"Thirty Thousand Half-breeds" and "Negroes With Guns": The Violent Formulation of Race in 1950s North Carolina

Andrew M. Cook

The College at Brockport, andrewmonroecook@gmail.com

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“Thirty Thousand Half-breeds” and “Negroes With Guns”:
The Violent Formulation of Race in 1950s North Carolina

by

Andrew M. Cook

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A thesis submitted to the Department of History of the State
University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
“Thirty Thousand Half-breeds” and “Negroes With Guns”:
The Violent Formulation of Race in 1950s North Carolina

by Andrew M. Cook

APPROVED BY:

Advisor

Reader

Reader

Chair, Graduate Committee

Chair, Department of History

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT: ........... ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION: ......... 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;INFERIOR CLASSES OF BEINGS&quot;:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIOLENCE, MEMORY AND THE CREATION OF RACE: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;KU KLUX CONSPIRACY&quot;:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE ENFORCEMENT OF RACIAL SEGREGATION, 1866-1957: 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;NEGROES WITH GUNS&quot;:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROBERT F. WILLIAMS AND THE MONROE GUN CLUB, 1955-7: 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;THIRTY THOUSAND HALF-BREEDS&quot;:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE LUMBEE INDIANS OF ROBESON COUNTY, 1958: 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY: .......... 74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

In January of 1958, over a thousand Lumbee Indians of Robeson County, North Carolina dispersed a gathering of one hundred and fifty Ku Klux Klansmen under the leadership of James “Catfish” Cole. In the aftermath, national newspapers and magazines published feature articles applauding the Indian confrontation with the Klan. Only two weeks earlier, Robert F. Williams, president of the Monroe, North Carolina chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had organized an armed confrontation with the Ku Klux Klan that received no national media coverage. The disparity of media attention given to the two events was due to the ideologies and motivations of two very different groups. The Lumbees resisted the imposition of a Klan doctrine that was foreign to the majority of
Indian and White residents of Robeson County and to the actual racial infrastructure at the time. Williams, on the other hand, used violence to attack the racial foundations of Southern society—the political, social and economic stratification of society along racial lines. In both cases, non-White groups used violence in an attempt to redefine what it meant to be Indian or Black.

This study explores the ways that North Carolinians used violence to create and define race. Chapter One examines the ways in which race is constructed through violence and the memory of violence. Chapter Two provides background on the Ku Klux Klan and the way that it used violence to enforce racial restrictions. Chapter Three presents the case of Robert Williams and the NAACP’s most militant local chapter. Chapter Four explores the evolution of the tripartite racial system of Robeson County and the ways that the Lumbees interacted with their White and Black neighbors. Throughout, this history focuses on the use of violence to create, enforce and redefine racial conventions. It also examines the distribution of stories, pictures and souvenirs as a method of spreading the impact of racial violence.
In January of 1958, over a thousand Lumbee Indians of Robeson County, North Carolina dispersed a gathering of one hundred and fifty Ku Klux Klansmen under the leadership of James “Catfish” Cole. The Lumbees fired shots over the heads of the Klansmen, who subsequently fled into the surrounding swamps. In the aftermath, national newspapers and magazines published feature articles applauding the Indian confrontation with the Klan. Only two weeks earlier, Robert F. Williams, president of the Monroe, North Carolina chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had organized an armed confrontation with the Ku Klux Klan that received no national media coverage. African American and Indian resistance to the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina in the 1950s provides a window into the complex construction of a three-way racial system. This disparity of
media attention given to the two events was due, in part, to the ideologies and motivations of two very different groups. The Lumbees resisted the imposition of a Klan doctrine that was foreign to the majority of Indian and White residents of Robeson County and to the actual racial infrastructure at the time. Williams, on the other hand, used violence to attack the racial foundations of Southern society—the political, social and economic stratification of society along racial lines. In both cases, non-White groups used violence in an attempt to redefine what it meant to be Indian or Black.

By the 1950s, America had a long history of using social actions, including acts of violence, to negotiate race. Race is not a biological fact, but a set of characteristics that society defines in order to categorize individuals. In the century that followed Reconstruction, White America employed violence to define Blackness and to impose that definition on Black Americans. This definition of Blackness included restrictions on the actions of Black people. From the end of the Civil War through the 1950s, the main tool that White America employed to enforce these restrictions was organized mob violence. At one extreme, Whites hastily collected groups that formed temporarily in order to carry out a specific task and disbanded as soon as they achieved their goal. At the other end of the spectrum, the Ku Klux Klan created a highly organized, hierarchical and permanent society that sought to impose constrictions on Blacks and other groups that they defined as non-White. In each instance, the mob intended to repudiate Black citizenship through violence.
White America defined and imposed race not only through acts of violence, but also through the creation of memories of violence. Southern Whites publicized graphic depictions of racial violence and broadcast them through the media. They created through their accounts of lynchings what historian and philosopher Pierre Nora has called "lieux de mémoire." Violence infused these "sites of memory" with violent racial meanings and undertones. Through the use of lieux de mémoire, the White community magnified the cultural and psychological impact of each individual act of violence.

In the 1950s, James Cole’s Carolina Klan drew on this historical practice of creating and enforcing racial categories and meanings through violence. Young Lumbee and Black veterans were unwilling to accept these attacks on their communities and fought White violence with force. The local and national White community sought to limit the disruption to the racial system that these violent altercations threatened.

In the case of the Lumbees, local law enforcement and government agents interpreted violence against the Ku Klux Klan as a strike against the disruption of the racial status quo. Cole’s Klan had attempted to change the local system of racial interaction to a system that more closely resembled the climate in South Carolina and the local and national White community had resisted. Conversely, in the case of Robert Williams and the Monroe NAACP, the Klan participated in the defense of the

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2 Hale, 209, 214.
racial status quo. As a result, the White community united behind the Klan in suppression of African American dissent.

In both cases, the White majority used its influence to minimize the disruption of racial order by ostracizing radical factions. Whites reacted differently to the two incidents because the Lumbees and the Monroe NAACP were fighting for two very different goals. The Lumbees were resisting the Klan's importation of foreign racial assumptions. In this particular instance, the Lumbees were actually fighting to maintain the status quo against White extremists. The Lumbees did not wish to integrate into the White community, but neither did they wish to be denied their status as Indians and as non-Blacks. The national media, through their coverage of this event, aided the Lumbee effort to protect the complex racial balance of Robeson County.

Williams, however, had been attacking the existing racial environment as aggressively as possible for since 1955. The concept of sixty Black veterans in control of a large stockpile of arms was offensive to most journalists and commentators. If reporters had publicized the Monroe Rifle Club's defeat of the Klan, they would have aided Williams in spreading his program of armed self-defense. White reporters did not want to assume this sort of responsibility. By publicizing the Lumbee incident, national journalists spread the psychological impact of the event by creating national memory of the event and its meaning.

The local and national White community attempted to maintain the separation of the racial categories of Black and Indian. To this end, the national media and the
local community celebrated the defeat of the Klan by the Lumbees, but they also made it clear that this message did not apply to Blacks. Even the Maxton community that celebrated the defeat of the Klan was concerned that others would "get the wrong idea." Thus, the national media did not disseminate the story of Robert Williams for fear that it would encourage the development of Black militancy.

By publicizing the Lumbee event and silencing Williams, local and national media controlled the effect of each event. The publicity the Lumbees generated seared the event and its meaning on the national consciousness. The media portrayed the Klan as a backward group that disrupted and harassed the local community. Conversely, the lack of attention given to Williams and the Monroe NAACP contained the influence of his model of armed self defense. This lack of press contained his influence by preventing Williams from entering the national consciousness and memory.

However, Williams sought alternative channels to spread his platform and disseminate the parable of the Monroe NAACP. He broadcasted his story through the airwaves with "Radio Free Dixie" and through the mail with The Crusader. He thereby encouraged the subsequent growth of Black militancy during the 1960s, inspiring figures from Malcolm X to Huey Newton. Even though the national media denied him access to the national memory, Williams impressed his story and his beliefs on the consciousness of Blacks. While the White community was largely

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unaware of his existence, he reached the thinking young Blacks who would take up
the same fight a decade later.

The traditional history of the Civil Rights has long focused on Martin Luther
King's non-violent mass protests and the legal assaults of the NAACP. This attention
has excluded other segments of the African American community who were working
in other ways for the same goals. This study explores two local racial minority
groups that challenged racial suppression through a program of armed self-defense.

Further, the history of Civil Rights has focused on national events and
movements. The legal victories of the NAACP and the mass movement engineered
by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference are well documented. But
historians know much less about the ideologies and actions of independent local
organizations and communities. It is necessary to examine these groups in order to
properly assess the impact of the national organizations and leaders.4

This study will explore the ways that North Carolinians used violence to
create and define race. Chapter One will examine the ways in which race is
constructed through violence and the memory of violence. Chapter Two will provide
background on the Ku Klux Klan and the way that it used violence to enforce racial
restrictions. Chapter Three will explore the evolution of the tripartite racial system of
Robeson County and the ways that the Lumbees interacted with their White and
Black neighbors. Chapter Four will present the case of Robert Williams and the

4 Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan, eds., New Directions in Civil Rights Studies
NAACP's most militant local chapter. Throughout, this history will focus on the use of violence to create, enforce and redefine racial conventions. It will also examine the distribution of stories, pictures and souvenirs as a way to spread the impact of racial violence.
CHAPTER ONE:

"INFERIOR CLASSES OF BEINGS"

VIOLENCE, MEMORY AND THE CREATION OF RACE

When the Lumbees gathered to disperse Cole’s Klan rally in 1958 and when Robert Williams organized the Monroe NAACP in order to violently confront a Klan motorcade, each group used violence as a tool to redefine the meaning of race in North Carolina. Race is a social trait that societies have constantly redefined to fit changing circumstances. Both groups drew on a long American history of social negotiation over the definition and interpretation of race. Further, both groups attempted to use the media to increase the influence of their victory. By creating national memory of their defeat of the Klan, the Lumbees redefined what it meant to be Indian. In denying equitable press coverage to Williams, the national media contained the meaning of Williams’ victory and protected the established meaning of Blackness.
By the 1950s, Americans had a long history of using social interactions, including violent acts, to define race. Society, through mundane interactions and negotiations, define race and racial categories. Race is not a biological fact, but a set of characteristics that society defines in order to categorize individuals. Furthermore, the borders of races are fluid and changeable. The meaning of race is contingent on environment, time, place, class, gender, religion and nationality. US case law includes fifty-one examples of how the courts have taken an active role in determining the race of individuals. An individual may be assigned to one racial category at one time and place and a different category in another time and place.

Finally, race conflates inherited genetic traits with acquired cultural traits. The biological trait of skin color is mistakenly seen as an indicator for acquired skills and attributes, such as personality, intelligence and temperament.

