bratton to the President of the United States, April 28, 1873, Bratton Family Papers, SCL.

\textsuperscript{1000}Gregory Downs has argued that in fact the Civil War and Reconstruction fundamentally reshaped individuals relationship to the federal government, and that most petitioners “pressed previously private, intimate needs onto states they embodied into patrons they could beg for favors,” suggesting that perhaps Bratton’s language was not uniquely gendered: Declarations of Dependence, 1. But in the context of how conservative white southerners wished southern households to be structured, however, the declarations that white families suffered because of the absence of patriarchs suggests much about how white conservatives wanted gender to function.
charged with grew out of the War.” The two petitions used similar language about women requiring protection, as women gained some concrete advantages from the system of patriarchy Klansmen were building.

Not just passive observers of the politics of Reconstruction, conservative white southern women supported the work of Klansmen and protested efforts to put down the Klan, even those who were not connected to Klansmen. Harriott Middelin of Charleston, writing to a relative living in Dawson, Georgia, asked,

Do you see how Grant is harrowing our Upper districts again? There are a number of Ku Klux prisoners in jail here. Waiting their trial under Bond & Bryan. And it is said that the Government is very anxious to implicate Hampton and others. I see that one of the Northern members made the assertion in Congress the other day that the Government had sufficient evidence against them- and Johnston’s letter in their defence looks as if he feared something. Meanwhile my favorite earthquakes seem to be gathering strength in the West, and the small pox to be increasing in New York.

Similarly, Virginia Carolina Smith Aiken of Abbeville, South Carolina, the wife of prominent conservative David Wyatt Aiken, recorded in her diary how she and her husband sheltered several Klansmen escaping prosecution in the spring of 1872. When “Col Watts” stayed with them in early April, she explained, “He absents himself from home on account of the arrests the Yanks or radicals are making a great many have left their homes. Tis distressing to think of the state of affairs in this State,” and added as a final note “We get no justice- & no hearing & all for political effect.” Then near the end of the month, when a Klansman from Laurens, South

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1001 Petition of Jacob R. Davis to His Excellency, U.S. Grant, President of the United States, May 29th, 1872, Letters Received, Source Chronological File, President, Box #2, “President: January 1872-August 1872,” Folder “May 1872-June 1872,” RG 60, NARA.

1002 Harriott Middelin to Langdon Cheves, April 3, 1872, Ku Klux Klan Clippings File, SCL.

1003 David Wyatt Aiken was imprisoned in 1868 for suspicion of having aided in the murder of black legislator B.F. Randolph in Abbeville, South Carolina, but was released. He was a vocal supporter of the Klan, but there is no evidence that he himself was a member of the Klan.

1004 April 4, 1872, Virginia Carolina Smith Aiken Diary, SCL.
Carolina stayed with them, Aiken bemoaned the difficulties suffered by this “poor man. I do feel so sorry for him & for all others thus situated. Oh! We poor Southern people have more than we can bear.”

The destabilization of conservative white households prompted by the investigation into Klan violence provided an opportunity for white women to engage more publicly in Reconstruction-era politics, but it did not undermine the system of patriarchy that Klansmen were building. In fact, women voiced support of that hierarchy. Conservative white women shared similar racial views as Klansmen, worked to facilitate their activities, comforted them in jail, and denounced their imprisonment. One should not assume that all conservative white women passively agreed wholesale with the kind of gendered and racial hierarchy Klansmen desired. But in the absence of significant dissent about how their husbands, fathers, or brothers were behaving, and given that white women displayed significant knowledge of and support of the activities of Klansmen, many conservative white women shared a similar political outlook as their husbands, including about the southern household.

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Though the initial effect upon all southern households of violence committed by members of the Ku Klux Klan was their destabilization, in the longer term, the violence Klansmen committed worked to codify and construct a new racial hierarchy. It shaped the governance of southern households, with certain conservative white men in control of their own households and with the authority to dictate the households of supposedly disrespectful white and all black men and women.

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1005 April 24, 1872, Virginia Carolina Smith Aiken Diary, SCL.

1006 Crystal Feimster has argued that it was after Reconstruction that some conservative white women criticized the rhetoric around lynching in order to denounce what she calls “the hollowness of the southern gender politics of protection,” in Southern Horrors, 35.
Legal historian Peter Bardaglio has argued for continuity in the structure of southern households across the nineteenth century. He writes that even by 1900, “[d]ramatic change had taken place,” in how southern households were structured, “but that change had not led to any sense of clear resolution,” while there were still palpable “undercurrents of continuity generated by deep-seated attitudes toward race, blood, and gender.”1007 Chief among the phenomena that persisted across the nineteenth century, Bardaglio argues, was “an obsession with keeping black men away from white women, and keeping lower-class blacks and whites from mounting a united challenge to elite rule.” That obsession underlay “the general commitment to white supremacy and racial separation” by white southerners.1008

But there is no one such thing as a “general commitment to white supremacy;” white supremacy was itself constituted by various ideological tenets. Essential among them during the period of Reconstruction was an emerging fear of black rape of white women—not a timeless obsession with it—and a commitment to the exercise of social and sexual control over lower-class white and all black women, a commitment that gained new salience in the aftermath of emancipation. Rather than a subterranean stratum of conservative white southern political belief, conservative white commitment to establishing a new hierarchy within southern households after the Civil War was an essential, constitutive part of an emergent political ideology of white supremacy.

In disaggregating the various gendered and political tenets of white supremacy, we might risk forgetting that the actors themselves explicitly saw them as intertwined. Thomas Tate, a Klansman from South Carolina, participated in a raid on a white Republican over the state line in

1007 Bardaglio, Reconstructing the Household, xv.
1008 Bardaglio, Reconstructing the Household, 212.
Rutherford, North Carolina. Called to testify in the trial of those arrested for the raid, Tate declared the purpose of the Klan as “to keep down the colored un’s from mixing with the whites.” When asked how, Tate responded, “To keep them from marrying… and to keep them from voting.” Rather than a strict separation between private and public, Klansmen believed households—who could marry whom—impacted electoral politics—who voted for whom.

Average white southerners supported the building of white supremacy by Klansmen through the use of violence, if with some ambivalence. J.M. Wallace of Como, Mississippi wrote to his sister Mary A. Wallace of Union, South Carolina on March 30, 1871, expressing sympathy for recent incidents of violence in Union:

We are sorry to learn you have been disturbed by the Ku Klux. It is difficult to determine whether these associations have accomplished more of good, than evil. If the scoundrels only were stricken down in the dark, we could not help approving—but when the innocent suffer with them—humanity shudders. We hope that you have passed through the worst.

However difficult it might have seemed to conservative white southerners like the Wallace family, the people who suffered the worst from the activities of the Ku Klux Klan were the women like the two named Frances Gilmore in Chatham County, North Carolina. The assaults they suffered were not only physically and emotionally scarring, but helped solidify a hierarchy of power that placed them subservient to the men who assaulted them.

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1009 Trial testimony of Thomas Tate, KKK NC, 430.

1010 J. M. Wallace to Mary A. Wallace, March 30, 1871, Wallace, Rice, and Duncan Family Papers, SCL.
CONCLUSION

In August of 1937, a white writer in the Federal Writer’s Project named T. Pat Matthews sat down with Kitty Hill. Hill was 77 years old, and had been born into slavery in Virginia near Petersburg. Her family was moved to Pittsboro, in Chatham County, North Carolina sometime during the Civil War, after her father had been sent north to Manassas Gap early in the war, likely to serve Confederate troops. She never saw him again. Though Hill was just a girl during the war, her mother told her stories of the suffering. General Wheeler’s Confederate cavalry was the “meanest,” she remembered. But she also saw violence after the war had ended.1011

“I ’member de Ku Klux an’ how dey beat people,” she told her interviewer. When they would visit their victims they would chant “Ku Klux, Ku Klux, Ku Klux” in what she called “a fine voice”—meaning loud and clear. But not all of the violence was one-sided. One night, the Klan came to a house in Chatham County where the door was “barred up.” Klansmen “got an ax an’ cut a hole in the door.” But they were met with resistance, she told. “When de hole got big enough de nigger blamed down on ‘em wid a gun an’ shot one of dere eyes out.”1012

Sixty-six years after the event, African Americans who lived in Chatham County during Reconstruction still remembered the attack upon Essic Harris and his defense of home and family. Perhaps it was because his resistance was unusual; though many Klan targets fought back, few were as successful as Harris. But no Americans, black or white, could forget the Klan.

