

# FEATURES

## The KKK: A Struggle for Survival in North Carolina

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On the outskirts of a Greensboro cornfield a huge bonfire once blazed. A phonograph which had been playing "Old Rugged Cross" now played a militant version of "Dixie." Later this tune was changed to a chorus of the U.S. National Anthem.

"This is a Christian organization," one man soon exclaimed. The masses flocked in white-hooded robes, called him a "Grand Dragon." "We admit that we do not let niggers, Catholics or Jews into our membership. It's not that we have anything against the niggers, not that we are opposed to the Jew, not that we hate the Catholics, but this is a Christian organization, made up of Christian people."

This organization—the Ku Klux Klan—has faced much opposition and criticism throughout the years. Yet, despite all the adversity encountered since its creation, the Klan in North Carolina, and most other states, still survives.

The Ku Klux, as the KKK was originally called, was formed in 1897 at a convention in Nashville, Tenn., and it was introduced into North Carolina in 1898. Patriotism and Christianity preeminently became the moving principles of the Knights of the KKK. The flag, the Constitution and the Holy Bible became the keystone of Klan principles.

The Klan has become most widely known because of its extreme support of the theory of white supremacy. KKK members have continuously argued that whites are superior while Catholics, Jews, Blacks and other non-white races and sects are inferior.

"Someone once asked me if I thought the nigger is inferior," an N.C. Klan leader of the late sixties, Robert Sheldren, once said. "You know what I told him? 'Yeah.'"

A report by the House Un-American Activities Committee released in 1965 showed that there were more than 100 local Klan units scattered in eastern counties and around the large piedmont cities of North Carolina. An on-again-off-again membership was said to have ranged from a half-dozen in some local units to as many as 70 in others.

The KKK today is reported to have a group of leaders composed of former housepainters, traveling salesmen, members of older Klan units, once defunct insurance agents and convicted gamblers. Reports also say that it has a fundraising technique built around the familiar cornfield rally, complete with burning cross and a pitch for money to augment a team of "organizers" who compose the staff of the "Grand Dragon."

Yet, the path of the Klan hasn't been made any easier by government officials of North Carolina. One of the most advent anti-Klanners, for example, was former Gov. Dan K. Moore.

"I am opposed to the Ku Klux Klan. It is a sorry organization. It has no place in North Carolina. It stirs up trouble, it stirs up bitterness, it stirs up hate," Moore said to a Daily Reflector reporter in 1967.

He repeated, "I am unalterably opposed to the Ku Klux Klan. It has no place in North Carolina."

One of the largest campaigns against KKK activity in the state was staged by the Raleigh Ministerial Association, which in 1950 was responsible for the capital

city's anti-masking ordinance. The association attacked the Klan on four points, charging that the KKK promotes racial and religious bigotry; that it contradicts the Christian principles of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; that it presumes to administer justice outside the law; and that it violates the rights and freedom of individuals under our democratic system of government.

Immediately following this attack the Klan retaliated, saying the ministers had forsaken their duties. One Klan leader was reported as saying, "These vain ones, back scratching, compromising, pussy footin', bermuda-short wearing breachers, that say that God intended for the races to mix are hypocrites."

Numerous measures have been taken to halt Klan activities throughout North Carolina. The state has adopted an anti-masking ordinance similar to the one passed in Raleigh in 1950.

Section 1 of Raleigh's anti-masking ordinance states, "The City Council expressly declares that public appearances, whether in motor vehicles or otherwise, of men who are masked or hooded and unidentifiable threaten the supremacy of the law and cannot be permitted in the city of Raleigh."

While this ordinance does not stop groups from parading around towns burning crosses if they are unmasked, it still has slowed down such occurrences. As former Raleigh Mayor P.D. Snipes said, "As long as they're unmasked, then we'll at least know who they are."

Newspapers, such as the Durham Morning Sun, readily supported such ordinances. An editorial in the Sun following passage of the Raleigh city ordinance stated, "Men who conceal their identity and masquerade behind masks are always mischief makers, if not worse than mischief makers. Such actions should always be illegal."

Many people thought for sure that the Klan would die in North Carolina after the adoption of legal measures as the anti-masking ordinance. To the contrary, more recent activities indicate that there may be a resurgence of Klan activities in the state.