In the past thirty years, scientists have abandoned the theory of race because of flaws in the definition of the concept. First, racial distinctions are not reproducible. If one person classifies a set of people into races using a predetermined set of criteria, another person using the same criteria should be able to classify the same set of people in the same way. However, racial classification depends as much on the experiences of the person doing the classification as on the morphological

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traits of the classified. For this reason, the majority of biologists have concluded that race is a social construct rather than a scientific fact.\textsuperscript{6}

While the socially constructed categories of race do not describe biological traits, they are nonetheless important for observing the cultural, political and economic structures that define and enforce racial descriptions and prohibitions. Thus, this study assumes that race and races are socially established fact. Following Ian Haney-Lopez, I will capitalize “White” and “Black” in order to signify that these are not neutral descriptors of race or skin color, but socially constructed categories of political, legal, economic and social existence and identity.\textsuperscript{7}

Through much of the history of the United States individuals and institutions have assumed that race is essentially natural and unchanging. Those attempting to define race through the establishment of hierarchical racial categories have viewed this activity as an attempt to discover natural law. The prime example of this mode of reasoning is the theory known as Social Darwinism. This school’s main proponent, Herbert Spencer, proclaimed that the different races of the human species “[came] down from those pre-historic times during which the diffusion of mankind and differentiation of the varieties of man, took place.”\textsuperscript{8} These races, while evolving into various societies, changed only incrementally due to varieties in environmental


\textsuperscript{7} Haney-Lopez, xiv.

pressures. Each race developed a specific set of social and biological characteristics in response to their requirements for survival. For example, Spencer noted that “that superiority of sight which enables a Bushman to see further with the naked eye than a European with a telescope, is fully paralleled by the European’s more perfect intellectual vision.”

Spencer believed that these racial characteristics could only evolve over many generations. Even in the case of intermarriage between two members of different races, “the conflicting tendencies towards different social types, now exist in the same individual. The half-caste, inheriting from one line of ancestry proclivities adapted to one set of institutions, and from the other line of ancestry proclivities adapted to another set of institutions, is not fit for either.” Thus, the dominant belief in America was that members of the White race were fully fit for citizenship in the modern state, while those who traced even part of their ancestry to a non-White race were not fit for citizenship.

The historically conditioned assumption that race is biologically determined has rarely been questioned. For example, the 1980 Supreme Court decision in Fullilove v. Klutznick includes the definition of various races, including the definition of a “Negro [as] an individual of the black race of African origin.” The predominant view in America to this day is that race is a constant and natural ingredient of an individual’s identity. Despite the evidence that race is socially constructed, many modern histories of the Klan also assume that race is biological.

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9 Spencer, 7.
10 Spencer, 163.
fact. Wyn Craig Wade’s indispensable narrative history *The Fiery Cross* consistently
treats racial categories as constants. Wade uses the terms “White” and “Black” with
no explanation of how society defined these categories. Though Wade thoroughly
illuminates the narrative of the Klan’s existence, he fails to explore the ways that the
Klan manufactured and enforced racial definitions.\(^\text{12}\)

However, in the past thirty years, critical race theory has challenged this
notion by defining race as a socially constructed phenomenon. This school of thought
challenges traditional notions of race by pointing to cases in which legal and
extralegal actors have used various criteria to determine an individual’s race. In
*White by Law*, Ian Haney-Lopez examines American case law that has categorized
race, determined the boundaries of different races and defined the meanings of
various races. In 1790, Congress restricted citizenship to “White persons.”\(^\text{13}\)
Thereafter, various cases have forced the American judiciary to determine whether or
not a specific person is White or non-White. The courts held that persons from
Mexico and Armenia were White, while persons from Hawaii, China, Japan, Burma
and the Philippines were not. Various courts also made contradictory decisions in the
cases of persons from Syria, India and Arabia.\(^\text{14}\) In addition to their role in
determining who was White and who was not, the courts also participated in defining
the meaning of racial categories such as White, non-White, Black and Indian. For

\(^{12}\) Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (London: Simon and Schuster,
1987).

\(^{13}\) *Act of March 26, 1790, Statutes at Large* 1, ch. 3, 103 (1790); quoted in Haney-Lopez, 1.

\(^{14}\) Haney-Lopez, 2.
example, in *Dred Scott v. John F.A. Sandford*, the Supreme Court accepted the
defendant's argument that Dred Scott was a "negro slave, the lawful property of the
defendant" and that the defendant, being a White citizen was entitled to hold title over
and physically restrain the plaintiff. Further, the court pondered the question of
"whether the descendants of . . . slaves, when they shall be emancipated, or who are
born of parents who had become free before their birth, are citizens of a State, in the
sense in which the word citizen is used in the Constitution of the United States." The
Court concluded that "they are not, and that they are not included, and were not
intended to be included, under the word 'citizens' in the Constitution, and can
therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for
and secures to citizens of the United States." The Court defined individuals of
African descent as an "inferior class of beings" that were therefore incapable of
assuming the rights and obligations of citizenship. This expansive decision defined
the Black race and established the characteristics of the members of this race. 15

While case law is the most thoroughly documented method of constructing
race, courts generally reflected the racial theories that American culture had
previously accepted. Americans define race through their everyday interactions with
each other—through the nearly imperceptible definition and coercive imposition of
economic, political and social custom. The overarching structure of race could not

exist if individuals did not create, recreate and articulate racial categories and meanings in the everyday.\textsuperscript{16}

American racial definitions have been produced by the violent enforcement of custom. During slavery, White Americans violently imposed their will upon Blacks through the tyrannical discipline of the plantation. This violence contributed to the determination of who was Black. The definition of Blackness, as seen in \textit{Scott v. Sanford}, rested largely on the historical fact of slavery. White slave owners enforced this fact daily through violence or the threat of violence. The courts participated by codifying the right to use such violence. In \textit{Scott v. Sanford}, the court drew on a 1705 Massachusetts law that provided “if any negro or mulatto shall presume to smite or strike any person of the English or other Christian nation, such negro or mulatto shall be severely whipped.”\textsuperscript{17} Americans defined race through violence and enacted statutes that reinforced the established racial categories.

White America employed violence to define precisely what it meant to be Black. The definition of Blackness produced during slavery included the “Old Negro,” the loyal, loving and patiently suffering servant. Whites contrasted this romanticized depiction of the happy slave with a conception of a violent savage with no respect for civilization. According to historian Grace Elizabeth Hale, Whites later included in the latter category the “black beast rapist,” popularized by D.W. Griffith’s

\textsuperscript{17} Holt, 8-14.
film *Birth of a Nation*. White America used this fearsome character to justify the imposition of restrictive codes of segregation and violence. The latter category included Blacks who strove to better their economic, social and political standing. The stereotype essentially included any Black who did not conform to the expectations and restrictions of White society.

During the antebellum era, America denied Black people the freedoms and privileges of citizenship, including the right to vote, sue, hold political office and defend themselves from violence. Blacks also faced restrictions aimed against their establishing economically successful businesses. The passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 abolished the White South’s legal and institutional methods of enforcing these restrictions. In response, White Southerners sought extralegal means of enforcing these strictures. During the century that followed Reconstruction, White America employed violence to define Blackness and to impose that definition on Black Americans. This definition of Blackness included restrictions on the actions of those determined to be Black. The main tool that White America employed to enforce these restrictions was organized mob violence. In each instance, the mob intended to violently repudiate Black citizenship.

White America created race not only through acts of violence, but also through the creation of memories of violence. Southern Whites publicized graphic depictions of racial violence and broadcast them through the media. They created,

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through the locations of their violence and the collection of lynching souvenirs, "sites of memory" that housed violent racial meanings and undertones. White participants and spectators also stored these memories of violence in objects. They collected, traded and displayed the body parts of lynching victims in order to recall the enforcement of racial codes. These objects recalled to Blacks the consequences of protesting the Southern racial environment. Through the use of lieux de mémoire, the White community magnified the cultural and psychological impact of each individual act of violence.\(^{19}\)

During the 1950s, the Lumbees and Williams' Monroe NAACP used violence and the creation of memory to redefine racial categories. By achieving national notoriety for their defeat of the Klan, the Lumbees created national awareness and memory of the event. This allowed them to define the Indian community as able to protect its members and to stand up to the excesses of white racism. In the case of Williams, the national press was troubled by the thought of a group of black men in control of a large quantity of weapons and willing to use them against White men. In defending the Black community from the Klan, Williams changed the existing definition of the Black man. He claimed the right of armed self defense and the right to refuse to accept White violence.

\(^{19}\) Hale, 209, 214.
CHAPTER TWO

"KU KLUX CONSPIRACY":
THE ENFORCEMENT OF RACIAL SEGREGATION, 1866-1957

In the century that followed the Civil War, white society used mob violence to construct and enforce race. The most thoroughly developed organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan, developed a sophisticated set of hierarchies, regalia and official functions. The Klan used these instruments to enforce racial restrictions through violence and the threat of violence. In times when the Klan's influence waned, white North Carolinians collected as ad hoc vigilantes who assembled for a specific act and dispersed upon its completion. By the 1950s, North Carolinians had a long history of using violence to negotiate race. Williams and the Lumbees both drew on this history in order to combat racial restrictions.

Racial violence in North Carolina from 1866 through the 1950s revolved around the many incarnations of the Ku Klux Klan. In 1866, in the dreary crossroads
town of Pulaski, Tennessee, six Confederate veterans, lacking jobs or any other meaningful diversion, set out to alleviate their boredom. They decided to establish a club that would play pranks on local residents. A committee of three members was charged with deciding upon an appropriate name before their second meeting. All they came up with was “the circle.” John Kennedy, one of the founding members, proposed that they at least translate circle into the Greek kuklos. Since the residents of the area were mainly Scottish, they added klan.\textsuperscript{20} For the next year and a half, the Klan diverted itself with initiating new members, playing practical jokes on their neighbors (especially local freedmen). For example, contemporary historians John C. Lester and D. L. Wilson relate a ubiquitous tale of Klan chicanery in their 1884 \textit{Ku Klux Klan} that involved a Klansman appearing at the door of “some negro needing a wholesome impression.” The Klansman would then ask for a bucket of water and pretend to drink it while actually pouring it into a sack under his robe. The Klansman would then say “That’s . . . the first drink of water I have had since I was killed at Shiloh.”\textsuperscript{21} The Klan intended these juvenile pranks as a method of scaring Blacks who took advantage of the privileges of citizenship.

The victory of Republicans and Blacks in the Tennessee election of August 1867 politicized the Klan and caused them to turn to violence as a more potent method of enforcing racial restrictions. Leading up to the election, Conservatives—a

\textsuperscript{20} Wade, 33.
coalition of Democrats and old-time Whigs—urged freedmen to trust in their former masters to run government. After Republicans won a resounding victory in the election, the Klan retaliated against Blacks and the White organizers who encouraged them to vote Republican. The Union League, a group of Northerners who traveled to the South during Reconstruction, bore the brunt of the Klan’s rage. Created to enable freedmen to integrate into society, the League had become an arm of the Republican Party. According to the Klan, without this “society which teaches the negro to hate his former master,” the freedmen would not have abandoned the traditional order of the South.\textsuperscript{22} The Klan quickly spread and established local chapters throughout Tennessee. A member of the Tennessee legislature reported that there was “an organized body of men, who, without provocation and in violation of Law—seemingly desperate in purpose—are scouring the county by night, carrying dismay and horror to all.”\textsuperscript{23} The leaders of the Klan attempted to use the violence of local Klansmen in order to maintain racial restrictions through intimidation.

