

The Klan in the South

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Received 14 August 2015; accepted 28 October 2015

Published online 26 December 2015

Abstract

This is a review article based on in the French translation work of an American book written by Stetson Kennedy (1916-2011), dated 1958. (The original book was written 4 years before that date).The book is a narration by the author, who somehow managed it to infiltrate into the Ku Klux Klan, with the hidden purpose of acquiring first hand information about the crimes committed by that secret society. The plot unravels in the years just after World War II.The author’s deed was a courageous undertaking full of perils. A resolute man, he did succeed in revealing the true face of the organization to the outside world.

Key words: Ku Klux Klan (briefly just “Klan”); Initiation; South; Black; White.

Çaya, S. (2015). The Klan in the South. *Frontiers of Legal Research*, 3(4), 40-53. Available from <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/flr/article/view/10.3968/8031> DOI: 10.3968/8031

INTRODUCTION

Here are some striking sentences from the cover page of the French version of the book in question:

A deserted mountain-top [Stone Mountain] where a gigantic cross in flames is erected; a procession of torches illuminating the night scene; thousands of cloaked and hooded men; an ambiance heavy with hatred! This was the vision of Ku Klux Klan for Stetson Kennedy on the night of his initiation.

Stetson Kennedy achieved his initiation to the Klan under the phony name John S. Perkins. But; this name was not chosen arbitrarily. Rather; it is his own former family name, which he had repudiated long ago in his youthful days as a protest to his racist family origins.

He himself is a descendant of a southern family in Jacksonville, Florida. His uncle, Brady Perkins, was a leading figure in the local representation of the Klan. One day, the little nephew discovered his carefully-concealed cloak in a trunk. Once unmasked, the uncle resorted to indoctrinate the boy in his own political views, in an open effort. He even made him witness a gathering ceremony, where the boy recognised his agnate from his familiar boots among the disguised Klan members.

One day, the boy and the family's diligent black servant (Flo) were in a streetcar (tramway). She gave a half-dollar to the ticket-giver, who deliberately returned the change as if only a 25-cent-coin had been given. When the girl dared to object (politely), she received a slap. This was just the beginning of her penalization. The next day the poor black girl was attacked in her own dwelling by a group of Klanists, the horrible ticket-giver's brothers. The tragic incident was a turning-point in the life of the boy, re-shaping his entire world view.

As the events unroll in this book; we witness the resolute struggle of a courageous, idealist scholar against a secret fraternity of hate crimes, which he condemns with all his heart.

1. A GLIMPSE TOWARDS THE CRUCIAL END

The first chapter starts with the ringing of his house telephone in midnight. Order comes from the local chief for a hasty gathering (this time not in robes). The meeting takes place in an all-night-open restaurant, where he counts 36 Klanists ("brothers") beside the local chief. Now the chief says that the number of suspects has boiled down to 37 and soon the "rat" will be pinpointed.

Stetson feels the shaking of his knees in fear. But he can make a guess that the chief is only bluffing. The chief, in a little while will come to admit that there is a lack of evidence. He still gives a promise to locate the abject spy sooner or later.

2. THE ORIGIN AND SOME DEEDS OF THE KLAN

The Klan is born in the small town of Pulaski near Nashville, Tennessee, in the chaotic days after the Civil War; when jobs and money were scarce, the newly-freed Blacks were unwilling to do work; life was tedious and the southern pride was wounded. One of the founders remembered the word *kuklos* from the Greek language class, meaning "surrounding circle". Another founder suggested dividing the word into two syllables and ending the second syllable with an (x),

thus producing *ku klux*. Still another founder added “clan”; but for the sake of alliteration, the word began with a “k” again. Certain womenfolk supported the supposedly feminine-protecting movement and prepared gowns and hoods for the involved men, as well as covers for horses. The white color would represent purity. The superstitious Blacks at first took the white apparitions as ghosts, thereby revealing their psychological vulnerability, to start with (summarized from Randel, 1965, pp.34-37).

Stetson Kennedy provides the reader with a sound knowledge about the activities of the Klan throughout years. This is how some of those activities can be cited:

— *Abolishment of then-compulsory military service for the Blacks, with the sheer purpose of making them work for wages below the officially specified minimum levels.*

— *Pression upon the army authorities and the Red-Cross officials to distinctly label donated-blood flasks as “Black” and “White”.*¹

— *Campaigns in Congress to discredit the value of black military personnel.*

— *Use of political pressure to get rid of a pamphlet which specified the main purpose of the allies as crushing Fascism.*

— *Propaganda for a separate peace with Hitler and a common front against the Soviet Red Army* (French version of the book, 1958, p.23).