The first of many such activities was the Klan "walkabout" in Durham in 1973. This parade down a Durham sidewalk was a preview to a mass meeting held on a field later that evening. The crowd that gathered for the parade "laughed not in contempt or derision," reported Henry Frailie, a New York Times Magazine writer, "but simply at the forlorn joke of it all."

In response to the jeering crowd of both Blacks and whites, P.F. Ellis, a Durham Klan leader, exclaimed, "If I had nigger blood in me, I'd cut it out." To photographers he said, "Go on, take a picture of me. I'm not ashamed to be a white man."

One of the largest gatherings of people to hear a KKK speaker in recent years occurred on the evening of Jan. 16, 1975 in Memorial Hall on the campus of UNC-Chapel Hill. While many groups had announced plans to protest the speech, such as the United Farm Workers and the New American Movement, the campus' Black Student Movement (BSM) had said that it was opposed to the speech but was not planning an organized protest.

On the night of the speech, however,

approximately 200 to 250 black students marched from South Campus of the University to Memorial Hall, where the Klan National Information Director David Ernest Duke was to give his speech. But Duke was unable to give his presentation as each time he approached the microphone the Black students yelled chants of "Power to the People."

Dean of Student Affairs Donald Boulton, Chancellor N. Ferebee Taylor and Student Body President Marcus Williams, a black student, were all called to the scene to try to persuade the protestors to go home. These attempts failed, however, and about 2,000 anxious people left the auditorium with mixed reactions as to whether student fees should have been spent to pay for a speaker of the KKK.

At a reception in the Morehead Planetarium after his aborted appearance, Duke gave the speech he said he would have given in Memorial Hall. Duke commented, "I believe in the white people. We have never been defeated and we will not all this time."

"As long as I have blood in my body and a breath of air in my lungs, I shall see to it that this country becomes a nation for my people, for whom it was intended. There was not one Black or Jew who wrote or signed the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution. In fact, the First Article of the Constitution equates the Negro as three-fifths of a person. This is what our founding fathers felt. . . The founding fathers of the country were racists. This country was built on racism."

The next year was a fairly quiet one for the Klan. There were few reported mass meetings, rallies and marches. The cross-burnings seemed to have become a thing of the past.

With the onset of 1977, the Klan took on a new vitality. Early in the year it staged a walkabout in Siler City. During the week of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) basketball tournament in Greensboro, the Klan reportedly had yet another march. Several witnesses have reported seeing cross-burnings in both Raleigh and Durham.

One of the most direct threats from the KKK in 1977 again occurred on the campus of UNC-CH. Two Black students, both BSM members, reportedly received threats from the Klan in the form of letters, phone calls and racial slurs on the doors of their

dorm rooms. One of the letters, in part, read:

Dear Niggers:

We hope you are presently doing fine, because in the next few weeks you will be beaten on, raped, cut up and other nice things. We would like to congratulate (sic) you on your selection by our outstanding organization to receive these honors. . .

What is the future of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States? Is it really dying out in North Carolina?

To be eligible for membership in this "all-American order," as it has been called, one must have been born in the U.S., of white parentage, be over 18 years of age, and of the Protestant Christian faith. Even though the majority of Americans meet these qualifications, membership in the KKK has steadily decreased.

In 1923, the North Carolina Imperial Wizard, H.W. Evans, set the KKK membership goal at 10,000,000. By 1944, the membership figure had reached 25,000, the largest number of Klansmen in the state this century. Since that time, the figure has been taking steep cuts.


A spokesperson for the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) said that as late as 1965 and 1966 there were an estimated 12,000 to 14,000 active Klansmen in the state. This figure dropped by the end of 1966 to 600 hardcore members and 6000 members in general. In 1974, the FBI estimated the membership of the United Klans of America, by far the largest Klan in North Carolina had dropped to a meager 1,000 nationwide. Current membership figures were unavailable.

A spokesman for the FBI branch in Raleigh once warned that when the KKK's membership is at its lowest, it is at its most dangerous point. Then, he said, the members are what could be considered hardcore.

"It could continue to die," the FBI spokesman pointed out. "On the other hand, it could become more militant. It could become more vocal."

In newspapers and on television appearances, David Duke has denied rumors that the Klan is dying. He says, "It's growing especially on college campuses and urban areas. College students are becoming interested because they have been exposed to integration in high school and they know how it doesn't work."

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