Following the 1867 election, the Klan held a formal meeting in Nashville in order to formalize their rules, regulations and hierarchy in their Prescript.\textsuperscript{24} Several weeks later, Klan officials offered the position of Grand Wizard (the ruler of all of the Klans) to former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest. Forrest had suffered for the cause; after the Civil War, he described himself as “completely used up . . .

\textsuperscript{22} Nashville Union and Dispatch (April 24, 1868); quoted in Wade, 45.
\textsuperscript{23} W. Bosson to Gen. George H. Thomas, March 5, 1868, Andrew Johnson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C; quoted in Wade, 46.
\textsuperscript{24} Wade, 40.
shot all to pieces, crippled up and ... completely dependant." Forrest had lost everything in the war. "I went into the Army worth a million and a half dollars, and came out a beggar," he lamented. He saw the Klan as a way for the South to recover and also saw it as a tool to revive his personal fortunes.

Upon Forrest’s assumption of leadership, the Klan stepped up their activities. "The object of the organization," Forrest claimed, "was to prevent a general slaughter of [White] women and children, and to prepare themselves to resist anything of the kind." Forrest asserted that White Southerners were concerned about racial unrest because of the influence of Northerners. "When the war was over our servants began to mix with the republicans," he recalled. "There was a general fear throughout the country that there would be an uprising." Forrest believed that Northern interlopers were the cause of the discord between races was widespread in the White South.

Unsurprisingly, Black Southerners gave their allegiance to the Republican Party in order to gain political, legal and economic rights. A delegation of South Carolina Blacks issued an “Address to the Native Whites”:

[You] derided the idea of granting us the right to vote; when your legislature met in 1865-66, you passed that infamous Black Code. . . . Your laws provided for the taking and binding-out our children and subjecting us to all manner of disabilities. We could not pursue any trade or calling in this State without written permission from some white man; we could not sell any article of barter without the consent first obtained from some magistrate.

26 Forrest, 24.
27 Forrest, 24.
28 Forrest, 24.
With all these facts before us, and your negro code before us... do you not see why we have been constrained to trust in strangers rather than to those who claim that they are our natural friends? Can you have the heart to ask colored men to vote for men who deny that they are capable of voting intelligently? Can you ask us to vote our liberties away forever? Can you ask us to sustain a party which is pledged to divest us of all the privileges in law which we now enjoy?29

White Southerners refused to accept that Blacks made an independent and rational decision to support the Republican Party in response to the racial and political environment. They instead chose to believe that Northern Republicans deluded Blacks into supporting their platform. Most White Southerners believed that Blacks were incapable of thinking rationally. Instead of accepting the Blacks' use of the vote as evidence of their rationality, White Southerners instead used violence in order to force Blacks to conform to their expectations.

Following the 1867 convention, the Klan enacted new chapters in North Carolina and attempted to circumvent the Reconstruction government by using violence to enforce Southern racial restrictions. William W. Holden, the Republican governor of North Carolina, observed that

under the leadership of ambitious and discontented politicians and under the pretext that society needed to be regulated by some authority outside or above the law... [T]hose secret Klans began to commit murder, to rob, whip scourge, and mutilate unoffending citizens.30

The Klan in North Carolina used violence and fear to circumvent the Reconstruction government and enforce traditional Southern racial restrictions.

The historical record from the late 1860s is strewn with reports of Klan violence. Lynching was their usual mode of operation as they littered the countryside with the charred, mutilated bodies of their victims.\(^{31}\) For example, in one congressional district of Alabama, from 1868-71, there were reports of 371 cases of violence, thirty-five murders and six churches burned.\(^{32}\) The uncontrolled violence of local Klans shocked even prominent Klansmen and their supporters.

Forrest himself was troubled by his lack of power over and even lack of communication with the local Klans. In 1869, he issued "General Order Number One," which formally abolished the Klan because "[it] is in some localities being perverted from its original honorable and patriotic purposes."\(^{33}\) It is unlikely that Forrest intended to prevent further activity from the Klans, but he did intend to wash his hands of the business. Forrest’s Order did not reduce the Klan’s activity. If anything, violent acts increased because of the lack of any moderating influence from leadership.

This violence had dramatic political implications as Conservatives prevented Blacks and Republicans from voting through violence and threats. In the spring election of 1868 in Georgia’s Oglethorpe County, Republicans received more than

\(^{31}\) Wade, 54-79.
\(^{32}\) DuBois, 494.
1,100 votes. By the time of the presidential election in November, 1868, they received 116. In Columbia County over the same period, Republican votes fell from 1122 votes to one vote.\textsuperscript{34} In the election of 1870, Conservatives gained control of the legislature in North Carolina. The state’s Republican Governor, William Holden, offered a picture of the situation his annual message of 1870: “Grand juries in many counties frequently refused to find bills against the members of this Klan for the gravest and most flagrant violations of the law.”\textsuperscript{35} Later that year he wrote to President Ulysses Grant that the Klan “conspiracy is in existence in every county of the State. And its aim is to obtain the control of the government. It is believed that its leaders now direct the movements of the present Legislature.”\textsuperscript{36} Holden implored the federal government to take action to stop the growing conspiracy.

The Klan replaced the deceased legal enforcement of racial suppression in direct opposition of the federal government and the Fourteenth Amendment.

Congress responded by appointing a select committee to investigate the Klan.\textsuperscript{37} On March 23, 1971, Grant personally intervened in the Congressional debate and demanded the passage of a bill that would grant the executive the authority to forcefully deal with the Klan. Grant explained to Congress that the Southern states

\textsuperscript{37} Wade, 86.
contained an environment hostile to the constitutional rights to life and property and to federal tax collectors and even mailmen. Believing that the states were incapable of addressing this problem, Grant urgently requested "such legislation as in the judgment of Congress shall effectually secure life, liberty, and property and the enforcement of law in all parts of the United States." Congress responded and on April 20, 1871 President Grant signed, *An Act to enforce the Provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States*, later known as the Ku Klux Act. The Act provided that any person who deprived another of constitutional "rights, privileges, or immunities... to be prosecuted in the several district or circuit courts of the United States." Thus, prosecutions of Klansmen were removed from local and state courtrooms that had been infiltrated by the Klan. The Act also declared the Klan to be "a rebellion against the government of the United States." This allowed the executive to suspend habeas corpus and to use the military to suppress the insurrection.

The Ku Klux Act provided Grant with a legal mechanism for attacking the Klan. Acting upon Attorney General Amos T. Akerman’s advice, President Grant suspended the writ of habeas corpus on October 17, 1871. Federal marshals, in cooperation with the Seventh Cavalry under Major Lewis W. Merrill, began filling the local jails with Klansmen. Several hundred Klansmen, especially the leaders of

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38 U.S. Congress, Message from the President, Relative to the Condition of Affairs in the South, 42 Cong., 1 Sess., House Exec. Doc. No. 14, 1871; quoted in Wade, 89.
39 Wade, 93.
40 *An Act to enforce the Provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, Statutes at Large, 17 (1871): 13-5.*
the order, fled before they could be arrested. According to the New York Times, the “stampede... [which included] a number against whom there is no evidence, and no charge save their accusing consciences... , revealed the extent and ramifications of the Order even more clearly than the evidence.” With the flight of their leaders, rank and file Klansmen bitterly realized that their favorite tactics of avoiding justice would not work and many of them confessed. They also “express[ed] great indignation at the escape of many of the leaders of the order, leaving them to suffer the burdens of fine and imprisonment.”\(^{41}\) The arrests spread havoc through the county as nearly every family was affected. Approximately two hundred men were incarcerated in York County and more than five hundred more had surrendered, confessed and been released. Twenty turned state’s evidence and six requested to be arrested in order to protect themselves from retribution.\(^{42}\) Most importantly, the government had instigated the betrayal of the rank and file by their leaders, dividing the Klan.\(^{43}\)

Unfortunately for the federal government, Congress had provided the legal but not the financial tools for dealing with the Klan. The multitude of Klan cases soon overwhelmed the Justice Department and the federal court system. Akerman decided to prosecute only the most egregious offenders, while those whose participation in the Klan’s activity was marginal or at all questionable were released on bail. Despite the failure of federal prosecution, the government’s actions had effectively dispersed the Klan in South Carolina. As Southerners realized that Klan activity might provoke


\(^{42}\)Lou Falkner Williams, 46-9.

\(^{43}\)“Telegraphic News,” 1.
federal military action, Klans in other states followed suit and ceased their activities.\footnote{Wade, 102-4.}

However, the motives of the Klan would be debated for the next century.

Histories of Reconstruction produced during the early twentieth century declared that the Ku Klux Klan developed in order to counter the intrusion of Reconstruction governments composed of Blacks and Northerners. In 1901, historian and future President Woodrow Wilson recalled that “there had sprung into existence a great \textit{Ku Klux Klan}, an ‘Invisible Empire of the South,’ bound together in loose organization to protect the southern country from some of the ugliest hazards of a time of revolution” [emphasis original].\footnote{Woodrow Wilson, \textit{A History of the American People}, 5 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1901), 60.} In 1905, political scientist John W. Burgess concluded that the Klans intended to replace the state’s control of race that the South had lost in the Civil War. Burgess opined that with the enactment of Reconstruction, “Congress turned the tables upon the Southern White people, and placed the ignorant barbarians in political control of them... It was... rather natural, though not praiseworthy, that men should have bound themselves together by secret oaths to do anything and everything in their power to defeat this blunder-crime against civilization.”\footnote{John W. Burgess, \textit{Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 252.} In 1929, historian Claude G. Bowers compared the development of the Ku Klux Klan to the vigilance committees that were formed in areas of the West to maintain order where available law enforcement was inadequate or non-existent. “In the pioneer West, vigilance committees were formed for the
protection of horses and cattle; in the South, the Klan was organized for the protection of women, property, civilization itself."\footnote{Claude G. Bowers, \textit{The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln} (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1929), 309.}

By 1930, the glorification of the Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan was an established tradition.