1011 Interview with Kitty Hill, Born in Slavery, Volume XI, Part 1, 422-426
African Americans remembered the violence and the trauma Klansmen inflicted as well as the spectral costumes and pretensions to ghostliness Klansmen mobilized. Later white apologists for the Klan claimed that such stories—which apparently were widespread among black southerners—were evidence that black people in fact believed that Klansmen were ghosts. One white conservative, writing in 1914, claimed that “the tales of the Ku Klux, as told by some old black negro Mammy,” were “delightful and enchanting,” and could make “the cold chills play up and down the back.” The author claimed that the disguises “seen at the dead hour of midnight, were enough to frighten anyone, white or black; and the darkies just declared, ‘Fore Gawd,’ the Ku Klux came straight from the bad place.”1013 But though many told that they had been afraid of the Klan, African Americans interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project would far more often testify about the violence the Klan committed, rather than the impact of their purported supernatural abilities. Zeb Crowder of North Carolina remembered that “de Ku Klux Klan was something all niggers wus scared of” because “dey would get wid you.”1014 He made no mention that black people were scared of Klan costumes.

White southerners’ belief that African Americans were convinced that Klansmen actually were ghosts sent from hell was matched by a belief that the Ku Klux Klan was, at worst, a temporary evil that accomplished positive goals. Most accounts of the Klan by white authors, well into the twentieth century, tended to emphasize that their actions were a necessary evil to free the South from the despotic and unnatural rule of carpetbaggers, white race traitors, and incompetent black people. The Klan, as one Mississippi Klansman remembered, “was composed of good men, brave and true, who had battled hard four years, half starved, for their rights and

1013 Rose, The Ku Klux Klan, 53.

1014 Interview with Zeb Crowder, Born in Slavery, Volume XI, Part 1, 200.
honest principles.” The work in the end, he claimed, was efficacious. “Did they succeed? Let history answer,” he wrote, before immediately answering his own question: “Southern honor and civilization were saved.” Many of those depictions came from other Klansmen themselves. William L. Saunders, in all likelihood the head of the Klan in North Carolina, became one of the state’s earliest historians.

The sentiment was not limited to amateur historians and former Klansmen. Early white professional historians who wrote about Reconstruction depicted the Klan quite favorably. Led by William Dunning, a professor at Columbia University, an entire historical school formed around the ideas that black suffrage was a mistake, Republicans universally corrupt, and the Klan’s work at worst a necessary evil that resulted in the restoration of white southern home rule. Among its most prominent proponents were Walter L. Fleming of West Virginia University (and later Vanderbilt University), J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton of the University of North Carolina, and President Woodrow Wilson (who received a PhD from the Johns Hopkins University and taught at Princeton University). Hamilton, for example, claimed that the Klan arose because “Crime and violence of every sort became a veritable hell through misrule which approximated anarchy.” As a result of the violence, “The women of the South once more could leave their doors without the accompaniment of a deadly terror. Property became fairly safe again,… and the supremacy of the white race and of Anglo-Saxon institutions was secure.”

Their depictions of Reconstruction permeated their teaching as well as their scholarly writing. In 1909, Hamilton advised a senior history thesis at the University of North Carolina

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1015 Robuck, My Own Personal Experience, 136.

1016 Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 453.
about the Klan during Reconstruction. His student, Donald Fairfax Ray, summed up the Klan’s work during Reconstruction by asserting that it

was the legitimate offspring of its parent misrule and as its parent passed away so did the child. Hundreds of cruelties and unnecessary deeds of violence have been attributed to it and in many cases unjustly so. Was it necessary? With such chaotic conditions it came inevitably like the Carbonari of Italy or the White Caps of Ireland. Was it successful? It did its work as nothing else could have done it. It acquired its main purpose, the preservation of the white races and when such an end is considered might not even its lawless methods of the foxes skin in a lawless country, under lawless rule, be regarded as justified.\(^{1017}\)

This thesis was approved by what would become a preeminent department of American history—at a university through whose campus the Klan had ridden in 1869 to terrorize the town—and the interpretation that Klansmen were closer to freedom fighters than terrorists came to dominate both professional and popular interpretations of Reconstruction among white Americans.\(^{1018}\)

This interpretation had more than academic implications. It influenced contemporary political debates. One white southern writer defended the Klan by comparing it unfavorably to lynchings outside of the South. “Be it remembered,” he wrote, “that the Ku Klux never burned negroes. In Delaware and Illinois they do burn negroes”—neglecting to mention that Klansmen burned black homes and that southern lynchers also sometimes burned their victims.\(^{1019}\) Popular culture also valorized the Ku Klux Klan. The novels of Thomas Dixon about Reconstruction were adopted into popular plays, and in 1915 were made into D. W. Griffith’s groundbreaking film \textit{Birth of a Nation}. The film’s central premise was that the Klan had rid the South of the destructive, corrupt, and rapacious rule of African Americans aided by white northern


\(^{1018}\) On the Klan’s ride through the University of North Carolina’s campus, see Trelease, \textit{White Terror}. 196.

carpetbaggers. The film ended with an image of North and South reunited under a watching Christ, the strife of the Civil War finally brought to an end as white Americans reunited through the removal of African Americans from the body politic.1020

Partially spurred by the success of the film, the Ku Klux Klan, absent from the South since Reconstruction, was reborn in 1915. A white man named William Joseph Simmons in Georgia organized a new chapter of the Klan with a ceremonial cross burning on Stone Mountain, just outside of Atlanta.1021 Though the Klan of the 1910s and 1920s drew from a broad swath of the white male population, the Klan in the twentieth century was considerably different than that of Reconstruction. The Reconstruction Klan had never burned crosses; Dixon had added that detail to make Klansmen seem to be inspired by medieval Scottish warriors. The twentieth-century Klan also spread outside the South, gaining at least as much popularity in the Midwest and even parts of the Northeast as it had in the South. And in addition to being opposed to black political participation, the Klan in the twentieth century was more broadly anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, and anti-Semitic, none of which were major concerns of the Reconstruction Klan. A fond memory of the Klan by many white southerners had led directly to further violence and racial oppression during Jim Crow.1022


1021 MacLean, Behind the Mask of Chivalry, 4-5.

The memorialization of the Klan perhaps only existed because the Reconstruction-era Klan had dissolved before the end of Reconstruction. Had it continued to exist, the myths around it might not have been so powerful. The Klan disappeared partially because of the sustained campaigns against it, but also because Klansmen saw other available means to accomplish their goals, and perceived their work as having been effective. Later apologists claimed that the Klan was officially disbanded in March 1869, well before violence ceased, under orders from Nathan Bedford Forrest. R. J. Brunson, a Klansman from the original Pulaski Klan, certified in the introduction to an early history of the Klan that he “raided with Den No. 4 until the disbandment,” and ceased activity after Forrest disbanded it, though he kept a copy of its constitution.\textsuperscript{1023} The author of that history wrote that “Members were directed to burn all regalia and paraphernalia of every description and to desist from any further assemblies or acts as Ku Klux.” Those men who continued to raid were therefore renegades, “acting on their own responsibility.”\textsuperscript{1024} And the organization could bear no responsibility for their actions, because “Whether obeyed or not, this proclamation terminated the Klan’s organized existence as decisively and completely as General Lee’s last general order, on the morning of April 10, 1865, disbanded the Army of Northern Virginia.”\textsuperscript{1025} A Klansman from Mississippi told a similar story in his memoirs, saying that all who committed violence after March 1869 “were not Ku Klux. They were only aping the disbanded order, but they overshot the mark in what they did.”\textsuperscript{1026}
Other members burned their robes and orders. In an unpublished biography of John Thomas Gaston, a Klansman from Edgefield, South Carolina, one of his family members remembered that “Several members came to our house and burned their Regalia after the Reconstruction Days and buried the ashes in our back yard at night.” But recalling that the members burned their robes after “Reconstruction Days,” which in South Carolina continued through the 1876 election, suggests that perhaps this incident did not necessarily relate to the supposed order to disband. Chillingly, there was an audience beyond that immediate white family, as the author recounted that “Our Negro servants were scared to death nearly.”

