

### HOMEWORK: Realities of Reconstruction (Part I)

**Background:** The Ku Klux Klan was originally organized in the winter of 1865-66 in Pulaski, Tennessee as a social club by six Confederate veterans. In the beginning, the Klan was a secret fraternity club rather than a terrorist organization. (Ku Klux was derived from the Greek "kuklos," meaning circle, and the English word clan.) The costume adopted by its members (disguises were quite common) was a mask and white robe and high conical pointed hat.

The Klan spread beyond Tennessee to every state in the South and included mayors, judges, and sheriffs as well as common criminals. The Klan systematically murdered black politicians and political leaders. It beat, whipped, and murdered thousands, and intimidated tens of thousands of others from voting. Blacks often tried to fight back, but they were outnumbered and outgunned. While the main targets of Klan wrath were the political and social leaders of the black community, blacks could be murdered for almost any reason. Klan activity ended by 1872 and disappeared until it was revived again in 1915.

#### Reading 1 - Testimony about the Ku Klux Klan

They stripped me of everything since I came (to Montgomery). My wife said they took a cow and a calf and my corn and my meat. She sent me word so. Mr. Maxwell is got my cow, so I understand. He lives about a mile from where I live. My wife had to hide the children out to keep them from perishing. They even took the church papers out of the trunk I had and all the wine and bottles and tumblers and everything. They took them all.

Q--What was the cause of these people taking offense at your church?

A--They got it into their minds that we were all too strong Republicans. They said we prayed too loud and preached too loud.

Q--What was the church worth?

A--Four or five hundred dollars, if not more.

Q--Was it built exclusively by the colored people?

A--Yes, sir, by our own labor.

Q--What effect has this had upon the colored people? Has it made them afraid to vote?

A--It appears so. They seem to not know what to do.

[CITATION: Henry Giles (testimony), in *The Trouble They Seen: The Story of Reconstruction in the Words of African Americans*, Dorothy Sterling, ed. (Garden City: Double Day & Co., 1976), 382.]

#### Reading 2 - List of KKK outrages in NC & MS

- The jail of Lenoir County broken open, and five men taken out, their throats cut, and their bodies thrown in Neuse river.
- The jail of Orange County broken open, and three men shot at, two escaped, but one was wounded, and died of his wound.
- The jail of Chatham County broken open and a United States prisoner released. He was in jail for violating the revenue law. He has not since been arrested.
- The Sheriff of Jones County and Colonel of Militia, shot and killed from behind a blind, in the open day, on the public highway. His death was decreed by a Ku Klux camp in the adjoining county of Lenoir. He was hated because he was a Northern man and a Republican.

- A colored man who was on horseback, in company with Sheriff Colgrove, was also shot and mortally wounded.
- The Colonel of the Militia of Jones County, and a Justice of the Peace, shot and killed in the open day while at work in his saw mill. A colored man with him, at the same time badly shot.
- A man named Grant shot and killed in Lenoir County, by order of a camp, because he threatened to divulge the secrets of the Kuklux.
- A man shot from the back of a horse in Lenoir County and killed.
- A colored man in Wayne shot in his own door and killed.
- The family of Daniel Blue, colored, murdered in Moore County. Blue was wounded and escaped. His wife was killed. She was heavy with child. His five other children were murdered, the house set on fire, and the bones of all found next morning.
- A colored man murdered in Harnett County.
- Two white men of the name of McLeod murdered in Cumberland. The men who murdered them had painted faces. The Kuklux charged the murder on colored men, and one colored man was killed by them on account of it.
- A colored man hanged in Chatham County. A revenue officer riding along the road, saw his body hanging and reported. His wife and children were sitting under the body moaning. Nothing was done about it.
- A colored man in Chatham County badly whipped. As he returned to his house, the Kuklux followed. One of his daughters came out of his house with an infant in her arms, and fled. The Kuklux fired on her and wounded her and her infant.
- A colored woman near Pittsborough, Chatham County, beaten with a club until her life was despaired of, because she complained to a magistrate that a white man, a Kuklux, had stolen her chickens.

[CITATION: "Statements, depositions, and other records submitted by Gov. William W. Holden relating to crimes of the Ku Klux Klan against citizens of North Carolina, 1869 - 1871"]

### Reading 3 – *Testimony on the KKK*

#### **Statement 1.**

When they came to my house that night, the dog barked twice. The old man got up and went out of doors. Then he came back and lay down. Just as I got in bed, five men bulged right against the door. It fell right in the middle of the floor, and they fell down.

George McCrea ran right to me and gathered me by the arm. The old man threw his arm around my neck and held on to me. Then there were so many of them holding me that they got me out of doors. I looked ahead and saw that they had the old man.

The old man was ahead of me, and I saw Dave Donley stamp on him. After they carried me about a quarter of a mile from the house, they carried me to a pine as large as I could get my arms around. They then tied my hands there. They whipped me from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet. I was just raw.

[CITATION: Thomas Frazier, ed., *Voices of America: Readings in American History*, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1985), 152.]

The first thing they asked me was, "Who burned our houses?"—gin-houses, dwelling-houses had been burned in the neighborhood. I told them it was not me; I could not burn houses. Then they hit me with their fists and said I ordered it. They went on asking me didn't I tell the black men to ravish all the white women. "No," I answered. They struck me again with their fists and went on. "When did you hold a night-meeting of the Union League and who were the officers?" I told them I had been the president but that there had been no Union League meeting held since last fall. I said, "Upon honor." They said I had no honor and hit me again.

After plundering the house searching for letters they came at me with pistols and asked if I was ready to die. I told them I was not exactly ready, that I would rather live. One caught me by the leg and I made moan when it hurt. One said "G-d-d-n it, hush!" He had a horsewhip and he told me to pull up my shirt. I reckon he struck me eight cuts on the hip bone; it was almost the only place he could hit my body, my legs are so short.

One of them brought out a little book and says, "What's this for?" It was a book in which I had an account of the school. I read them some of the names. They asked me, "Will you quit preaching?" I told them I did not know. I said that to save my life. They said I must stop that Republican paper that was coming to me from Charleston. They said I must quit preaching and put a card in the newspaper renouncing Republicanism, but if I did not they would come back next week and kill me.

—Elias Hill<sup>2</sup>

[CITATION: Elias Hill, in *The Trouble They Seen: The Story of Reconstruction in the Words of African-Americans*, Dorothy Sterling, ed., (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1976), 380.]

### Reading Questions:

1. LIST the methods used by the KKK to terrorize their victims. Cite 2-3 specific examples.
2. What do you think motivated the KKK to terrorize their victims? (Consider evidence from each testimony.)