One of the first critics of this interpretation of the Klan was a young Indochinese man named Nguyen Sinh Cung who lived in France and traveled to the United States several times during the 1920s. Cung, writing for the French periodical \textit{Correspondance Internationale}, was appalled by Americans' treatment of African Americans. "After sixty-five years of so-called emancipation, American Negroes still endure atrocious moral and material sufferings, of which the most cruel and horrible is the custom of lynching."\footnote{Ho Chi Minh, "Lynching," \textit{La Correspondance Internationale}, 59 (1924), Ho Chi Minh, \textit{Ho Chi Minh: On Revolution: Selected Writings}, 1920-66, ed., Bernard B. Fall (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 41.} After the creation and popularization of the Klan, Cung reported that the "agrarian and slave-owning bourgeoisie saw in the Klan a useful agent, almost a savior. They gave it all the help in their power." However, the White elites soon found that once unleashed, the violent hordes could not be properly controlled. "In the space of three years it committed so many crimes and misdeeds that a number of those who supported it left in horror."\footnote{Ho Chi Minh, "The Ku Klux Klan," \textit{La Correspondance Internationale}, No. 74 (1924); in Fall, 48-9.} Cung went on to elaborate many of these horrors to his French audience. He reported that due to the "Ku Klux Klan, and other secret societies, the illegal and barbarous practice of lynching is spreading and continuing widely in the States of the American Union." Cung detailed the scene of a lynching: "Imagine a furious horde. Fists clenched, eyes bloodshot,
mouths foaming, yells, insults, curses. . . This horde is transported with the wild
delight of a crime to be committed without risk.” Cung provided a Marxist
framework for viewing the rise of the Ku Klux Klan that would be echoed by
historians a decade later. By that time Cung had returned to Indochina and changed
his name to Ho Chi Minh. 50

In the 1935, historian W.E.B. DuBois suggested that economic and political
motivations were much more important in the Klan’s development than politics.
DuBois characterized the Klan and other such groups as “secret Democratic
organizations” intent on preventing Republicans from winning elections. 51 DuBois
also asserted that the Klan was primarily an economic response of capital to labor.
Wealthy White business owners defused tension with White laborers by redirecting
their restlessness against Blacks. “Planters, united in secret organizations with poor
Whites, were determined to reduce the labor vote by disfranchising the Negro.” 52
Klansmen formed bands that roamed the countryside attacking Blacks for almost any
imaginable reason. DuBois reports that the

“reasons for such outrages were significantly varied: the victims should suffer
in revenge for killing, and for some cases of arson; they were Republicans;
they were radical; they had attempted to hold elections; they were carrying
arms; they were 'niggers'; they were 'damn niggers'; they boasted that they
would own land; they should be made to recant Republican principles; and
they should give desired information.” 53

From economic and political origins, the Klan descended into uncontrolled violence.

50 Wade, 202-4.
51 DuBois, 474.
52 DuBois, 483.
While there may be some truth to DuBois' interpretation, the main impetus for organizing the Klan was to suppress Blacks by the reimposing the racial definitions that Republicans had attempted to erase during Reconstruction. Through the Klan, Southerners imposed these definitions through masked force in much the same way that they had openly done so during slavery. Violence was still central to the creation of race. Many of the same forms of violence used during slavery, such as binding, whipping, beating and even killing, remained the same after the Civil War. Whites inflicted this violence in order to resist the redefinition of race by Blacks and by the Union. The objective of the Klan was to limit Blacks' access to education, suffrage and the courts.

In the decade following the defeat of the Klan, Radical Reconstruction would also fail. The presence of a clandestine conspiracy to suppress the laws of the United States had fueled Northern support of the Republican Party. In the absence of the Ku Klux Klan, Northern support for Reconstruction waned. When the Democrats reclaimed the House of Representatives in 1874, it was clear that support for Reconstruction was on the wane. Three years later, the infamous bargain that elected Rutherford B. Hayes also ended Reconstruction. In the following decades, the North and the Republican Party effectively abandoned the cause of racial equality. Southern states thoroughly legislated and codified racial segregation. The Supreme Court overturned many of the statutes passed by Congress during Reconstruction, including most of the Ku Klux Act in 1883. The Court also chipped away at the

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54 DuBois, 110-11.
implications of the Fourteenth Amendment by allowing states to introduce restrictions on voting and other rights. The Klan, meanwhile, lay dormant and may never have been heard from again if not for a peculiar combination of events, the most important of which was a popular portrayal of the Reconstruction Klan.

On January 8, 1915, a motion picture premiered in Los Angeles that would soon spur a national debate, provoke race riots and tarnish the reputation of the President. D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* portrayed Radical Reconstruction as a dark day in American history when one section of the nation maliciously imposed its vindictive will upon another. It reiterated the ugly racial characterizations of Blacks that White Southerners had popularized. Perhaps most importantly, it pictured the Klan as a protective organization that rode to the rescue of the impugned dignity of the South.

In 1915, William Joseph Simmons, an itinerant district manager of the fraternal "Woodsmen of America" and erstwhile Methodist preacher, was bedridden and forlorn. That spring he had been hit by a streetcar in Atlanta. During his three month recovery, Simmons began dreaming of fraternity and companionship. Upon hearing of the success of *The Birth of a Nation*, Simmons took an active interest in the Klan. He obtained and revised a copy of the 1867 *Prescript*. On October 26, 1915, Simmons and 34 fellow comrades applied for and received a charter from the
State of Georgia for the “Knights of the Ku Klux Klan” as a “purely benevolent and eleemosynary” fraternal order.55

Despite all of the trends in favor of the Klan, Simmons was only able to attract 5,000-6,000 members from 1915-1920.56 Simmons had assembled the mechanisms for the Klan’s success, but he was unable to sell the Klan. Simmons sought help from Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler, two advertising professionals, in order to spread the appeal of the Invisible Empire.

Much of the Klan’s success can be attributed to the innovative and effective financial organization implemented in 1920 by Clarke and Tyler. The Klan required each member to pay an initiation fee (a “klectoken”) of $10.57 Simmons essentially contracted out the management of the klectokens to Clarke and Tyler. Of the $10 membership, $2 went into the treasury of the Klan. Clarke and Tyler retained the remaining $8, of which they paid $4 to the kleagle (an organizer or field worker58) who had recruited the initiate, $1 went to the head kleagle of the state, $0.50 went to the Grand Goblin (the overseer of all the kleagles in a domain, or group of states), and Clarke and Tyler retained the remaining $2.50.59

The financial incentive encouraged the kleagles to adapt the political and social program of the Klan to each local community’s issues, conflicts and problems.

55 “Exhibit A,” KKK Hearings, pp. 101-2; Wade, 144.
57 Constitution and Laws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc. (Atlanta, Georgia: Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, 1930), 10
58 Constitution, 19.
Since 1970, a wealth of scholarship has explored the many permutations of the Klan and the populations they attracted. In general, this scholarship has demonstrated that local issues determined the nature of local Klans and that the membership of the local Klans were generally reflective of the native White Protestant community in the area. 60

The financial reorganization and adaptability of the Klan had a dramatic impact on the organization's growth rate. During 1922, Klan membership grew from one hundred thousand Knights to one million. 61 At its peak in 1924, the Klan claimed between three and six million Americans. 62 The Klan claimed many officials of state, local and national government as members, and even inducted President Warren G. Harding into the Klan in the White House Green Room. 63

However, the system that brought the Klan success also contributed to its downfall. The Klan generated an enormous volume of wealth not only for the individual members, but also for the organization. The Klan collected $8 million in revenue for the fiscal year 1923-4, but only recorded a balance of only $664,091. Inadequate documentation obscures the path of this money, but it can reasonably be

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61 Wade, 166.
63 Wade, 165.
assumed that a substantial percentage flowed into the pockets of local and national officers.\(^{64}\)

Conflict within the Ku Klux Klan also produced bad press that damaged the organization.\(^{65}\) Klan leader Hiram W. Evans fired North Carolina’s popular Grand Wizard, Judge Henry A. Grady in 1927. Grady had exercised a restraining influence in North Carolina and had opposed the national organization’s efforts to raise funds and engage in politics. The conflict created a schism in the state organization and the Raleigh Klan, where the state organization was centered, disbanded. Many Klansmen left the order, and membership dropped from a high of approximately fifty thousand to around eight thousand in 1927.\(^{66}\) Financial scandals, along with high profile factionalism in North Carolina and other states, led to the downfall of the Klan by the end of the 1920s.

While the Klan remained largely silent throughout the Depression and World War II, racial violence in North Carolina continued largely unabated. White Southerners used lynching a tool to impose racial restrictions during this time. Lynch law had a long tradition in the southern United States as an extralegal system of enforcing order. During Reconstruction, the Klan used lynching to maintain the racial order. Lynching occurred more frequently in the 1890s than in any other decade. However, the rituals of lynching became much more formalized and publicized through the 1930s. White mobs generally showed high levels of

\(^{64}\) Wade, 364.
\(^{65}\) Alexander, 364.
\(^{66}\) Chalmers, 92-7.
organization and premeditation. Newspaper advertisements appeared several days before the Whites planned to take action and in many cases, organizers chartered private train coaches to transport the mob to the planned location of the lynching. Local authorities were complicit in mob action, as they relinquished the prisoner in their charge at the hint of an unruly gathering. The majority of the White community participated in lynching, either directly or by participating in the retelling of the narrative.

In addition to furthering awareness of the event, large numbers of participants and spectators also provided anonymity. Where the Klan had used hoods and robes, the mobs of the 1930s relied on their size to protect their identity. In general, local authorities accepted (and in some cases promoted) lynching as an inevitable reaction of the Southern community to the Black victim's alleged crime. Since a large percentage of the community participated in the lynching, law enforcement would have had a difficult time bringing all of the participants to justice. Local authorities neglected to prosecute the participants, either because of the difficulty or due to their support of the violence.

Lynching replaced the Klan in the social operation of the South by enforcing the racial codes through violence and the threat of violence. Newspapers published accounts that described the motive of the Lynchers and the real and imagined crimes of their victim. This publicity threatened Blacks and enforced the observance of the

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social order and the rules of society. In order to further the impact of the event, the organizers of a lynching also attempted to draw large numbers of participants and spectators. Participants also actively collected, sold and traded souvenirs from lynchings, such as body parts, instruments of torture and even picture postcards. This practice further spread the message and meaning of the lynching by creating objects that helped a transitory event to live on through the recollection of its details.

Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, Southerners used ad hoc mobs to enforce racial restrictions and Klan membership continued to dwindle. During the Depression, few potential klansmen could afford the $10 klectoken. Upon the United States’ entrance into World War II, most Americans were more concerned with German and Japanese enemies than the perceived Black, Catholic and Communist enemies of the Klan. Furthermore, the existence of an organization working covertly to suppress the rights of Americans contradicted the government’s campaign to spread democracy internationally. During World War II, president Franklin Delano Roosevelt feared that the Klan threatened national unity and international support. The final nail in the Klan’s coffin came from the Internal Revenue Service in the spring of 1944. Marion Allen, an IRS agent working out of Atlanta, Georgia, presented Imperial Wizard James A. Colescott with a bill for $685,000 in back taxes.

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68 Hale, 206.
69 Hale, 228.
70 Hale, 228.
71 Brundage, 302-5.
72 Wade, 274.
on Klan revenues. According to Colescott, the Klan “voted to suspend the constitutional laws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc., to revoke all charter Klans and to order disbandment of all provisional Klans.” However, Colescott reserved the right to “meet and reincarnate at any time.”

The end of World War II brought the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. In mid-May, 1946, seven hundred Klansmen gathered atop Georgia’s Stone Mountain for a grand initiation ceremony. Five hundred men and women paid their ten dollars and joined the Klan. Thanks to newspaper advertisements, approximately two thousand spectators attended. The Klan lit up the countryside by placing fuel cans in the shape of a three hundred foot long cross on the slopes of the mountain. Dr. Samuel Green, a local physician who presided over the spectacle as Grand Dragon, proclaimed, “We are revived.”

Green contended that his organization, which he called the Association of Georgia Klans (AGK), was the same Klan that had operated in Georgia since 1915. This meant that the Klan was operating under the 1915 Georgia charter which characterized the Klan as a purely benevolent and charitable fraternal order. During the next decade, unemployed reporter Stetson Kennedy would infiltrate the AGK and gather information that the government would use to revoke the Klan’s charter.