It is possible that Forrest, and other Klan leaders, wished to dissolve the order, but claims that the Klan officially disbanded in 1869 were specious, or at least overstated, given the widespread coordinated Klan violence of 1870 and 1871. There is little or no evidence that former Klansmen actively working to stop violence. Furthermore, narratives that the Klan degenerated into an unruly mob of criminals were manufactured to defend the many elite conservative white men who participated in it, either to prevent their prosecution or to provide them later historical absolution.

March 1869, the date given for the supposed order to disband, predated most sustained efforts to suppress the Klan, particularly in the Carolinas. In 1869 North Carolina had made the use of a disguise “with intent to terrify or frighten any citizen or the community, or part thereof” a misdemeanor and in the same act made the perpetration of violence or unlawful trespass while disguised a felony. William Holden, the governor of North Carolina, took further steps to try to stop the violence. He began appointing secret detectives to investigate the Klan in late 1869,

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1027 Anonymous and undated biography of John Thomas Gaston, John Thomas Gaston Papers, SCL.

declared several counties to be in insurrection in the spring of 1870, suspended the writ of habeas corpus, and dispatched state militia troops under the command of Colonel George W. Kirk, a former Tennessee Unionist.\textsuperscript{1029} Holden’s efforts prompted a conservative political backlash—attracting some disaffected white moderates—that led to his impeachment and removal from office in March 1871.\textsuperscript{1030} South Carolina Governor Robert K. Scott did not declare martial law and preferred to try to stop the Klan through civil measures. In January 1871, even after several years of Klan violence, he publicly stated that bringing in federal troops “would be as bad as the disease, and would be a public declaration that there was no civil government in South Carolina, and that we are living in a condition of social anarchy.”\textsuperscript{1031} Further violence, including raids on the Union jail, changed Scott’s mind about the deployment of U.S. troops, and he did not object to Grant’s suspension of habeas corpus in South Carolina later that year.

Though both the U.S. Senate and the War Department launched investigations into Klan violence in 1869 and 1870, efforts by Congress and President Ulysses S. Grant did not gain traction until 1871. On April 20, Congress passed the third Enforcement Act, known as the Ku Klux Act. That same day it created the Joint Select Committee to begin investigations into whether further steps were needed.\textsuperscript{1032} Testimonies for the Carolinas began in June. White conservatives immediately denounced the committee. In July 1871 the \textit{Newberry Herald} of South Carolina reported that Republicans intended “to suppress the truth and hear but one distorted side of the case,” but that conservative witnesses had given testimony that “was a decided stroke against the radical policy,” and that “that the evidence lately given is a regular

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1030] Massengill, “Detectives,” 479.
\end{footnotes}
knock downer to the record of lies which have been freely offered to bolster up a unholy and unrighteous cause." After conducting hearings in Washington, some members formed a subcommittee and traveled south to hear testimonies in Greenville, Spartanburg, and Columbia.

Klansmen seem to have taken some active steps to stop the committee. At least one black man, Samuel Gaffney, who testified to the sub-committee in South Carolina was attacked for having done so, though Klansmen took his gun and did not whip him. One member of the Klan, William K. Owens, of Yorkville, spoke frankly and candidly about his involvement, detailing the oaths, passwords, and activities of the Klan. In the middle of his testimony he suddenly stopped, pointed to the door to the room in which he was telling the sub-committee his story, and told the committee “There’s a party standing out there can hear every word that is passing in here; but it makes no difference; I can say this before the world.” Despite his bluster, he seems to have spoken softly while telling about murders he had heard that his fellow Klansmen had committed, as Democratic Representative Philadelph Van Trump several times asked why he was speaking so softly and if he was afraid. Even if those listeners were innocent, or if Owens indeed did not fear his former comrades hearing his testimony, the specter of Klan violence hung over even the congressional investigation into it.

The Joint Select Committee’s investigation combined with the Grant administration’s desire to stop the Klan, and more U.S. troops were sent to the Carolinas, including the U.S. Seventh Cavalry. Some white conservatives preferred federal troops to the use of state militias by southern governors, since U.S. Army soldiers were less likely to be black (though black

1034 Testimony of Samuel Gaffney, KKK SC, 601-604.
1035 Testimony of William K. Owens, KKK SC, 1365.
soldiers were stationed in the Carolinas as late as 1868). The Newberry Herald, after the raid on the jail in Union, South Carolina, hoped that the deployment of U.S. troops “will put an end to all trouble.” In contrast, “To send the negro militia to Union, is to send them to bloody graves. To send United States troops, is to ensure quietness and peace.” Troop numbers peaked in late 1871, with more than 300 soldiers in North Carolina and 1,000 in South Carolina. The previous year, despite Klan violence, there had been just over 700 in both states combined.

The army began arresting suspected Klansmen. They acted on information gathered from testimonies as well as the reports of local marshals and, in some cases, secret detectives. Several arrested Klansmen agreed to cooperate and provide information about the comrades; they were later remembered by white conservatives as “the low element,” because “the bottom dropped out” as a result of their disclosures. White conservatives also protested that most of the men arrested were innocent. Robert Wallace Shand, a white conservative from South Carolina who did not himself join the Klan, later claimed that “The first arrests were suspicious and made, I believe, in the dark, not knowing who were really members.” Later conservative critics went even further, declaring that the investigation had created “an open season for hunting and killing Ku Kluxers.” Well over one thousand men were swept up at various points. Many ended up being released. Men arrested in North Carolina were transported to Raleigh for trial, and those in South Carolina were taken to Columbia. Crowds met the transported prisoners, particularly at

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1036 Sefton, The United States Army and Reconstruction, 261-262.
1038 Sefton, The United States Army and Reconstruction, 261-262.
1039 Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 146.
1040 Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 145-146.
1041 Winston, Andrew Johnson, 493.
cities. Conservative newspapers especially reported stories of Klansmen being “grossly insulted” by crowds of African Americans that gathered to watch the prisoners. “All kinds of jeers, taunts, and insulting epithets were showered upon them by the negroes, who seemed bent upon having a row,” one reported about a prisoner transfer in Charlotte.\footnote{1042}{“The Ku Klux Trial at Raleigh,” The Chester Reporter, September 28, 1871.}

That Klansmen were being arrested and punished seemed very important to African Americans, given the size of black crowds that gathered. Charlie Hunter, of Wake County, North Carolina, told his Federal Writers’ Project interviewer that “I have seen one gang of Ku Klux. They wus under arrest at Raleigh in Governor Holden’s time.”\footnote{1043}{Interview with Charlie L. Hunter, Born in Slavery, Volume XI, Part 1, 455.} Mary A. Hicks, 92 when interviewed in 1937, celebrated the arrest of Klansmen, telling her interviewer that “De Klu Klux Klan sprung riht up out of de earth, but de Yankees put a stop ter dat by puttin’ so many of dem in jail. Dey do say dat dat’s what de State Prison wuz built fer.”\footnote{1044}{Interview with Marcy A. Hicks, Born in Slavery, Volume XI, Part 1, 186. Hicks was incorrect. The North Carolina state penitentiary was not built until the 1880s.}