When President Roosevelt died (a few months before the end of World War II), vice-President Harry Truman² replaced him. Truman’s father had fought for the Confederation against Lincoln. The Klanists then emerged from the shadows into the open space. In a certain leaflet they said that they could count on Harry (ibid.).

3. ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE HEROIC SPY

The protagonist of the book proceeds stepwise. First he establishes links with Eugene Talmadge, the racist former governor of Georgia, promising his support for the man for the coming elections. He also gets a part-time job at a pro-Klanist newspaper, *the Southern Outlook*.

The protagonist then starts frequenting a Klanist billiard saloon in Atlanta, exposing himself to possible approaches by a recruiting agent. Before long he is indeed approached by one. One day; the by-now-familiar man sitting next to him says:

— “What this country really needs is a beat up by the Klanists. This is the only way to correct the Black riff raff (*la raille noir*), the dirty Jews, the hybrid Catholiccs (*les métèques catholiques*) and the leftist worms (*la vermine da gauche*)”.³ The man goes on to recruit “Mr. Perkins” after receiving approval from above.

After being picked up on the decided spot, the protagonist is taken along to his initiation ritual on the Stone Mountain among a carload of hooded and cloaked men.

The traffic-policeman jumped on the road and blew his whistle. Not to stop us, but to interrupt the traffic flood cutting our direction! (French version of the book, 1958, p.42).

The car rolls on to a safe turf, totally under the influence of the Klanists. A police-car even gives them escort on the way. At the very initiation ceremony the protagonist spots many policemen as well as some ex-soldiers.

(One Klanist was controlling the traffic on top of the mountain) and he had really professional gesticulations. Looking at his feet, the pants of a policeman below the robe were discernible (French version of the book, 1958, p.46). *The war had just come to an end and many new recruits were still in army shirts* (French version of the book, 1958, p.47).

A Klanist collects the guns of the new-comers, who would soon be recruited. A policeman among them asks:

— “Does the rule include us, too?”

— “No exceptions!” replies the Klanist in charge, boastfully (French version of the book, 1958, p.53).

The new knights of the invisible Empire are full of enthusiasm. One asks:

— “Have these men proved their devotion to the principles of pure Americanism, Protestant Christianity and the supremacy of the white race?”

Another answers on behalf of the recruits:

— “*The Invisible Eye has judged them all worthy*” (French version of the book, 1958, p.55).

A Klanist suggested the etymology of the name of the society. The initial, three K’s come from the motto “Kill, kill, kill!”⁴ The Falcon⁵ approved and added:

— “*During the reconstruction period following the Civil War, the first secret society, the White Circle, was founded. The Klan itself was established in 1865 in Tennessee by General Forrest⁶ as the Primary Magician⁽⁵⁾* (French version, 1958, p.65).

“Mr. Perkins” (Stetson Kennedy) meanwhile keeps secretly communicating with Charlie Pike, an anti-Klanist southern labor-union official as well as Dan Duke, an honest man who is the vice-attorney general of the state of Georgia.

Tumbling through the archives of the Tribunal of Fulton, I learned that the Stetson learns that the permit of the Klan was accorded in July 1916 by the state of Georgia and renewed in 1935 for twenty years. (Based on the permit alone, one can only visualize the Klan as a benevolent society aiming to exalt Americanism (French version, 1958, p.90).

The plan of the protagonist and his cooperators is to condemn the Klan juridically with hard evidence for propagating racial and religious prejudice and intolerance and hatred plus imposing certain principles via violence and intimidation. The tax-avoidance proofs⁷ could also be of good value for this purpose.

4. MORE INSIGHT INTO THE KLAN'S STRUCTURE

The Klan was in possession of further secret elite hierarchies within itself, where a militant understanding and organization can be discerned. They kept a top secret book. Communications were achieved by metaphoric sentences. Passways were used as special signs of recognition (like displaying the palm of one's hand). Subscription fees were regularly collected. Those who quit paying tribute were expelled. Traison in the sense of betraying "brothers" was a deadly felony.

Stetson Kennedy (French version, 1958, p.129) believes that *a Klanist is driven more with an evil hedonistic impulse of pain-infliction than a sublimated feeling of obedience and discipline:*

The cheap whisky-bottle passed from hand to hand. The last Klanist who took a sip used some swearing words directed at the chief (Rock-Water) in absentia for not being a bit more generous. This drinking session occurred during an abject activity. A Black taxi-driver was punished with a specially-manufactured whip (normally concealed in the house of a relative) for carrying white passengers [Times of Jim Crow Laws which foresee "separate but equal status" for the two races in soial life]. Though they did not intend to kill him, the poor man died. The next day only one paper would mention about a corpse on the road run over (!) by a careless driver. Stetson is thankful to his hood for hiding his expression of nausea on his face. He can do nothing but simulating a few kicks to the victim.