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73 Wade, 275.
74 “Klan Disbands as National Body; Claimed 5,000,000 Roll in 1920s,” The New York Times (June 5, 1944), 21.
Kennedy’s goal in gathering evidence on the Klan was to persuade the state of Georgia to revoke the AGK’s charter. Kennedy infiltrated the Klan and reported his findings in national periodicals such as *The Nation*, *PM* and *Common Ground*. Kennedy also fed information to radio commentators and even the writers of *Superman*. During this time Kennedy was collecting information for a legal attack on the AGK. By 1954, Kennedy believed he had accumulated enough material evidence to take down the Georgia Klans. He extricated himself from membership and turned the evidence over to the Georgia Attorney General, who revoked the AGK’s charter.

The downfall of the AGK splintered the Klan and allowed a wide array of more radical local leaders to gain autonomy. This generally enabled local groups to take a more violent approach to the problems that they perceived in their area. In Alabama, Asa Carter’s Original Ku Klux Klan of the Confederacy acquired a reputation for extreme violence. With the national leadership chain destroyed, any local Klansman with enough support could set up an independent state organization.

On a Monday morning in 1954, the Supreme Court unintentionally provided additional provocation for the spread of local Klans. The effect that the *Brown* decision had on race relations in the South cannot be overstated. Segregationists formed White Citizens’ Councils to prevent the enforcement of the *Brown* decision, while at the same time attempting to contain the spread of the Klan. “We want the people assured that there is responsible leadership organized which will and can

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76 Wade, 280.
77 Wade, 303.
handle local segregation problems. If that is recognized, there will be no need for any 'hot-headed' bunch to start a Ku Klux Klan." These Councils were supposedly non-violent, respectable alternatives to the Klan. They drew well educated, prosperous segregationists and left the Klan with little membership other than violent, uneducated laborers.\textsuperscript{80}

The Councils proved incapable of stopping the desegregation of the South, and many of their members sought more radical means. With the desegregation of Little Rock Public schools and the success of the Montgomery bus boycott in 1957, the Klan gained new members, many of whom sought publicity and conflict.\textsuperscript{81} These events allowed demagogues with no other talent than inciting the least educated and most virulently racist members of Southern society to commit acts of violence.

The splintering of the Klan allowed leaders with little organizational or public-relations skills to claim the mantle of the Klan. In North Carolina, James "Catfish" Cole set up the Carolina Knights. Cole had a checkered past riddled with problems with alcohol, driving and the law. He had previously earned a living as a carnival huckster and circus barker. Cole now proclaimed himself a Baptist minister, "I’m a minister of the Gospel," he declared, "and I’m here to tell you God’s side: He never meant for niggers and whites to mix."\textsuperscript{82} Cole began holding rallies in southern North Carolina that drew thousands of spectators and participants. Cole also inserted

\textsuperscript{79} Hodding Carter III, \textit{The South Strikes Back} (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1959), 39.
\textsuperscript{80} Wade, 300.
\textsuperscript{81} Wade, 303.
\textsuperscript{82} Wade, 119-20.
his opinion into local issues in an attempt to intimidate racial minorities who failed to conform to traditional Southern racial definitions.

From the end of the Civil War through the 1950s, White Southerners used violence and the threat of violence to create and enforce racial restrictions. Robert Williams and the Lumbees both inverted this tradition by using violence to reject restrictions based on race. They also used violence to claim the rights of citizenship, including the right to retaliate against White violence.
On October 5, 1957, Robert Williams, the President of the Monroe, North Carolina chapter of the NAACP, successfully defended the home of Monroe NAACP Vice President Dr. Albert E. Perry against an attack by a Klan motorcade. During the 1950s, Williams and the Monroe NAACP developed a program of armed self-defense in order to resist White racial violence. This program attacked the heart of the racial system that Southern society had developed over the preceding century. Williams and the Monroe NAACP refused to defer to White authority, an obligation that Southern society required of Blacks. Williams also claimed for Black men the right to defend their homes, families and neighbors through violence and the threat of violence. By openly carrying arms, Williams hoped to prevent White violence towards himself and other Black residents of Monroe. Williams used armed self
defense to redefine what it meant to be a Black man.

By the time that Williams organized the Monroe NAACP, the South had an entrenched system of racial division and suppression that was based in pseudo-science and social tradition. Social Darwinism, developed by Herbert Spencer in the 1850s, mandated a virtual obsession with racial heritage based on the mistaken assumption that social traits were inherited through genetics. In the 1950s, the notions of Social Darwinism persisted in Southern racial beliefs. Spencer and his American disciples believed that the expression of an individual's racial composition could be observed in every area of a person's personality and appearance. Further, they believed that race determined the success of an individual, or groups of related individuals. These theories adapted Darwinism to the human social and racial sphere. Social Darwinists measured evolutionary success by the domination of one race over another. Using a pseudo-scientific sleight of hand, Southerners confounded socially constructed racial characteristics, such as intelligence, sexuality and aggressiveness, with the genetic expressions of skin color, facial features, hair, etc. By way of circular reasoning, European Americans used the fact of established white social, economic and political control of African Americans to justify the continuance of their social domination and the imposition of restrictive racial definitions upon minorities.83

83 Spencer, 7, 162-6.
Southern whites declared white blood to be the most pure due to the fact that White Americans had dominated and oppressed other races. European Americans claimed to be more intelligent, civilized and beautiful than members of other races. They believed that the height of white purity was to be found in Southern white women. The purity and delicacy of white women needed to be protected for the good of the children that they gave birth to and reared. Southerners believed black blood to be the least pure and they therefore conceptualized a correspondingly defective mentality. They imagined the prototypical African American to be childlike in temperament—impulsive, instinctual and accepting of their status as a lower caste. In the Southern conception, African Americans could either be helpful and polite or, by refusing their lesser status, become militant, demanding and “uppity.” White Americans also imagined blacks to be more animalistic, passionate, promiscuous and more violent in their sexual practices. The possibility of contamination of white blood through miscegenation with lesser races posed the greatest danger for Southern society. Indeed, one drop of black blood was enough, in Arkansas and Alabama, for an individual to be considered black. These beliefs, combined with the fear of the black man’s supposed impulsive and aggressive sexuality, caused Southern society to develop an intense paranoia about black men raping or having sex with white women. In 1898, Democrats even used song to drive the scare tactics:

84 Blu, 26.
85 Haney-Lopez, 118.
86 Blu, 24-7; Gail Bederman, Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917 (The University of Chicago Press, 1995) 28-9, 92; Glenda Elizabeth
Rise ye sons of Carolina!
Proud Caucasians, one and all;  
Be not deaf to Love’s appealing—
Hear your wives and daughters call,
See their blanched and anxious faces,
Note their frail, but lovely forms
Rise, defend their spotless virtue
With your strong and manly arms.87

Democrats and other race-baiters goaded white men into violence by challenging
them to demonstrate their manhood while simultaneously denying Black men the
ability to exercise the same manliness.

Williams and the Monroe NAACP challenged these notions by claiming the
right to defend their homes, families and communities through armed self-defense.
Biographer Timothy B. Tyson suggests that an event that occurred in 1936 had sown
the seeds of Williams’ militancy. On a warm September afternoon, the eleven-year-
old Williams witnessed Jesse Alexander Helms (father of U.S. Senator Jesse Helms),
a Monroe police officer, beat an African American woman and drag her down the
street to the jail. Years later, Williams recalled that “The emasculated black men
hung their heads in shame and hurried silently [away] from the cruelly bizarre
scene.”88 As an adult, Williams would strive to be the antithesis of these impotent
Black men by protecting himself and other members of the African American

Gilmore, Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-
typescript, Timothy B. Tyson Papers (1996), 5-6; quoted in Timothy B. Tyson, Radio Free Dixie:
Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,
1999), 1-2.
community from White violence. The suppression of a Black man's ability to protect a Black female was a major battlefield in the Southern racial system.

Southern society intricately linked gender, especially the conception of manhood, with racial differentiation. In order for Southern White men to express their manhood, they had to protect Southern White women. For this reason, Southern society was obsessed with the Black man who was suspected (or imagined) to have raped a White woman. On the other hand, Southern society prohibited Black men from challenging White men. Therefore, Black men could not protect Black women from White men. Further, the definition of Blackness included the compulsion to defer to authority. This entailed the inability of Black men to claim manliness by protecting Black women from attack. Through the lynching of the supposed rapist, White men further asserted not only their manliness, but also their Whiteness. The mob took possession of a Black man’s body in order to define White manliness as able to protect White femininity. 89 Williams’ generation grew up under the violent enforcement of racial restrictions.

After this generation served in World War II, many Black veterans refused to accept the segregation that they had grown up with. In 1955, Williams returned to Monroe from serving as a Private First Class in the United States Marine Corps. 90 He found the local NAACP chapter dwindling due to White intimidation. Following the *Brown* decision, the Ku Klux Klan began a policy of gathering information on local

89 Hale, 233-8.
NAACP members and terrorizing them with threats, cross burnings and economic reprisals. 91 In Monroe, the chapter membership shrank to six, down from a high of 163 members in 1946. 92 When Williams objected to disbanding it, the other members elected him President and, except for his fellow veteran Dr. Albert E. Perry, promptly resigned. Williams began a drive for membership aimed at young veterans who had returned from the war to find no employment, or only menial work. "One day I walked into a Negro poolroom in our town," Williams recalled, "interrupted a game by putting NAACP literature on the table and made a pitch. I recruited half of those present." 93 This shift in recruiting tactics reflected Williams' general strategy for the Monroe NAACP and the desire of the Black working class for an organization that would fight for their rights.

Prior to Williams' assumption of leadership, the NAACP had been predominantly middle-class and moderate. By the 1950s, there was a growing feeling in Southern Black communities that the NAACP was, as the novelist and intellectual Julian Mayfield put it, "doing too little, too timidly and too late." The national organization was unable to advocate militancy because that would jeopardize the financial and political support of most of their supporters, who preferred to address racial injustice through the legal and political systems. 94

92 Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 58.
94 Mayfield, 551.
Williams developed an NAACP chapter that, because of its working-class composition and its militancy, was unrestrained by the concerns of the previous members or the national organization. Williams thought that the "most important" aspect of the Monroe chapter was that "we had a strong representation of returned veterans who were very militant and who didn't scare easy."\(^{95}\) Williams found it easier to recruit these working class members because they had more reason to challenge the status quo and less to lose from doing so. Williams remarked that "we got some of the 'worst element' we could find. They had been abused, they had been mistreated, they had been in jail."\(^{96}\) In addition, Williams solicited the support of working-class African American women and the financial support of those who could not join openly.\(^{97}\)

Williams transformed the Monroe NAACP into an armed community defense organization. In 1957 he wrote to the National Rifle Association and received a charter. The Monroe Rifle Club, which was affiliated with the Monroe NAACP, stockpiled weapons for defense.\(^{98}\) According to Williams, they started "getting really organized and setting up, digging foxholes and started getting up ammunition and training guys. In fact, we had started building our own rifle range, and we got our own M-1’s and got our own Mausers and German semi-automatic rifles, and steel

\(^{95}\) Williams, 14.
\(^{96}\) Robert F. Williams, Interview with Stephanie Banchero, transcript, 1996, Stephanie Banchero Papers, transcript, Madison, Wisconsin; quoted in Tyson, 81-82.
\(^{97}\) Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 81.
helmets. We had everything."99 Williams took advantage of every possible asset in constructing a militant group to aggressively challenge racism in Monroe.