U.S. troops remained stationed in the west of North Carolina and in the South Carolina upcountry. Violence slowed but did not stop. Colonel Lewis Merrill of the Seventh U.S. Cavalry reported to Senator John Scott, head of the Joint Select Committee, that in August of 1871, despite the arrests his troops had made, the Klan had “seemed to return.”\footnote{1045}{Colonel Lewis Merrill to Senator John Scott, August 9, 1871, Letters Received, Source Chronological Files, 1871-1874, President, Box #1, “January 1871 to December 1871,” Folder “June 1871-July 1871,” RG 60, NARA.} Some of the troops even politically identified with the men they were arresting. One conservative white South Carolinian later reminisced that “With these several garrisons, both officers and men, we got on very pleasantly. They obliged their orders but with few exceptions were all in sympathy with the
white people.”

By November 1871, Mary Davis Brown in York County, South Carolina recorded in her diary that “Times seem to be cooling down all little at this time.”

The trials of Klansmen began late in the fall and through the winter of 1871. There was close coordination between state and federal authorities. U.S. district attorneys and state attorney generals worked together in prosecuting Klansmen, usually charged with violating sections of the Ku Klux Act; arguments in the trials often revolved less around whether members had committed the crimes for which they were accused, but instead whether they had been engaged in a conspiracy while committing them. The trials garnered considerable outside attention. Telegrams flew back and forth to Washington, D.C. Conservative newspapers denounced virtually every aspect of the trials, from jury selections to the charges filed to the sentencing. The trials achieved mixed results in terms of convictions. Many Klansmen accepted deals, either in exchange for testimony or confessing their participation for reduced sentences. Several were acquitted, but many were convicted and sentenced to fines and jail time in the federal penitentiary in Albany, New York.

Republican commitment to punishing Klansmen quickly evaporated at both the state and federal levels shortly after the trials. The reversal took less than a year. In January of 1872, pending charges against Klansmen who had participated in the Constitutional Union Guard in Lenoir County were dropped. None of the Klansmen arrested for the attack upon the Kinston jail or other murders perpetrated in Lenoir and Jones Counties were ever convicted; many had

1046 Shand, “Incidents In the Life,” SCL, 141.

1047 Brown, Oil In Our Lamps, 192.

1048 See the myriad arguments recorded in SC Trials, through page 132.

1049 For example, “Grant’s Reign of Terror,” The Chester Reporter, August 15, 1872.

been released in 1870 by Governor Holden in an attempt to appease his opponents. The Ku Klux Act expired in 1872 and Congress did not renew it. In April 1872, Mary Davis Brown of York County, South Carolina, reported in her diary that “We was all verry much lifted up to day with the Tellagram from Charleston that President Grant had proclaimed a general forgiveness to all the cu clux.” That May, Congress removed all the remaining political disabilities for former Confederates, again per President Grant’s request.

In late 1872 Grant pardoned the Klan prisoners being held at Albany prison. He did so partially in response to charges that prison conditions were bad, after at least one Klansman, Hezekiah Porter, died in prison. But the pardon was also, in the telling of a conservative newspaper, “simply to appease the storm of indignation that has been raised at the North against his administration, on account of the manner in which they [Klansmen] were convicted.”

Official forgiveness and appeasement of Klansmen continued. In June of 1873, the U.S. Attorney General told the friends of John S. Bratton, a Klansman suspected of hanging Jim Williams, that he could return from hiding, “remain presently at his home and with his afflicted wife and … he will not be disturbed,” because “no action would be taken against” him. And the trend was matched at the local level. In Rutherford County, many Klansmen who had previously been arrested had pending cases in local courts dismissed in 1873. It almost seemed as if people wanted to forget the violence that was endemic just two years before. The local case

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1051 Holden later explained that “the disorders ceased, and the people generally were active in supporting what I had done,” and thus he ordered the prisoners released without trial; W. W. Holden, The Memoirs of W. W. Holden, the John Lawson Monographs of the Trinity College Historical Society, Durham North Carolina (Volume II. Durham, N.C.: The Seeman Printery, 1911), 125. See also Trelease, White Terror, 191.

1052 Brown, Oil In Our Lamps, 203.

1053 Du Bois, Black Reconstruction, 560.


1055 T. J. Robertson to James B. White, June 28, 1873, Bratton Family Papers, SCL.
against James McGaha, still wanted for the murder of Klansman Decatur DePriest, was also dropped in the spring of 1873, as McGaha had successfully evaded capture and could not be found.\textsuperscript{1056}

Some federal troops remained, though at reduced numbers. By 1876 there were fewer than 800 soldiers stationed in the Carolinas.\textsuperscript{1057} The remaining soldiers of the Seventh U.S. Cavalry had been dispatched west to participate in the Plains Indian Wars. Many of the soldiers who had suppressed the Klan were killed in the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876. A recruit from Rutherford County, David A. Kanipe, survived and was said to be one of the last people to see George Armstrong Custer alive.\textsuperscript{1058} Major Marcus Reno, a prominent officer who had coordinated with the War Department in the investigations and arrests of Klansmen, also survived the battle and was publicly scapegoated for the massacre.

The Klan disappeared nearly as quickly as it arose. But the crackdown was short-lived and surface-deep, as national Republicans had little stomach for radically reshaping the South either through legislative action or jailing the men most responsible for the violence that was undermining Republican power. Some conservatives later claimed that Klansmen halted its violence because they achieved their goals in spite of the crackdown. One conservative wrote that “Owing to some local circumstances, the circle at ---- was disbanded about the time of President Grant’s proclamation,” the author blanking out the specific location, “but we were not influenced by it in any degree. I think there were few cases of the disbandment of circles. The

\textsuperscript{1056} Rutherford County Superior Court, Minute Docket, 1869-1876, NCSA.

\textsuperscript{1057} Sefton, The United States Army and Reconstruction, 261-262.

\textsuperscript{1058} Historical Subcommittee, Rutherford County 1979, 668. Custer had not been among the officers sent to the Carolinas to arrest Klansmen, Lewis Merrill then being in command.
necessity for their existence expired with the exodus of the carpet-baggers.”1059 He later went further, claiming that the Klan disappeared because “The fox’s skin had served its turn before it was cast aside.”1060

The Klan had achieved many of its political goals in North Carolina. Indeed, 1871 and 1872 marked major turning points in North Carolina’s Republican control. Holden’s impeachment and removal from office in 1871 occurred because of increased numbers of Democrats in the state legislature. That was accompanied by a substantial decrease in the amount of white North Carolinians who supported Republicans; the 1872 presidential election saw a double-digit drop in the percentage of whites in the piedmont who voted Republican from 1868 to 1872.1061 African Americans also voted in decreasing number as a direct result of the violence the Klan committed. In 1875, North Carolina amended its state constitution to change local offices from being elected to being appointed. Further changes were intended to bolster Democratic control and reverse the democratizing changes of the 1868 constitution. The constitution was amended to outlaw interracial marriage. The secretary of that constitutional convention, Johnston Jones, had himself been a Klansman—the same Klansman who corresponded in secret code with his Klansmen brothers in South Carolina.1062 Three years after the federal investigation, some Klansmen were back in positions of major political control.