5. AT LAST, APPEARANCE IN COURT!

Finally with all the collected evidence a trial is charged against the Klanists and their sympathizers in Georgia. The protagonist of the events now reveals his true identity as he resumes his position on the witness stand. He is almost lynched by Klanist spectators on the very witness box, during the trial. "It is Perkins, that Rat, let's get him" they shouted (French version, 1958, p.209).

The issue turns into a battle of law. Ironically the Klanists accuse him of pornography, based on a single sentence in his just-published book (*Southern Exposure*), which is after all not even his own statement. It is a sheer quotation from a Klanist: *The only way of granting racial inequality to Niggers is to let them be f*cked by⁸ the Whites.* So he did dare to write this dirty word and this is what it really counts.

The Klanists proceed with cunning tricks in judicial matters. They emphasize their anti-Red activities while passing their criminal deeds under silence. Eventually they end up with pretty light prison sentences. The local juries⁹ are very lenient with them when it comes to passing the verdicts, even though "guilty" decisions do follow. The pro-Klanist union-official¹⁰ Loomis says: "Jail does not frighten me. Hitler wrote the book of the century [*Mein Kampf*] in prison. I'll write my book there!"

Stetson gets afraid of a possible vengeance activity. He says to his friends: They may arrest me for a trifle, like violation of a traffic rule and lead me to prison through deserted roads. On the way they may beat me, tear some of their own clothing to simulate a mutual struggle and dump my corpse to the police headquarters, explaining that I had attempted to escape (French version, 1958, pp. 208-209).

CONCLUSION

At the end of this adventure Mr. Kennedy sells his inherited property in Florida and goes to France. Some years later his optimism re-flourishes as it can be seen in the conclusion part of his published work:

Nowadays there are good reasons to be hopeful. The Supreme Court proclaimed the illegality of segregation. The Congress passed a law to protect the voting rights of Blacks. A Klanist got sentenced to twenty years in prison for having castrated a Black male. All those developments were caused by a spur of national and international opinions and they reflect the progress of the official attitude. The American nation could not yet surmount the racial prejudice. However; now the Americans are on the right route to the realization of the equality ideal (French version, 1958, pp.337-338).

NOTES

¹ That biological distinction of human blood based on race in the literal sense of the world, that stupid conviction, appears to be a rather common practice among racists of all kinds. The following episode is from a World War II movie:

A blond, wounded Nazi officer regains his consciousness in his sick bed. His custody-providers from the allied side announce the “bad news”:

— “We have given you some Jewish blood, in order to save your life!”

The Nazi screams with a grimace on his face:

— “Whaat? So you did it! You have poisoned my noble blood!”

Some pseudo-scientists are known to have attempted supplying support to those absurd ideologies through their published works.

*Joseph Arthur, Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882) was a French man of letters who became famous for developing the theory of the Aryan master race in his book *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (highlighted from Wikipedia, Access: May 24, 2015).*

[As one of his followers] *Georges Vacher de Lapouge (1854-1936) divided humanity into various, hierarchized, different “races“, spanning from the “Aryan white race, dolichocephalic” (long and thin-headed), to the “brachycephalic” (short and broad-headed) race (highlighted from Wikipedia, Access, May 24, 2015).*

² While a student, I have been told about the racist tendencies of Truman by an American special student. At the time, news of his death and related comments were being published in journals. One author was referring to the medical sight of the late ex-president with oxygen tubes and other coils protruding from his face and body and asking the question: “Why don’t we let people die without having a hell of a fight, [in the medical sense]?”

A few years later, I would write a poem dedicated to Truman, emphasizing his profession, haberdashery.

MAKING MUCH OF A HABERDASHER

Our class-advisor,
A Sociology-teacher,
Inquired irdividually about our home-cities
And the jobs of our parents.
When it was my friend’s turn,
—“A haberdasher’s my pa”
Muttered the boy in reply.
Broadly grinned the teacher
Words came out of his mouth
Very slow and distinct:
—“This very evening you shall go
And say to your beloved pa:
‘One of the late presidents
Of the United States,
That old Harry Truman,
Was your colleague in business!
Our teacher had said so.
For the sake of this knowledge,
Which is highly precious,
Feel proud, dear father!
And what about a reward
Er, well, like some extra lump of say
Pocket-money, for your son?’”

S.Çaya

³ Lacking the original version, at times, it was like a re-translation attempt back to English, compulsorily.