Williams and the Monroe Rifle Club accumulated the materials to defend their homes and families. Southern racial codes had long suppressed the ability of Black men to violence to protect their communities. In defending the women and homes of Monroe, the NAACP attempted to redefine the category of the Black man. They claimed the right of Black men to defend their families and neighbors, through violence if necessary. Williams refused to defer to the authority of the White community when they attacked Black domesticity.

During the summer of 1957, tensions increased as the Monroe chapter challenged the prohibition of Black children from the public swimming pool. The accidental drowning of a young African American who was forced to swim in a lake touched off this conflict. "Year after year, the summer months bring the same tragic story," Dr. Perry lamented in demanding access to a public swimming pool for African Americans.100 Williams and Perry began leading African American children, clad in bathing suits, to the publicly funded swimming pool to demand admission. When they were refused entrance, the contingent began a series of "stand-ins" at the entrance. During this time, Williams made a habit of openly carrying his .45

100 Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 83.
automatic in public.\textsuperscript{101} Even previously sympathetic Whites looked on this strategy with strong disapproval.

In the fall of that year, Catfish Cole involved himself in the issue. "A nigger who wants to go to a white swimming pool is not looking for a bath," Cole intoned, "he is looking for a funeral."\textsuperscript{102} Six Klan rallies drew thousands of participants, including a Klan-sponsored gathering of six thousand people in nearby Salisbury. After these events, Klan motorcades, accompanied by Monroe Chief of Police A.A. Mauney and several squad cars, frequently fired rounds into Dr. Perry's residence. In response, Williams and the Monroe NAACP set up a telephone alert system in preparation to defend their community. They also constructed defensive positions around Dr. Perry's residence. Williams established a schedule for approximately sixty men to take shifts guarding Dr. Perry's house. They slept on cots in the garage with their rifles and shotguns.\textsuperscript{103}

On October 5, 1957, Cole and Chief Mauney led a Klan motorcade past Dr. Perry's house. The Klan began firing their weapons at the house. Williams and the Rifle Club returned the fire from behind breastworks constructed of sandbags and earth. The Monroe Rifle Club fired low and did not hit anyone in the passing cars. B.J. Winfield recalled that "when we started firing, they run. We run them out and they started just crying and going on." The moral that Rifle Club member Woodrow

\textsuperscript{101} Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 86.
\textsuperscript{103} Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 88.
Wilson drew from the incident was that "The Klans was low-down people what would do dirty things. But if they found out that you would do dirty things, too, then they'd let you alone." The next day, the Monroe City Council banned Klan motorcades. This success proved the efficacy of Williams' program of armed self-defense. The city council moved to limit the disruption of the racial system by reducing Klan antagonism.

This incident, one of many violent racial altercations in 1950s Monroe, did not receive media attention, nor was the Klan held legally responsible for their actions as they were in Robeson County. Unlike the Lumbees, Williams and the Monroe NAACP only received press coverage from the Monroe Journal, and three African American publications. According to Williams,

The national press played up the Indian-Klan fight because they didn't consider this a great threat-- the Indians are a tiny minority and people could laugh at the incident as a sentimental joke-- but no one wanted Negroes to get the impression that this was an accepted way to deal with the Klan. So the white press maintained a complete blackout about [our] fight.

The Monroe Gun Club refused to passively accept the violent imposition of racial restrictions. However, Williams had contested the definition of Blackness, the White media deprived him of an opportunity to magnify the meaning of this victory through inattention to the event. They did so in order to contain any disruption to the Southern racial system.

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105 Williams, 21; Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 89, 138.
106 Williams, 21.
Through violence, Williams challenged the racial restrictions of Union County. The Black community gained a new pride by proving their ability to stand together and defend their community from the harsher elements of segregation. In 1961, Julian Mayfield reported that “the morale of the Negroes in Union County is high. They carry themselves with a dignity I have seen in no other Southern community. . . . It is as if, in facing up to their enemies, they have finally confronted a terrible reality and found it not so terrible after all.” Williams had replaced the tacit agreement between the White moderate community and the former middle-class leadership of the NAACP with a new reality in which the African American community in Monroe provided for its own security.

This new arrangement brought with it new challenges. While Black workers now possessed a higher sense of security and autonomy, they found it harder to provide for their material and economic needs. After the failure of fear to regulate African American behavior, the White community turned to economic retribution. The business community coerced factory owners in the area to import White labor from Charlotte rather than hiring local Blacks. White employers had previously compensated their Black employees through a system that provided for their material needs without conceding to labor the right to act independently of White control.

When Williams and the Monroe NAACP insisted that Blacks in Monroe were entitled

107 Mayfield, 562.
108 Mayfield, 562.
to the rights of citizenship, they negated the principles of this paternalistic system.

Mayfield detailed the disruption of Black workers’ personal economies:

The leftover food that the colored maid could once carry home is now consigned instead to the garbage pail, and the old clothes that found their way to the colored section are now either sold or burned. ... Negroes suspected of belonging to the NAACP are told “Let Williams feed you!” and “Let Williams find you a place to live!” as they are fired from their jobs and evicted from their homes. 109

This made the Black community responsible for their material needs without the infrastructure to do so or the ability to create it.

The White community also sought to suppress Williams’ challenge through personal retribution. On August 28, 1961, a mob of 5,000 Whites beat a group of thirty Black non-violent protesters led by the Reverend Paul Brooks of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and James Forman, the future leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). 110 That night, Williams and the Monroe NAACP engaged in a standoff with the White mob. A White couple named Mabel and Charles Bruce Stegell accidentally drove past the barricades and through the tense Black neighborhood. Mr. Stegall later recalled that “there were hundreds of niggers there, and they were armed, they were ready for war.” Williams feared for their lives, especially after Mr. Stegall began ranting, "What's the matter with you niggers? Whatcha pointing those guns for?" 111 Mabel Stegell recalled that

109 Mayfield, 562.
110 Tyson, Introduction to Negroes With Guns, Robert F. Williams, xxvii-xxviii.
Williams "acted like he wanted to be nice to us." The Stegalls followed Williams into his house, where they remained for several hours before being released. Fearing an all out race war, Williams fled Monroe.

Local and federal authorities charged Williams with kidnapping the Stegalls. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, in coordination with other federal and state authorities conducted a massive manhunt for Williams and his family. J. Edgar Hoover, chief of the FBI, ordered "all divisions must continue to press the investigation to locate and apprehend Williams. All leads must receive immediate attention." Law enforcement exerted an extraordinary effort to apprehend Williams.

Williams' connections in Monroe and elsewhere, through the NAACP, the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and the Socialist Workers Party enabled his flight. An FBI agent went so far as to say that Williams "has become something of a 'John Brown' to Negroes around Monroe and they will do anything for him." With his wife and two children in tow, Williams fled to the outskirts of Monroe on foot. There, the Williams clan met Julian Mayfield, who drove them to New York City. The FBI turned up the pressure, publishing wanted posters that warned that Williams "should be considered armed and extremely dangerous." They also inaccurately stated that Williams had been "diagnosed as a schizophrenic." Williams later

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112 Dwayne Walls, "She Begged for Freedom 'But They Wouldn't Listen,'" Charlotte Observer (August 29, 1961); quoted in Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 279.
113 Charlotte SAC to Director, FBI teletype, September 11, 1961, Robert Franklin Williams Papers/FBI; quoted in Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 283.
114 Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 284.
described these posters as “tantamount to a ‘shoot on sight’ order.”\footnote{Robert F. Williams, “While God Lay Sleeping: The Autobiography of Robert F. Williams,” 184; quoted in Tyson, \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, 283.} Due to this pressure, Williams left the country for Toronto. After Williams had been in Canada for six weeks, the Canadian Mounted Police joined the search for him. “One day the \textit{Toronto Globe and Mail} published a huge picture of me on its front page with an article stating that the U.S. government had asked Canada to arrest and extradite me,” Williams later recalled.\footnote{Tyson, \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, 284.} When FBI agents and Mounties raided the Toronto apartment that Williams had stayed in, they confidently declared that Williams “hasn’t got a chance. We’ll send him back to the States in a pine box.”\footnote{William Worthy, “The FBI in Cold War and Peace,” \textit{Realist} 31 (February 1962), 1; quoted in Tyson, \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, 284.} Williams fled to Nova Scotia, where, a week later, Cubans smuggled him onto a plane bound for his exile.\footnote{Tyson, \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, 284-5.}

From 1961 to 1965, Robert and Mabel Williams lived in Cuba and broadcast “Radio Free Dixie,” a 50,000 watt radio program that could be heard as far as Canada.\footnote{Tyson, \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, 286; Tyson, Introduction to \textit{Negroes With Guns}, xxviii.} Every Friday at 11 pm., listeners across the country tuned in to hear music, news and political diatribes against the “rump-licking Uncle Toms and “Ku Klux Klan savages.”\footnote{Tyson, \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, 286-7.} Williams set the stage for future Black activism, and is often cited as an influential figure in the development of the Black Power movement.\footnote{Tyson, \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, 250; Timothy B. Tyson, Introduction to \textit{Negroes With Guns}, xv.} Malcolm X thought that “Robert Williams was just a couple of years ahead of his
time; but he laid a good groundwork, and he will be given credit in history for the stand that he took prematurely."¹²² Two groups, the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) and the Republic of New Africa (RNA), named Williams president-in-exile (RAM in 1963 and RNA in 1968).¹²³ Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party, wrote that "reading *Negroes with Guns* by Robert Williams had a great influence on the kind of party we developed."¹²⁴ Interested White observers noted Williams' popularity with wariness. In 1966, *Life* magazine reported that Williams's "picture is prominently displayed in extremist haunts in the big city ghettos."¹²⁵ In 1969, the CIA claimed that Williams "has long been the ideological leader of the Black Panther Party... [and] has managed to becoming [sic] an outstanding figure, possibly the outstanding figure, in the black extremist movement in the United States. ... One wonders if Williams is about to claim the center of the Black Power stage."¹²⁶ While historian Timothy B. Tyson suspects that this was an exaggeration, the fact that Williams influenced the development of the Black Power movement is certain.