1060 Brown, The Lower South in American History, 221.


1062 Amendments to the Constitution of North Carolina, Proposed by the Convention of 1875, and the Constitution as it Will Read as Proposed to Be Amended (Raleigh: Josiah Turner, Public Printer and Binder, 1875).
The trend was similar across the South. Neither racist violence, nor the rising conservative political tide, stopped in 1872. Southern states steadily cast out Republican governors and legislatures, often aided by campaigns of violence committed with far less secrecy than the Klan. Conservatives ratified new state constitutions that reversed many of the democratizing changes passed during Congressional Reconstruction. Tennessee, where the Klan originated, had redrafted its constitution under conservative control in 1870.

In South Carolina, the 1876 election was disputed by Democrats, who seized power behind a widespread campaign of violence and intimidation by armed clubs of conservative white men known as Red Shirts. They installed Wade Hampton, former Confederate general, as governor. Nationally, Republican Rutherford B. Hayes won the presidency in a messy election thrown to the House of Representatives. In early 1877, the few remaining troops were removed from the South. That year, Robert Wallace Shand, wrote his father saying “But now the dark clouds have rolled away, and all is bright and promising. Can it be, that we are too hopeful? Will poverty keep our people down for many years yet to come?”1063 Reconstruction was over.

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Many Klansmen thrived after Reconstruction. Randolph Abbott Shotwell was a newspaper editor in Raleigh in 1880.1064 Iredell Jones became a freemason and a member of a Confederate Veterans’ association, and also served on the Board of Regents for the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum for nearly twenty years.1065 His brother Johnston was appointed Adjutant General for the North Carolina militia in 1877, serving as such for twelve years. He

1063 Robert Wallace Shand to Peter J. Shand, April 15, 1877, Shand Family Papers, SCL.
1064 1880 Census, Roll 984, Page 322D, District 269, Image 0764.
1065 Hemphill, Men of Mark in South Carolina, Vol. 3, 262-263. Also Columbia South Carolina City Directory 1891, , 20; Columbia South Carolina City Directory 1903, 26.
worked for two Democratic newspapers and served two years in the North Carolina state
classisature (where in 1885 he proposed the legislation that codified the state flag into its current
form). He moved to California in 1889 to begin a law practice, and served as the district
attorney for San Diego and then the assistant district attorney for Los Angeles. James L.
Hunter was the sheriff of Alamance County in 1880, while David Schenck was the judge of
North Carolina’s sixth district. The foxes controlled the henhouse.

The Klan enjoyed success in its ideological goals. The racial oppression of Jim Crow
segregation that developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had far more in
common with the kind of racial hierarchy that Klansmen desired than it did with the earlier
oppression of slavery. Jim Crow’s ideological justifications more closely matched the narratives
used to defend Klan violence than the proslavery ideology that dominated white southern
thinking and led to secession in 1860.

Klansmen did not wholesale set the agenda for Jim Crow. For one, segregation had deep
roots in the North. Most northern states abolished slavery early in the nineteenth century, but
many white Americans in the North had no desire to establish equality with former slaves.
Consequently, northern states passed laws establishing political disfranchisement of and separate
public accommodations for African Americans much earlier than southern states. Additionally,
Jim Crow did not immediately develop after the reversal of Jim Crow. African Americans

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307.
1068 1880 Census, Roll 950, Page 80A, District 006, Image 162; 1880 Census, Roll 970, Page 311C, District 102,
Image 0624.
remained involved in southern politics—in increasingly circumscribed ways—throughout the 1880s and for many years of the 1890s.1069

Most importantly, sustained activism from African Americans mitigated some of the worst oppression of segregation. Through both arguing against and working within a system predicated upon the fiction that separate could be equal, African Americans built their own businesses and robust institutions of higher learning and carved out a space to build a middle class. Urban spaces provided both anonymity and myriad economic resources for black southerners to challenge some of the strictures of Jim Crow. In the rural context, a black desire to work for shares instead of wages led to the development of sharecropping. Though it all too often evolved into a system of debt peonage, sharecropping grew out of compromises forged by both white planters and black (and often white) tenant farmers. And the rural South provided a space of more open, personal relationships that could be used to occasionally mitigate the oppression of Jim Crow. Jim Crow was suffused with and built upon violence, and dedicated to enforcing the political, economic, and social inferiority of African Americans, but it could not deny their humanity nor stop their activism.1070

But in the immediate aftermath of emancipation, it is surprising that Klansmen’s racial ideology so largely paralleled and influenced the racial ideology of Jim Crow segregation, rather than that of slavery. Proslavery ideology, by the middle of the nineteenth century, had coalesced

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1069 Those years formed the crux of C. Vann Woodward’s argument about the strength of alternatives to the development of segregation in the South; were the new racial hierarchy of Jim Crow predestined, he implicitly argued, it would have arisen the moment federal troops were removed from the South. See Strange Career, and Cell, The Highest Stage of White Supremacy, 82-102.

around two critical points: that slavery was an unambiguous good both for white and black Americans, and that slavery must expand in order to survive. Proslavery white Americans did not simply defend the institution as an economic necessity, they argued that it had to expand and endure for the benefit of all Americans. They argued that slavery elevated and protected slaves no less than it benefited white planters. That ideology fed national expansion through manifest destiny and underlay the push for ensuring all new national territory legalized slavery.\textsuperscript{1071}

Significantly, members of the Ku Klux Klan did not call for the reestablishment and perpetuation of slavery. Even though the Black Codes passed in the first years of Reconstruction attempted to create a system of indentured servitude for petty crimes, there were few other sustained efforts to recreate the institution of slavery on a grand scale. And Klansmen did not argue that the violence they committed was in the best interest of childlike African Americans who needed the protection of white owners. Instead, they used vigilante violence against both white and black southerners in order to outline a new code of racial etiquette. Later apologists were in some ways more angered by the actions of white Americans. One declared that

\begin{quote}
There might be some excuse for the negro, ignorant, his freedom suddenly thrust upon him, and crazed by a sudden elevation to power, but for these depraved whites, who proved that a white skin does not always mean a white man, there was no possible excuse. They made themselves the lowest of the low, and deserving of the contempt in which they were held by all, even the negroes themselves.\textsuperscript{1072}
\end{quote}

Such vituperation shows how, to Klansmen, white men who supported equality sacrificed their masculinity as well as the privileges that whiteness was to grant them amongst other whites.\textsuperscript{1073}


\textsuperscript{1072} Rose, \textit{The Ku Klux Klan or Invisible Empire}, 31.

\textsuperscript{1073} Jane Dailey has explored how Democrats in 1880s Virginia “insisted that the categories of ‘white man’ and ‘Democrat’ were coterminous and exclusive,” in \textit{Before Jim Crow}, 14.
Klan violence was based upon the desire to cast off Republican political control no less than to simply remove African Americans from the political sphere. Klansmen were cognizant of the fact that black people were citizens, and the violence they used within the political sphere was not intended to turn back time. Klansmen worked to disfranchise black voters, but they also sought to remove any politicians, white or black, who supported black equality. They targeted Republican revenue agents and other agents of the Republican power establishment. And at the same time, they and their conservative allies denied that Klan violence was political in nature, seeking to obscure their goals and reflecting their desire to narrow what was considered political.

Similarly, Klansmen reacted to new black institutions like churches, schools, and militias by seeking not to reestablish white paternal control, but to undermine or destroy black communities. Klansmen wanted a world where African Americans were socially and economically inferior outside of the bonds of slavery. Klansmen used vigilante violence to undermine black equality before the law and to depict African Americans as predisposed to criminal behavior—though they themselves were criminals.

