

KLANWATCH director to speak at N.C. Central

The following article was first published in April 1982 after Williams' first year as KLANWATCH director.

Notes of a Klanwatcher

By Randall Williams

It's easy and relatively safe, in 1982, to hate the KKK, but explaining why an anti-Klan movement is necessary, and getting those in that movement to agree with the explanation, is less simple. After a year Klanwatching (a friend still calls us occasionally, asks: "Have you spotted any today?" then bursts into hysterical laughter), we taped a favorite photo to a door in the office. The picture depicts a serious young man, a member of a Canadian anti-Klan group, in mid-leap from the roof of a car, placard stick raised on high, about to smash the head of an equally serious young man who is a member of another anti-racist group. The supporting parts in the photo are played by several dozen members of these two groups, battling in a melee apparently provoked by a difference of opinion on how best to oppose the racism and violence of the Ku Klux Klan in British Columbia.

Looking at that photograph, we at KLANWATCH are apt to burst into hysterical laughter.

Part of the problem is that there are so many contradictions involved, and many questions about what author Stetson Kennedy calls the Bedsheet Brigade can be truthfully answered both "yes" and "no." We will look at other parts of the problem, but first, consider some of the contradictions.

No, there aren't enough Klansmen and they aren't well enough organized, right now, to pose the country any serious threat. Yes, you can still get hurt, killed or otherwise terrorized by the Klan if you're the "wrong" color or doing the "wrong" thing. Or if you happen to be married to California Klan leader Michael Mendonsa, who recently ended his wife's budding career in organized racism by blowing her apart with a shotgun.

Still another contradiction involves the recently widely publicized Klan recruitment of youth. No, the Klan Youth Corps is not experiencing a membership explosion similar to that of the Hitler Youth of the 1930s. Yes, the Klan today deliberately seeks out youth and involves them in rallies, demonstrations and training. And a startlingly high percentage of contemporary racist violence and harassment is committed by youngsters. Klan literature does show up in schools around the country. The stuff is available for the writing from three or four Klan publications and is advertised in gun and adventure magazines available at most grocery and drug stores.

Where Klan chapters exist, it should not surprise anyone when the sons and daughters of Klansmen say or do racist things or pass around literature in school. However, the Klan youth camps which were seen on television in 1980 and written about in *Rolling Stone* and other publications were largely spontaneous creations for the benefit of the press, and the kids in them were almost all the children of adult Klan members.

I think the Klan has definite allure for certain types of white children. Kids dwell on mystery, violence and sensationalism, and the Klan has all of that, especially as portrayed by much of the reporting on the subject today. Some kids—perhaps most of them, really—are raised with racism. Take a kid who already has all of that stuff running around in his head, who is at the age of rebellion, and who can't make the debate team (or, equally likely, is never encouraged to try), gets beat out by black kids on the basketball team, and sits sullenly in the back of the classroom—that kid is ripe for recruitment.

But even the strength of the adult Klan is a contradiction. It is not true that the Klan's membership is currently growing by leaps and bounds, though reporter after reporter dutifully licks his pencil point and records it when the local head cone confides, "Well, son, we don't discuss numbers, but we've got klaverns now in every county in this state and three new ones started last week." It is true that Klan membership today is the highest since the mid-1960s and that the growth was dramatic between 1975 and 1980. We at KLANWATCH believe the Klan's membership leveled off in 1981, though there is potential for more growth. Clearly, this potential is aggravated by the mean mood of the nation as a whole. It should be remembered that there are plenty of people in Washington doing more harm with ink pens than the Klan is with axe handles. Elsewhere, racist violence, whether committed by actual Klan members or not, is at a sickeningly high level, as is religious bigotry.

There is genuine reason to be concerned about these turns of events, all contradictions notwithstanding, especially when the leaders of the nation seem blind to the existence of the problems and the causes.

Which brings us to today's sermon topic. We can cuss, meet, march, legislate and litigate until the proverbial freezing-over of hell, but until we start thinking about Klansmen as people and consider how it is that we still have a society which spawns them, we're not going to whip the problem. This is not to say that the current educational campaigns against the Klan are no good, or that the prosecutions and civil lawsuits against criminal Klansmen do not deter other racist violence, or that outspoken stands against the Klan philosophy have no effect. All of these are vital and are largely responsible for the current disarray within the Klan ranks.

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The director of KLANWATCH, a group which monitors hate groups in the United States, will speak on "Myths and Realities of the New Klan in the 1980s" April 2 at 7:30 p.m. in the NCCU Health Science Building Auditorium.

Randall Williams will also present the academy award-winning documentary film, *THE KLAN—A LEGACY OF HATE IN AMERICA*, as part of the evening program.

KLANWATCH, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), works to curb Klan activity and racist violence through litigation, education, and monitoring.

Williams' appearance—sponsored by NCCU Media-Journalism, Continuing Education, and *The Campus Echo*—is free and open to the public.



Randall Williams

That day, Williams will also be speaking to media-journalism students at 10:40 a.m. in the Communication Building's Seminar Room on the problems reporters have when covering the Klan.

Williams, who has worked as a reporter and editor for different newspapers for over 10 years, uses his journalistic skills with KLANWATCH to help write and edit *Intelligence Report*, a periodical which reviews the activities of the Klan, neo-Nazi groups, and other racist organizations—publicizing crossburnings; arson and bombings; vandalism; shootings and assaults; legal actions; harassment; and KKK organizing.

KLANWATCH receives its funds from the SPLC, which in turn receives its funds from private donations. No governmental funds are involved.

While Williams has been the KLANWATCH director since 1981, his previous service has included serving as a board member of the Birmingham, Ala., American Civil Liberties Union and directing a planning project for a series of Civil Rights documentaries sponsored by the Southern Regional Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

THE CAMPUS ECHO

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The incident that eventually led to the founding of KLANWATCH. DECATUR, ALA.—May 26, 1979. One hundred twenty-five Klansmen break through police lines and prepare to attack a peaceful demonstration by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Later, the Southern Poverty Law Center was called in by the SCLC to defend a black man who had killed a Klansman during the confrontation.