Williams demonstrated that a well-organized group of Blacks could achieve the redefinition of racial meanings by asserting the right and ability of Black men to protect themselves, their families and their communities. This assertion ran counter

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¹²⁵ Russell Sackett, "Plotting a War on Whitey," *Life* (June 10, 1966), 100; quoted in Tyson, 297.
to the established Southern racial structure that defined Black men as incapable of asserting their manliness in opposition to Whites. However, Williams thereby provoked the reaction of White law enforcement and media outlets. White media outlets refused to broadcast the story of the Monroe Gun Club and thereby reduced the regional and national impact of Williams' challenge to White authority. The legal mechanisms of White power, in the form of local police and the FBI successfully made Williams a fugitive and forced him to flee to Cuba. Further, White supporters of the NAACP forced the national organization to reject the ideology of its most militant branch. Despite these impediments, Williams' story inspired a generation of militant political activists because he used violence to redefine what it meant to be Black.
CHAPTER FOUR

“THIRTY THOUSAND HALF-BREEDS:”

MAKING RACE IN ROBESON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, 1958

Between the colonial era and the 1950s, North Carolinians developed a complex system of tripartite racial segregation that included Whites, Blacks and Indians. Through the various social negotiations, including violence, North Carolinians defined these three racial categories. While much of this history is lost, the known experiences of the Lumbee Indians of Robeson County illuminate the development and reformulation of this unique racial system. The Lumbees remained separate from their Black and White neighbors through their own volition. They consistently defined themselves as non-White and actively defended their unique status. In 1958, when Cole’s Klan attempted to subject them to restrictions placed on Blacks, the Lumbees used violence to define themselves as non-Black.
The historical origins of the Lumbee are poorly documented and controversial. In 1885, historian Hamilton McMillan suggested that the Lumbees were descendents of Raleigh’s lost colony.\(^\text{127}\) The colony was planted on Roanoke Island, Virginia (now North Carolina) in the mid-summer of 1587. The settlers soon realized that they would not be able to plant a crop that year and sent Governor John White back to England to secure supplies. England’s war with Spain, however, prevented White from returning until 1590. By this time, the colony had been abandoned. There had been previous discussion of moving the colony inland, and the settlers agreed to leave a carving to indicate where they had gone and to leave a cross if they were in danger upon leaving. White found inscriptions on several trees that read “CRO” and “CROATOAN” and did not find a cross. Upon making this discovery, White wrote “I greatly joyed that I had safely found a certain token of their being at Croatoan, which is the place where Manteo [a friendly member of the Hatteras tribe] was born, and the savages of the island our friend.”\(^\text{128}\) White searched briefly for the missing settlers, but the captain of the ship was anxious to chase Spanish bullion in the Caribbean and thus prohibited extensive investigation.

Over the succeeding centuries, various travelers reported encountering, or hearing of, possible descendents of the lost colony. In 1608, Captain John Smith reported hearing of Indians in the Chowan-Roanoke area who dressed like

Englishmen. In 1660, the Reverend Morgan Jones claimed to have encountered Indians in North Carolina who spoke English. John Lederer, in 1670, reported that Santee and Cheraw Indians had informed him that “a powerful nation of bearded men [was] seated” in inland North Carolina. Finally, Lumbee scholars Adolph L. Dial and David K. Eliades cite John Larson, the surveyor-general of North Carolina, who wrote *History of North Carolina* in 1708. Lawson told of Indians who raised poultry and were familiar with the concept of writing. Dial and Eliades take this as a sure sign of contact with Europeans and speculate that this contact was with the Lost Colony. Lawson further reported that the “Hatteras Indians . . . tell us, that several of their Ancestors were white People, and could talk in a Book.” Many of the early travelers’ accounts are unconfirmed and contain a fair amount of hearsay. Further, by the time of Lawson’s account, it is quite likely that Indians in inner North Carolina had encountered settlers who had left the colony of Virginia. By the late 1600s, class lines in Virginian society had become less permeable. The earliest settlers had monopolized the land that was accessible by ship. Many younger men, upon their release from indentured servitude, found themselves with no opportunity to purchase farmland. The defeat of Bacon’s Rebellion, the violent expression of these men’s discontent, and the development of a cohesive gentry class produced further

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129 Dial and Eliades, 5-6.
131 Dial and Eliades, 6.
motivation for the participants to flee the colony.\textsuperscript{133} The Lumbees have since adopted this theory as their myth of national origin.\textsuperscript{134} In 1888, the Lumbees applied for federal recognition as the Croatan Indians.\textsuperscript{135} While it does seem possible that the Lumbees are descendents of the Lost Colony, there is little evidence to support a definitive claim. At any rate, the Lumbees’ mythical connection to the Lost Colony influences the way they think of themselves and often inspires White interest in them.\textsuperscript{136}

Other theories as to the origins of the Lumbees abound. Anthropologist J.R. Swanton theorized that the “Croatan” Indians most likely descended from a variety of Siouan groups such as the Cheraw, Keyauwee, Eno, Shakori, Waccamaw and Cape Fear and possibly also from several Iroquoian groups.\textsuperscript{137} The Lumbee themselves have, at various times, claimed to be Cherokee, Cheraw and Siouan.\textsuperscript{138} Social Anthropologist Karen I. Blu suggests that extensive genealogical research might help

\textsuperscript{133} Breen, 241.
\textsuperscript{134} Blu, 36.
\textsuperscript{135} Fergus M. Bordewich, \textit{Killing the White Man’s Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century} (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 64.
\textsuperscript{137} Blu, 41.
\textsuperscript{138} Bordewich, 64; Peter Iverson, “\textit{We Are Still Here:}” \textit{American Indians in the Twentieth Century} (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1998), 100-1.
to clarify the history of the Lumbees, but a complete account of Lumbee history is most likely impossible.\textsuperscript{139}

Oral traditions place the ancestors of the Lumbees in the area of Robeson County at least as early as 1732. In that year, George II of England granted two Lumbee ancestors, Henry Berry and James Lowrie, title to land on the Lowrie Swamp near the Lumber River.\textsuperscript{140} Mary Norment, a White resident of Robeson County, wrote in 1875 that the first Scottish migrants, who arrived in the area in 1747, found the ancestors of the Lumbees already living there.\textsuperscript{141} In 1754, the governor of North Carolina, in his \textit{Colonial Reports}, described “50 families a mixt Crew,” which could refer to the ancestors of the Lumbees. The governor elaborated that these families were “a lawless People, [who] possess the Lands without patent or paying quit rents.” They had “shot a Surveyor for coming to view vacant lands being inclosed in great swamps.” The governor, though, also reported that there were “No . . . Indians in the county.” However, Blu suggests that the government officials were likely reluctant to investigate the race of people who had shot a tax collector. Finally, it may be, as Blu suggests, that the Lumbees by this time had mixed ancestry and had ceased to live what was considered a tribal lifestyle and therefore were not considered Indian. From 1790 on, there is continuous documentation of the Lumbees’ existence in Robeson

\textsuperscript{139} Blu, 41-2.  
\textsuperscript{140} Blu, 35-36.  
\textsuperscript{141} Blu, 36.
County. The Lumbee people faced the encroachment of American settlement and the African American slaves who accompanied them.

The residents of Robeson County in particular, and of the South in general, created a legal, intellectual and pseudo-scientific caste system based on race. During the Jim Crow period, the residents of Robeson County developed a three-way system of segregation to separate the races. By the 1950s Indians, African Americans and Whites had separate schools, restaurants and restrooms. In addition to de jure separation of the races, Robesonians developed a complex racial hierarchy based on the conflation of biological traits with acquired attributes.

White American ideas about Indian blood followed a parallel course as with Blacks, but Indian genetics were viewed more positively than African genetics. Further, a significant amount of blood was necessary for an individual to be considered a “real Indian.” Similar to their conception of Blacks, Whites saw two possibilities in Indians: the noble savage and the vicious savage. The first was seen as sullen, backward looking and melancholy. The less civilized type of Indian is characterized by his “meanness.” He was overly sensitive to insult and quick with a violent reaction. A small amount of Indian blood could, in some cases, be positive. Especially popular was the Cherokee grandmother. A female Indian ancestor added an air of the exotic without provoking the fear of the violent Indian man. Cherokee heritage was especially popular because it provided a victim status while also relating

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142 Blu, 38-9.
143 Blu, 25.
an individual to one of the "Five Civilized Tribes."144 Through their claims to Cherokee heritage and the Lost Colony, the Lumbees mitigated their Indian identity by claiming descent from White ancestry and the most noble of Indians. Thus, Indian heritage, and Lumbee heritage in particular, was treated as less desirable than White blood, but more desirable than African American heritage. As a result, Robesonian society viewed the Indian race less negatively than the African race.

In Robeson County, individual Lumbees remained part of a segregated group, at least in part, through their own volition. Lumbees exercised control over tribal membership in order to continue to define themselves as neither White nor Black. Members of the community were Lumbees if one of their parents was a Lumbee and neither of their parents was Black. Beyond this, there is no distinction made between "half-bloods," "full-bloods," etc.145 Whites or non-Lumbee Indians who marry a Lumbee are accepted as contributing members of the community, but are not considered to be Lumbees.146 It is probable that most Lumbees could have fully integrated into the White community if they had so desired. In physical appearance, Lumbees are often mistaken for Whites.147 The Brass Ankles, Melungeons and Rockingham County Indians of North and South Carolina have renounced their Indian identity and have become socially recognized as White. The Lumbees could also have merged with the Black community, a possibility encouraged by Whites. In

144 Bordewich, 66.
145 Blu, 170.
146 Blu, 172.
147 Blu, 28.
Columbus County, North Carolina, members of the Indian community known today as the Waccamaw-Sioux split three ways: some became socially recognized Whites, others Blacks, while some retained their Indian status.\textsuperscript{148} As a result of the Lumbees' desire to be socially considered neither White nor Black, they did not necessarily view segregation as a negative practice in and of itself.

The Lumbees have remained Indian—separate from Whites and Blacks—through a conscious, collective choice. The Lumbees fought constantly to gain and protect Indian schools in Robeson County. In 1921, the General Assembly of North Carolina reacted to the demands of the Lumbees by passing "An Act for the Protection of the Indian Public Schools of Robeson County." This Act established an all-Indian committee and empowered it to resolve "all questions affecting the race of those applying for admission to public schools of Robeson County for the Indian race only."\textsuperscript{149} In addition, the Lumbees lobbied for the expansion of the state college's institution at Pembroke. This exclusively Indian institution was established in 1926 as a Normal school. In 1940, the college awarded its first Bachelor's degrees and, in 1941, the state changed the name of the school to Pembroke State College for Indians. Thus, the Lumbees exerted considerable effort to define of themselves as a racially Indian group, distinct from the White and Black communities.

\textsuperscript{148} Blu, 182-3.
\textsuperscript{149} Dial and Eliades, 98-9.
Following World War II, many Lumbee veterans bitterly objected to racial restrictions upon their return to the South. One Lumbee veteran related his experiences to Lumbee scholars Adolph L. Dial and David K. Eliades:

I went to a square dance in a neighboring town with some Indian and White friends. As I stood in line to get tickets, a policeman looked me over. He finally walked up to me and asked, “Are you an Indian?” to which I proudly replied yes. He then said, “Well, you can’t go in.” . . . I couldn’t help but wonder how I could be free everywhere except at home.\(^{150}\)

In addition to discriminating against Indians, Whites in North Carolina further restricted Indians from Robeson County for being Lumbee. Another veteran of WWII described his pursuit of a college education:

In 1945 or ’46, I applied to UNC. I had six battle stars. They said they didn’t accept Indians from Robeson County. . . . Indians from the West could come here and go to school, but here we are living here right in the state, taxpayers and all, and we can’t go.\(^{151}\)

Many Lumbee veterans deeply resented the contradictory system that demanded that Indians serve in the military while discriminating against them at home.