Southern households had been structured around the supposed mastery of white men and their paternal power. With slavery gone, white southern men could not wield the same power they had, and Reconstruction threatened their authority over white women and children just as it destroyed their ability to dictate the lives of those they had enslaved. But Klansmen did not want to just restore the same white mastery of slavery. They sought to use their manliness to practice vigilant violence to build a racial hierarchy where black and white lived separately. Klan violence was practiced by some white men who had not previously been slave owners, and was targeted against people who even slave owners had not been sanctioned to attack during slavery: white southerners or the black workers and former slaves of other white southerners.
Vigilante violence was key to the new world Klansmen were building. Klansmen sought to create a society wherein all white men could exercise violence against any person, white or black, who sought to strengthen or enrich African Americans, individually or communally. Slavery had been grounded in and secured through violence, but it was the violence of owner against enslaved person, not free citizen against free citizen. The violence of the Klan would be appropriated and adopted by Red Shirts and White Cappers and lynch mobs, as Klan violence had introduced and inoculated white southerners to the practice of using vigilante violence to police rules of racial behavior.

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Klansmen could be aggressive and vindictive even in their personal writings and correspondence. The anger behind their words bled through the page. They railed against an imagined threat posed by freed African Americans and swore that the violence they committed was necessary for protecting white society. They excused every thing Klansmen committed and condemned anything African Americans and particularly white Republicans did. A similar anger or fear pervaded their writings about things unrelated to the politics of Reconstruction. Some Klansmen almost seem to have been predisposed to racial hatred and violence.

Other Klansmen were more measured in their words. They would speak lovingly of their families, support their friends, and show circumspection about the violence tearing apart the South in which they were engaged. And conservative observers who did not join the Klan, including their wives and female friends, could be even more cautious or ambivalent. While simultaneously supporting the violence Klansmen were committing and constructing narrative justifications for it that worked to reconfigure racial oppression to the postemancipation South, a handful of southern white conservatives were not—in tone—vindictive or conspicuously hateful.
Given the homogeneity and anonymity that Klansmen projected with their robes and hoods, and given the extent to which both critics and defenders asserted that all Klansmen were the same, that they were in fact not all identical remains an important lesson. But though Klansmen were white men of varying backgrounds, and though it is critically important to remember the differences between them, it is also important to look at what bound them together under the auspices of the Ku Klux Klan.

We must consider their common goals especially because Klan violence and white conservative rhetorical campaigns worked hand in glove to silence and subjugate African Americans and build a less democratic nation despite the social and political freedoms gained through war and Reconstruction. Those campaigns spanned many arenas: the home, local communities, the southern economy, and national, state, and local politics. The work that Klansmen undertook was much larger than knee-jerk anger or a deep-seated antipathy to people with dark skin. It was a relatively sophisticated political project, developed—at times haphazardly—through violence and terror, mobilized by a regional, secret organization of white southern men across the class spectrum.

America in 1870 looked nothing like it had in 1860. The Civil War had killed slavery and remade the United States. Rapid industrialization coincided with the wholesale slaughter of the war, wherein over a million men were killed or wounded. Women North and South saw new economic and social opportunities during and after the war. The relationship between the states and the federal government was radically reshaped. And the enfranchisement of African Americans radically opened American politics to participation by people the political system previously had been explicitly designed to exclude.
The Civil War also changed how Americans, in the North and South, thought about race. Even among conservative white southerners dedicated to preserving a wide slate of privileges their whiteness conferred, the Civil War altered how they wanted race to function politically and socially. Rather than a simplistic, timeless antipathy to black people, racism in America shifted in its underlying ideologies and manifestations. Slavery was gone. The white supremacy of segregation emerged and matured. Central to that shift was the work of the men in the Ku Klux Klan, who hid themselves behind mask and hood to assert that white men could visit vigilante violence upon anyone working for racial equality.

It is through learning about the people rightfully considered the most racist in American history that we learn something very important about how racism functioned in nineteenth-century America. When confronted with legal and political systems designed to stop or limit racism, white Americans who wished to retain the privileges and power that an older system of racial oppression had provided found ways to reconfigure the scope of and justifications for racism. White southerners who wanted to re-establish a system of white solidarity and racial oppression after slavery had been destroyed used vigilante violence to define new political, economic, social, and personal rules of racial behavior in order to develop a new, and, they hoped, enduring hierarchy that again placed white over black. They did so in the face of sustained black activism, considerable white support for black political equality, and established laws that were supposed to ensure that African Americans had access to political power and civil rights. And the Klansmen’s efforts were tragically successful, especially in developing the new form of racial oppression known as white supremacy. Because it existed in opposition to contemporary laws and policies, the lasting physical, political, and ideological impacts of the
violence of the Ku Klux Klan ought to remain frightening to those of us interested in using political means to craft a more equitable, equalitarian, and democratic world.
APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To catalog and analyze the many Klansmen my research uncovered, as well as the victims they attacked and the violence they committed, in the summer of 2009 I designed and built a relational electronic database using OpenOffice Base, an open-source software program similar to Microsoft Access. I was greatly aided by Jennifer Doty, a research librarian in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina. The database electronically links rosters of Klan members and victims with fields for raids, incidents of violence, and data from the 1860, 1870, and 1880 federal censuses.

Klansmen were added to the database when there was strong evidence that they had been sworn into the order. In some instances the case for their active participation was simple, such as men whose names were included in the membership roll of the Chester Conservative Clan, or men who admitted either contemporarily or in later accounts that they had joined. In other instances, including members could be a little trickier. Those named by victims or observers in federal trials were included even if no sources about what those men thought of participation in the Klan was extant. Similarly, men arrested by the federal investigation were included even if they pled not guilty or denied their involvement. Also included in the database were those men who admitted joining the Klan but who renounced their membership, served as witnesses in the federal trials, or claimed that they only joined because pressured by acquaintances. A handful of men arrested in the investigations were released because they were falsely identified or arrested, and those men were not included.

This approach risked including some white southerners who were less committed to the Klan’s work, or those who had never had joined it. It is possible—though, as detailed throughout this dissertation, quite unlikely—that some of the men named or arrested in the federal
investigation as Klansmen were not, in fact, active members. David Schenck, as discussed in
Chapter 3, is representative of a type of man about whom the existing evidence is perhaps
contradictory. He claimed he did not support the violence and was not an active member; the
evidence against him came from other witnesses and the tenor of his racial beliefs, which
personally I find convincing.

But I chose to take a wider approach in collecting names for analysis for a variety of
reasons, not the least of which was taking a more conservative approach would have made
demographic analysis impossible. Very few Klansmen were forthright about their membership.
The roll of the Chester Conservative Clan is, I believe, the only document that currently exists
that was internal to the Klan wherein members openly signed their names. There are probably
fewer than one hundred men about whom there is absolutely no extant doubt that they
enthusiastically joined the Klan.

Furthermore, those Klansmen who denied their membership did so both because they had
sworn secrecy when joining the order and because they feared prosecution. Frequently Klansmen
would claim that they never wore disguises or participated in raids—two of the activities made
illegal as part of the crackdown—but would sometimes admit that they had been sworn into the
order. Perhaps most importantly, that there might have been a range of involvement by white
southerners in the Klan also matches a central argument of this dissertation: the Klan drew from
a wide range of the white male southern population. Including those men who attended merely a
meeting or two, or were just strongly suspected by their neighbors of having done so, is critical
for accurately capturing the kinds of men who made up the backbone of the Klan.

Victims of Klan violence posed a different challenge for the database because so very
many were unnamed. When I encountered accounts of specific, more verifiable attacks upon
unnamed victims I would include them as John or Jane Does. Inclusion usually depended upon the amount of specific information. For example, Essic Harris testified that one of his black female neighbors was raped, thus she was included in the database without a name; when other witnesses testified that Klansmen raped several women in their home counties, those victims were not included because the information was vague and not quantifiable.