⁴ In the French version “tue, tue, tue!” is written and the English “kill, kill, kill!” is supplied as a footnote.

⁵ In the book many Klanic special titles are cited. “Falcon” is one such title. There are others like “Knight”, “Rock-Water”, “Chief Torturer”, “Magician”, “Primary Magician” etc..

⁶ It appears that Forrest and some other Confederate generals of the Civil War are highly praised heroes in the eyes of Klanists. It can not be denied, however, that some of those military figures were worth of being admired due to their charisma or firmness in principles or disciplinarian qualities. Sorley (1981, p.185) narrates an anecdote about General John Gray Forrest by alluding to historian Walter Pittman, 1980:

Forrest one day observed a group of soldiers carrying an ammunition trunk across a creek. One officer was standing and watching the soldiers. Forrest asked him why he was not giving a hand. The man said that he was an officer. The general lost his temper and shouted:

— “I’ll officer you!” and gave the officer a forceful blow with his fist.

Let us note that this happened in the southern army, which was supposedly promoting the aristocratic values and taking inequality for granted. Thus is the universal pragmatic nature of all armies. First comes the accomplishment of the goals, then all abstractions and philosophising.

Another prominent southern general was Lee. An author makes an eulogee of Lee in his article, in the following manner:

Probably no American soldier ever epitomised the art of leadership more fully than Robert E. Lee. On the Federal side, only George H. Thomas approached Lee in this. Lee was every inch a gentleman. He studiously referred to the Federals as “those people”, never as “the enemy” (Stokesbury, 1992, p.11).

On the 142nd page of the French version of the book; Stetson Kennedy gives the description of a pro-Klanist labor-union leader’s office (The union called *The Colombians*). One of the most conspicuous objects is a Picture of General Lee!

One invariably wonders: Could it be that those generals took the Klan naively as a purely just movement of exalting American values? Or could it be that the Klan in its original days actually was different, before evolving into a racist and corrupt organization?

Indeed; Wikipedia distinguishes three distinct movements in the United States, in this respect: *The first Ku Klux Klan flourished in the Southern United States between 1860s and 1871. Members made their own, often colorful, costumes. They sought to overthrow the Republican [unlike the traditionally pro-slavery Democratic Party, Republican Party was against slavery] state governments in the South during the Reconstruction Era, especially by violence against African American leaders. The second KKK flourished nationwide in the early and mid-1920s, and adopted a standard white costume (sales of which together with initiation fees financed the movement) and code words as the first Klan, while adding cross burnings and mass parades. It stressed opposition to the Catholic Church. The third KKK emerged in the form of small local unconnected groups after 1950. They focused on opposition to the Civil Rights Movement, often using threats of violence* (highlighted from Wikipedia, Access: May 24, 2015).

⁷ For people from many other countries it may look strange; but in America avoiding the tax-payments is no matter to joke with. Elsewhere, authorities are much more flexible or negligent or lenient in that respect. But the American governmental agencies are unyielding!

On the 104th page of the French version of the book; Stetson Kennedy describes a heated debate about using this particular “trump” against the Klanists. It is a well-known fact that a king of gangster mobs, Al Capone could only be convicted under the pretext of tax evasion, there being a lack of evidence about his gang activities and crimes.

⁸ Ironically; in a novel we encounter a passage which imparts credulity (!) to those words by the Klanist. When the male is a White and the female a Black, there is indeed no problem. A retired federal agent is talking with a lawyer, relating their manoeuvre against some Klanists in 1967: *Some of them were coming together with their Black girls after bulleting Black houses! Our man had a high place in the church and he had a chalet in the forest which he used for meeting his Black girl. One day we busted him in the bed and took photographs of them. The man almost cried. He became our involuntary informer*” (Grisham, 1995, pp.274-275, as summarized from the German version).

⁹ It is no secret that the judicial system, on occasion, can be easily manipulated in a manner to favor the powerful side, whereby juries seem to represent the most vulnerable point, in that respect.

Ex-attorney Jim Garrison, in his book, describes a similar development in New Orleans, culminating his efforts to uncover the mystery of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the namesake of the author of the book in question. Due to uncooperative attitudes from all the involved circles, he can only bring a few cases to the attention of the court. There, too, because of the uneasy attitudes of the juries, the accused persons get acquitted. One of those individuals is a White Russian aristocrat, a committed anti-communist in possession of a rich social network including nobles of Europe.

That particular suspect, a gentleman in appearance, is so sure of himself while being tried that, using Garrison’s own metaphor; he looks as if he were Gulliver in person [the hero of Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)] secretly making fun of the finger-men, the Liliputs, who had tied him with minutely thin ropes (summarized from the German version of Garrison, w.d. but c.1967).