The racial situation in Robeson County was exceptionally complex, but was much less violent than in other areas of the South. Following the end of federal endorsement of segregation in Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, there was no violent, racially motivated resistance to the decision. Robesonians displayed none of the racial hysteria, race-baiting or organized resistance that occurred in other areas of the South.\(^{152}\) As anthropologist Karen I. Blu suggests, Whites did not possess a

\(^{150}\) Blu, 156.
\(^{151}\) Blu, 86.
\(^{152}\) Blu, 190.
common group identity based on a shared history and culture. Indeed, Robeson County contained small Jewish and Greek communities that were very active in business and politics. The White (mainly Scottish highlander) majority often denigrated these minorities through negative ethnic definitions, even while considering them White. As a result, these minorities have generally exercised a moderating influence on race relations.

White community leaders of Robeson County often restrained White dissidents who promoted a more repressive form of segregation. In 1952, federal, state and local authorities had united to arrest and prosecute members of the Klan operating in Robeson and bordering Columbus County. More than seventy-five Klansmen were convicted and sentenced to pay fines or serve prison terms. This ended Klan activity in the area for the next six years.

On January 13, 1958, the Klan resurfaced in Robeson County. James "Catfish" Cole of Marion, South Carolina, led his fellow Klansmen across the state line. The Klan burned one cross outside of a house in Lumberton, where a Lumbee family had moved into a house that had been occupied by Whites. They burned a second cross outside of a home in the town of St. Pauls (on the outskirts of Pembroke) whose White owners were housing a Lumbee woman. According to Cole, the Klan gave the Lumbee woman "a warning" because she was "having an

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153 Blu, 192.
154 Blu, 190-1.
affair” with a White man. Cole elaborated, “There’s about 30,000 half-breeds in Robeson County and we are going to have a cross burning and scare them up.”

Cole attempted to lease land in or near Pembroke, but was refused by local residents. On Thursday, January 16, the Klan announced that they would hold a large rally and cross burning on Saturday, January 18, in Maxton (ten miles west of Pembroke). Cole predicted that five thousand Klansmen would attend to “put the Indians in their place [and] end race-mixing.” When interviewed by the Gaffney Ledger about Cole’s statements, Lumbee veteran Simeon Oxendine responded, “He said that, did he? Well, we’ll just wait and see.”

Sheriff Malcolm McLeod visited Cole at his residence in South Carolina and “told him that his life would be in danger if he came to Maxton and made the same speech he’d been making.” Even before the event, the local White community worked to avoid disruption of the racial order.

At twilight on Saturday, January 18, approximately one hundred Klansmen gathered around a speaking platform in the field in Maxton. They had brought a generator, which powered a sound system and a solitary light bulb. Approximately

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156 “Klan Indian Violence,” 10.
159 Dial and Eliades, 159.
one-fourth of them were armed with rifles and shotguns. Above them, they stretched a banner emblazoned with the initials “KKK.” Across the road, Lumbees were arriving several cars at a time. Most were carrying handguns, shotguns or rifles. Several Lumbee soldiers who had returned home from local military bases brought “bushel-baskets full of” grenades, “just in case.” By 8:30 pm., when the rally was scheduled to begin, there were approximately one hundred Klansmen and hundreds of Lumbees. Sheriff McLeod, warned Cole against speaking: “Well, you know how it is. I can’t control the crowd with the few men I’ve got. I’m not telling you not to hold a meeting, but you see how it is. You’ve leased the land and have a right to be here, but you see how it is.” According to one Lumbee woman interviewed by anthropologist Karen Blu, several Lumbees asked the sheriff to tell Cole that they would kill him if he spoke. While the sheriff was speaking with Cole, Lumbees began advancing toward the Klan from three sides, leaving only the adjacent wetland unguarded. Suddenly, someone shot out the light bulb and chaos erupted across the field. In the ensuing melee, shots were fired “every which way,” and enraged Lumbees chanted “God Damn the Ku Klux Klan.” The Lumbees destroyed the sound system while the Klan fled into the swamps and the sheriff and his deputies

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163 Blu, 157; Sider, 102.
164 The number of Klansmen was estimated to be between 75 and the number of Lumbees was estimated to be 350 in “Indians: The Natives are Restless,” 20. However, Sider, on page 101 states that 150 Klansmen and between 1,500 and 3,000 Lumbees participated. Other estimates fall within this range.
165 Dial and Eliades, 160.
166 Blu, 157.
167 Dial and Eliades, 156.
“disappeared into their cars” and radioed the state highway patrol. Lumbee veteran Simeon Oxendine tore down the KKK banner, wrapped himself in it and posed for pictures that would appear around the world in *Life* magazine. The Lumbee also burned the Klan’s cross, hanged an effigy of Cole and called in vain for Cole to show himself. Cole’s wife, abandoned by her chivalrous husband, drove the family’s aging Cadillac into a ditch while trying to turn it around and escape. After the shooting stopped, a group of Lumbees pushed the car back onto the road for her. By one account, Cole remained in fearful seclusion in the swamp for two days. According to another report, two sheriff’s deputies, wearing civilian clothes, dispersed the remaining crowd with a tear gas bomb, which “sent[ ] choking, weeping Indians and Klansmen alike into the bushes or toward their cars.” By yet another account, Sheriff McLeod took the microphone and announced that if everyone did not leave at once, they would miss “Gunsmoke.” Remarkably, no one was killed and only four people received minor injuries. Historian Tim Tyson reports that falling bullets caused all but one of these injuries. Historical anthropologist Gerald Sider,
however, states that a reporter was wounded when a bullet struck his camera and that he was the “only person even slightly wounded.”

The Lumbees’ collective memory of this event depicts the nation acting in unity against the imposition of a violent, foreign ethos. A Lumbee woman interviewed by Blu stated that “outside agitators from South Carolina” had provoked the incident. She described Cole as believing that because “in South Carolina they don’t have such things... they shouldn’t be here either.” White residents supported the Lumbees in protecting their intricate and unique tripartite racial system.

White judicial and governmental authorities sided with the Lumbees. On January 20, a grand jury indicted Cole and James Garland Martin, a tobacco plant worker arrested after the rally for drunkenness and carrying a concealed weapon, on charges of inciting a riot. While Martin was already in custody, Cole failed to turn himself in and was declared a fugitive from justice. On January 22, Assistant Judge Lacy Maynor, a Lumbee Indian, fined Martin $74.75 after he was convicted of public drunkenness and possession of concealed weapons. Upon returning from a vacation cruise on January 30, 1958, North Carolina Governor Luther H. Hodges asserted that the responsibility for the conflict “rests squarely on the irresponsible and misguided men who call themselves the Ku Klux Klan.” As reported by the New York Times, Cole fought a losing battle against extradition, “on the ground that his

176 Sider, 102.
177 Blu, 160.
178 Blu, 157.
life would be in jeopardy if he returned here." On March 13, an all-White, all-male jury deliberated for only forty-three minutes before convicting Martin and Cole of inciting a riot. The next day, Judge Clawson L. Williams sentenced Cole to eighteen to twenty-four months in prison and Martin to six to twelve months.¹⁸¹ While the judicial system acted in a responsible manner, the reaction of the press was much more ambiguous.

The extensive press coverage of this event focused on the dramatic aspect of the event rather than exploring the implications for, or describing the intricacies of, the delicate racial climate of the South. In many cases, it would appear that reporters were writing about a late-nineteenth century Indian war. One New York Times editorial opened, "The Indian war whoop still brings terror to a little band of settlers in Robeson County."¹⁸² Such language was meant to invoke the history of White settlement of the frontier, even though Whites constituted the largest racial group in Robeson County. The Newsweek special stated that the Lumbees "gave the U.S. the first war-whooping, gun-shooting Indian raid it had seen in 50 years and more."¹⁸³ TIME entitled its piece on the Lumbee "The Natives Are Restless."¹⁸⁴ The authors used this terminology in order to stir the emotion of a public that still romanticized the frontier and the conflict with Indians that it entailed. The fact that the Lumbees did not pose a threat to the White majority made the story even better.

In their accounts, some journalists described the Klan as a morally neutral, rather than a brutal, expression of the violent Southern system of racial segregation and repression. *Newsweek* accepted the system of segregation in Robeson County as the inevitable outcome of the presence of three races: “The existence here of the three races has led to a triple-way segregation system.”185 The only moral that *Life* drew from the story was that, like Custer, “the Klan had taken on just too many Indians.”186 Others merely marveled at the foolishness of Cole’s franchise of the Klan. The *Commonweal* remarked that “it is rare that even the Klan has its stupidity so blatantly exposed.”187 The *New York Times* sarcastically editorialized that the Lumbees were “inconsiderate to startle the pathetic covey of Kluxery, who, like all sneaks and bullies, are easily scared.”188 National reporters celebrated the Lumbee victory over the Klan through derision of Cole and his followers.

However, the media made it clear that the example of the Lumbees was not applicable to the Blacks of the region. The *New York Times* tapped this vein of thought when it reported that “the residents [of Maxton] are afraid others will get the wrong idea.” They were “concern[ed] that some observers might get the idea that they are opposed to segregation just because they don’t like the Klan. And that wouldn’t be true.”189 Journalists and local residents did not wish to theorize on the

189 “Indian Raid Knits a Carolina Town,” 36.
future of African Americans in North Carolina, nor did they wish to consider the implications of the Lumbee victory for Black resistance.

The incident with the Klan actually improved the racial climate in Robeson County. The Lumbees were overjoyed with their victory and were impressed by the lack of support given to Cole by local Whites. Both Indians and Blacks were pleased with the operation of the local law enforcement and courts. After the announcement of Cole’s conviction, Simeon Oxendine remarked “I think the Indians are satisfied with the judgment.”190 However, an underlying current of conflict between African Americans and the Lumbees was evident. Immediately following the riot, Oxendine expressed his belief that “if the Negroes had done something like this a long time ago, we wouldn’t be bothered with the KKK.”191 Oxendine had not heard of Robert F. Williams or the Monroe Gun Club, despite the fact that Monroe was only eighty miles away.

Due to their defeat of the Klan, the Lumbees maintained the racial balance of Robeson County. The White community actively participated in this process through the media, law enforcement and judiciary. Despite the fact that they did not receive the same level of support, Robert Williams and the Monroe NAACP did not receive the attention that changed the racial paradigm in Union County. Further, Williams had a considerable effect on national racial debate through Radio Free Dixie and his influence on the leaders of SNCC and the Black Power movement. Williams and the

190 “2 in Klan Sentenced,” 38.
Lumbees used the Southern practice of establishing racial definitions through violence to attack racial repression.

In the case of the Lumbees, the local and national White community interpreted violence against the Ku Klux Klan as a strike against the disruption of the racial status quo. Conversely, in reaction to Robert Williams, the White community united behind the Klan in suppression of African American dissent. Whites reacted differently to the two incidents because the Lumbees and the Monroe NAACP were fighting for two very different goals. The Lumbees resisted the Klan's importation of foreign racial assumptions in order to defend the unique racial structure of Robeson County. The local, state and national White community supported the Lumbees by publicizing their victory and prosecuted the Klan for the incident. Conversely, Robert Williams attacked the racial order in Monroe, North Carolina. In response, the national media ignored the event and the local and national law enforcement pursued charges against Williams. In both cases, the moderate White majority used its influence to minimize the disruption to the racial situation by ostracizing radical factions.
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*Act of March 26, 1790, Statutes at Large 1*, ch. 3, 103 (1790).


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