The available sources, including most notably lists of arrested Klansmen that the district attorneys for the Carolinas separately forwarded to the Attorney General, contained names of nearly 1,200 Klansmen that could be included in the database. Instead of researching all of those names in the federal census reports that book-ended Reconstruction (1860, 1870, and 1880, and the 1860 slave schedules), I chose to analyze a representative sample of 125 Klansmen (roughly 10% of known members). At first I used the online database of census reports compiled by HeritageQuest.com, but I switched to Ancestry.com at some point because it had a more accurate and complete search function.

The sample used for the census data drew from broad swaths both of the kind of men who joined the Klan as well as from different areas that had Klan activity. At least 20 Klansmen from each area (piedmont, down east, and mountain North Carolina, upcountry South Carolina) that saw Klan violence were included in the sample, as well as at least 5 each from more isolated counties that saw flashes of Klan violence (like Sampson County, North Carolina or Sumter County, South Carolina). It included men who were arrested as well as those who escaped arrest, men about whom there was substantial qualitative data, and men about whom little else was known other than their name. Men were sometimes chosen for inclusion if their names were slightly unusual. For example, I could reasonably be assured that a Philander Moore from York County was the Klansman I was looking for, whereas there might be several men named John
Smith in a county and it could be impossible to identify the one who had joined the Klan. Picking the right person in the census for inclusion could be difficult, so as much as possible I used corroborating evidence, such as the name of a hometown, a profession, or a relative to ensure that the men located in the census were the Klansmen I had identified. When I could not be reasonably confident that a name in the census was a Klansman, I did not include him.

Such uncertainty, along with the spotty and incomplete census reports, led to many Klansmen who could not be located in the census. The 1870 census in particular was fraught with errors, but those of 1860 and 1880 were not pristine, either. Interestingly, though it is possible that members who could not be identified in the census were more likely to live on the margins of southern society, they often were elites. As one example, Joseph Banks Lyle was a prominent Democrat from the South Carolina upcountry and also an admitted Klansman. As previously detailed, Lyle was not a fringe member of southern society, but was a schoolteacher and prominent educator. Despite his prominence, he could not be positively identified in the 1860, 1870, or 1880 censuses.1074

In all, 24 men, or nearly 20%, of the overall sample could not be positively identified in any federal census reports. Fifty-two percent of Klansmen were found in all three census reports. Seventy-eight percent of Klansmen from the sample were found in the 1860 census, 81% in the 1870 census, and 64% in the 1880. Part of the reason for the high number of people who could not be identified was likely a result of differences in the spelling of their names. Those people who were identified through oral testimony, for example, were less likely to be identified in census searches than those whose names were recorded in letters or arrest reports. The 1880 census generated fewer results partially because some Klansmen had died or fled (though even

1074 There are several “Joseph Lyles” in the South Carolina upcountry in 1860, but none with the correct age; there are also a “James” a “Jno.” And in the 1870 census, though James and John are again locatable, there is no Joseph.
those who left the Carolinas could occasionally be identified in other states), but more likely because the 1880 census did not include a second town name in the way that the 1860 and 1870 census had, and so positively identifying a Klansman within one county proved slightly more difficult.

Results from a preliminary analysis that drew from less than 80 Klansmen netted data nearly identical to the full sample, signaling that the sample can be considered reasonably representative of the men known or suspected of having been members of the Reconstruction Klan. The median age of Klansmen from 1870 in the earlier sample, for example, was 29, exactly the figure from the full sample. Though I have not counted every Klansmen in the census (an impossible undertaking), I am confident that the quantitative data from this dataset is representative of the larger trends of Klan membership.

To compare those Klansmen with white southern men who had not joined the Klan, I used a random sample of white men from the Carolinas from the same census reports generated by the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) from the Minnesota Population Center at the University of Minnesota. This database—an invaluable resource—generates a random 1% sample of the population from each federal census report, which can be limited by a variety of factors, including state, age, race, and sex. Using STATA, a statistical software program, that dataset could be analyzed in the same ways I analyzed the sample of Klansmen. After limiting the dataset to white men, to ensure they had a similar age range as Klansmen (to prevent comparing them to infants or elderly men), I dropped men from each sample who exceeded the minimum or maximum years of Klansmen from the federal censuses. For 1860, that resulted in 3,319 observations of white men in North and South Carolina over age of 7 but under 52. For 1870, the sample generated 2,634 white men between 16 and 63. And for 1880, there were 2,024
men between 26 and 64. Each of those samples resulted in datasets of men of nearly the same median age as Klansmen from the same years, ensuring a useful comparison. Though this data was drawn from across the Carolinas, and thus included counties that saw no Klan activity, they provided a remarkably detailed portrait of white men in the Carolinas regardless of political party—the group from which Klansmen could have drawn its membership.

Together, these datasets provided a rich comparison between men who joined the Klan and ordinary white Carolinians. Eventually my roster of victims of Klan violence can be analyzed in the same way that Klan members were. The quantitative analysis in this dissertation is not a complete reckoning of either all the men who joined the Klan or all of the victims they attacked. Neither can it exist outside of the qualitative analysis that accompanies it, without which there would be no context for it. This demographic analysis of Klansmen, however, is about as accurate a picture as can be drawn from the scattered and diffuse primary sources about the men who joined the Ku Klux Klan in the nineteenth century.
APPENDIX B: COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS

The following tables illustrate that areas that saw Klan violence had no discernible demographic trends between 1860 and 1870. For example, whereas South Carolina had a black majority, North Carolina had had a white majority, both of which that essentially remained stable between 1860 and 1870. Whereas South Carolina saw only a tiny overall population growth, North Carolina gained nearly 8% population despite the destruction of the Civil War.

Similarly, the individual counties that saw Klan violence could have sizeable black majorities (like Jones and Caswell in North Carolina; Abbeville, Chester, Newberry, and Sumter in South Carolina), essentially even racial breakdowns (Lenoir in North Carolina and York in South Carolina), or large white majorities (Alamance, Chatham, Rutherford, Lincoln, or Cleveland— with an 84% white population—in North Carolina; Spartanburg in South Carolina). Similarly, the counties ranged the gamut from losing population between 1860 to 1870 (like Jones in North Carolina, which lost nearly 13% of its overall population) to seeing substantial population growth (like York in South Carolina, which had 13% growth). And some saw their racial compositions stay stable while others changed (like Orange in North Carolina, which saw an increase in its black population of 13% while its white population decreased by 2%).

Were the demographics of a particular county or state a causative aspect of Klan violence, these demographic figures would instead have had far more visible patterns. Instead, they further underscored the extent to which the organization of the Klan itself was determinate of Klan violence and the extent to which participation in the Klan was driven by the ideology of white conservative southerners, rather than the racial environment in which they lived.