¹⁰ It must be a terrific stratagem for the Klanists to gain many labor unions for their cause. Normally labor unions are associated with leftist ideas. Robbins tells the life story of a great fictive union leader in one of his unforgettable novels, whereby many aspects of the union history come to the attention of the reader. Actually; for the average union leaders, the betterment of the workers’ conditions is what counts and politics are entirely out of the equation. But the field being convenient; radical political ideas invariably leak into the world of unions.

[In the novel] *the hero, Big Dan, strongly advises his colleague Murray to delay a prospective strike. He reminds the 1919-Pittsburgh lesson. Chances are slim and Chicago police are determined to interfere. But his colleague Murray confesses that he is under pressure because the “commies” [the common pejorative term for communists] are already campaigning to topple him* (summarized from Robbins, 1979, p.317).

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APPENDIX: SOME VISUAL MATERIAL



Figure 1
Author and Activist Stetson Kennedy Murray (1916-2011) (Internet)



Figure 2
The Klanists on the Verge of Action (Illustration by the Author—S.C.)



Figure 3
**German Counterparts of American Klanists:
Xenophobic Neo-Nazi Skinheads (Illustration by S.C.)**



Figure 4
A Cartoon in a Publication in North Carolina in 1900: An Exaggerated Fear of a Possible (!) Black Rule! (From the Book of Randel, 1965)

THE KU KLUX KLAN RIDES AGAIN
Your Country Is Calling You

The Klan Rides to
Save America!



Stop! Look! Listen!
Think! Pray!

Communism Must Go! America, Wake Up!

YOUR COUNTRY	COMMUNISM
Love, Peace, Freedom, God. Home, Husband, Wife and Children. Free Schools of Patriotic Thought. Free Speech and Free Press. Government of the People. The Stars and Stripes Forever. Right to Worship God as we Please.	Hate, Bondage, Prison and Starvation. Free Love, Children State Property. Dictated Thought by a Few. Fear to Express Thought by Speech or Press. Overthrow of All Government. The Red Flag of Destruction. Overthrow of All Religion.

You have read of "The midnight ride of Paul Revere," calling the Minute Men to arms to free us from tyranny.
 This is the MIDNIGHT RIDE OF THE KU KLUX KLAN, calling you to save our country and its institutions.
 The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan is determined to drive out of the United States these vicious, alien radicals and to eradicate their radical thought from every rank, class and group of the American people, through a nation-wide concerted campaign. In this job, they are entitled to the hearty support of every true American citizen.
 The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan invites and pleads for your help to save our country before it is too late. We do not want money but we need YOU and your support.

MODERN COMMUNISM CHALLENGES ALL DECENCY AND CIVILIZATION

This organization is determined to fight to the last ditch and the last man against any and all attacks on our government and its American institutions. If you are a Red Blooded, Native Born, American Citizen and believe with us, fill out the coupon below.

Tear off on this line and mail.

P. O. Box 1975,
 Tampa, Florida.

I want to help save our country and am ready to ride with you.

NAME

OCCUPATION (State where employed)

RESIDENCE ADDRESS

Figure 5
This Printed Paper Was Distributed in Florida in 1930s. The Klanists Were Strongly Anti-Communicistic, One Should Indeed Grant This (From the Book of Randel, 1965)



Figure 6
A Member-Recruitment Invitation Printed in Paper, in Former Times (From the Book of Randel, 1965)

UNITED KNIGHTS
OF THE
Ku Klux Klan

WILL PRESENT A PROGRAM

Saturday Night, November 16th
8:00 P. M. AT
U. S. Highway 17 North
6 Miles North of Wilmington, N. C.

Come Hear The Truth
PRESS, RADIO, AND TV WELCOME

Imperial Wizard and
The Grand Dragon of North Carolina
and Other States

The White Public Is Invited

Authorized By The Board Of Directors The United Klans Of America, Inc.
National Office: Suite 401, Alston Building, Tuscaloosa, Alabama
North Carolina Office: Box 321 Granite Quarry, N. C.
Sponsored By New Hanover County Lodge No. 5

Figure 7
A Program Invitation Distributed in November 1963, Just a Few Days Before the Assassination of President John Kennedy (From the Book of Randel, 1965)



Figure 8
On the Left-Side: Pastor Oren Van Loon from Detroit Penalized by Cautery, Following a Sermon Against the Klan in 1924. On the Right-Side: Afro-African citizen Felton Turner Also Cauterized by Klan Members in Houston in 1960 (From the Book of Randel, 1965)