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Table B.1 – North Carolina counties with Klan activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1860 Total</th>
<th>1860 White</th>
<th>1860 Black</th>
<th>1870 Total</th>
<th>1870 White</th>
<th>1870 Black</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>992,622</td>
<td>629,942</td>
<td>361,522</td>
<td>1,071,361</td>
<td>678,470</td>
<td>391,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>(63.5%)</td>
<td>(63.5%)</td>
<td>(36.4%)</td>
<td>(63.3%)</td>
<td>(63.6%)</td>
<td>(36.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[331,059 slave, 30,463 free]</td>
<td>[331,059 slave, 30,463 free]</td>
<td>[331,059 slave, 30,463 free]</td>
<td>[331,059 slave, 30,463 free]</td>
<td>[331,059 slave, 30,463 free]</td>
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<td>Alamance</td>
<td>11,852</td>
<td>7,985</td>
<td>3,867</td>
<td>11,874</td>
<td>8,234</td>
<td>3,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(67%)</td>
<td>(67%)</td>
<td>(32.6%)</td>
<td>(67%)</td>
<td>(67%)</td>
<td>(67%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>[3,445 slave, 422 free]</td>
<td>[3,445 slave, 422 free]</td>
<td>[3,445 slave, 422 free]</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caswell</td>
<td>16,215</td>
<td>6,578</td>
<td>9,637</td>
<td>16,081</td>
<td>6,587</td>
<td>9,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(40.6%)</td>
<td>(40.6%)</td>
<td>(59.4%)</td>
<td>(41%)</td>
<td>(41%)</td>
<td>(59%)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>[9,355 slave, 282 free]</td>
<td>[9,355 slave, 282 free]</td>
<td>[9,355 slave, 282 free]</td>
<td>[9,355 slave, 282 free]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
<td>19,101</td>
<td>12,549</td>
<td>6,552</td>
<td>19,723</td>
<td>12,893</td>
<td>6,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(65.7%)</td>
<td>(65.7%)</td>
<td>(34.3%)</td>
<td>(65.4%)</td>
<td>(65.4%)</td>
<td>(34.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>[6,246 slave, 306 free]</td>
<td>[6,246 slave, 306 free]</td>
<td>[6,246 slave, 306 free]</td>
<td>[6,246 slave, 306 free]</td>
<td>[6,246 slave, 306 free]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>12,348</td>
<td>10,108</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>12,696</td>
<td>10,633</td>
<td>6,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(81.9%)</td>
<td>(81.9%)</td>
<td>(18.6%)</td>
<td>(83.8%)</td>
<td>(83.8%)</td>
<td>(46.9%)</td>
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<td>[2,131 slave, 169 free]</td>
<td>[2,131 slave, 169 free]</td>
<td>[2,131 slave, 169 free]</td>
<td>[2,131 slave, 169 free]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>5,730</td>
<td>2,204</td>
<td>3,526</td>
<td>5,002</td>
<td>2,346</td>
<td>2,656</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38.5%)</td>
<td>(38.5%)</td>
<td>(61.5%)</td>
<td>(49.2%)</td>
<td>(49.2%)</td>
<td>(53.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>[3,413 slave, 113 free]</td>
<td>[3,413 slave, 113 free]</td>
<td>[3,413 slave, 113 free]</td>
<td>[3,413 slave, 113 free]</td>
<td>[3,413 slave, 113 free]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenoir</td>
<td>10,220</td>
<td>4,902</td>
<td>5,318</td>
<td>10,434</td>
<td>4,902</td>
<td>5,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(48%)</td>
<td>(48%)</td>
<td>(52%)</td>
<td>(47%)</td>
<td>(47%)</td>
<td>(53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[5,140 slave, 178 free]</td>
<td>[5,140 slave, 178 free]</td>
<td>[5,140 slave, 178 free]</td>
<td>[5,140 slave, 178 free]</td>
<td>[5,140 slave, 178 free]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>8,195</td>
<td>5,999</td>
<td>2,196</td>
<td>9,573</td>
<td>6,814</td>
<td>2,759</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(73.2%)</td>
<td>(73.2%)</td>
<td>(26.8%)</td>
<td>(71.2%)</td>
<td>(71.2%)</td>
<td>(28.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>[2,115 slave, 81 free]</td>
<td>[2,115 slave, 81 free]</td>
<td>[2,115 slave, 81 free]</td>
<td>[2,115 slave, 81 free]</td>
<td>[2,115 slave, 81 free]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>16,947</td>
<td>11,311</td>
<td>5,636</td>
<td>17,505</td>
<td>11,087</td>
<td>6,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(66.7%)</td>
<td>(66.7%)</td>
<td>(33.3%)</td>
<td>(63.3%)</td>
<td>(63.3%)</td>
<td>(36.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[5,108 slave, 528 free]</td>
<td>[5,108 slave, 528 free]</td>
<td>[5,108 slave, 528 free]</td>
<td>[5,108 slave, 528 free]</td>
<td>[5,108 slave, 528 free]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutherford</td>
<td>11,573</td>
<td>9,059</td>
<td>2,514</td>
<td>13,121</td>
<td>10,479</td>
<td>2,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(78.3%)</td>
<td>(78.3%)</td>
<td>(21.7%)</td>
<td>(79.9%)</td>
<td>(79.9%)</td>
<td>(20.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[2,391 slave, 123 free]</td>
<td>[2,391 slave, 123 free]</td>
<td>[2,391 slave, 123 free]</td>
<td>[2,391 slave, 123 free]</td>
<td>[2,391 slave, 123 free]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.2 – South Carolina Counties with Klan Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>1860 Total</th>
<th>1860 White</th>
<th>1860 Black</th>
<th>1870 Total</th>
<th>1870 White</th>
<th>1870 Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina Statewide</td>
<td>703,708</td>
<td>291,300 (41.4%)</td>
<td>412,320 (58.6%) [402,406 slave, 9,914 free]</td>
<td>705,606 – increase of 1,898 (+0.27%)</td>
<td>289,667 (41.0%) – decrease of 1,633 (-0.56%)</td>
<td>415,814 (58.9%) – increase of 3,494 (+0.85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbeville</td>
<td>32,385</td>
<td>11,516 (35.6%)</td>
<td>20,869 (64.4%) [20,502 slave, 367 free]</td>
<td>31,120 – decrease of 1,265 (-3.9%)</td>
<td>10,916 (35.0%) – decrease of 600 (-5.2%)</td>
<td>20,213 (65%) – decrease of 656 (-3.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester</td>
<td>18,122</td>
<td>7,096 (39.2%)</td>
<td>10,964 (60.5%) [10,808 slave, 156 free]</td>
<td>18,805 – increase of 683 (+3.8%)</td>
<td>6,290 (33.4%) – decrease of 806 (-4.4%)</td>
<td>12,513 (66.5%) – increase of 1,549 (+14.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurens</td>
<td>23,858</td>
<td>10,529 (44.1%)</td>
<td>13,329 (55.9%) [13,200 slave, 129 free]</td>
<td>22,536 – decrease of 1,322 (-5.5%)</td>
<td>9,904 (43.9%) – decrease of 625 (-5.9%)</td>
<td>12,632 (56%) – decrease of 697 (-5.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newberry</td>
<td>20,879</td>
<td>7,000 (33.5%)</td>
<td>13,879 (66.5%) [13,695 slave, 184 free]</td>
<td>20,775 – decrease of 104 (-0.5%)</td>
<td>7,457 (35.9%) – increase of 457 (+6.5%)</td>
<td>13,318 (64.1%) – decrease of 561 (-4.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spartanburg</td>
<td>26,919</td>
<td>18,537 (68.9%)</td>
<td>8,382 (31.1%) [8,240 slave, 142 free]</td>
<td>25,784 – decrease of 1135 (-4.2%)</td>
<td>17,375 (67.4%) – decrease of 1162 (-6.3%)</td>
<td>8,408 (32.6%) – increase of 26 (+0.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumter</td>
<td>23,859</td>
<td>6,857 (28.7%)</td>
<td>17,002 (71.2%) [16,682 slave, 320 free]</td>
<td>25,268 – increase of 1,409 (+5.9%)</td>
<td>7,463 (29.5%) – increase of 606 (+8.8%)</td>
<td>17,805 (70.4%) – increase of 803 (+4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>19,635</td>
<td>8,670 (44.1%)</td>
<td>10,965 (55.8%) [10,801 slave, 164 free]</td>
<td>19,248 – decrease of 387 (-2.0%)</td>
<td>8,718 (45.3%) – increase of 48 (+0.6%)</td>
<td>10,530 (54.7%) – decrease of 435 (-4.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York</td>
<td>21,502</td>
<td>11,329 (52.7%)</td>
<td>10,173 (47.3%) [9,984 slave, 189 free]</td>
<td>24,286 – increase of 2,784 (+12.9%)</td>
<td>12,114 (49.9%) – increase of 785 (+6.9%)</td>
<td>12,167 (50.1%) – increase of 1,194 (+19.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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