Summer 2015


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SEE AND HEAR JAMES “CATFISH” COLE:
IDENTITY, MANHOOD, AND THE NORTH CAROLINA KU KLUX KLAN,
1952-1967

by

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B.S. May 2005, Chowan University

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ABSTRACT

SEE AND HEAR JAMES "CATFISH" COLE: IDENTITY, MANHOOD, AND THE NORTH CAROLINA KU KLUX KLAN, 1952-1967

John Scholl Hinton
Old Dominion University, 2015
Director: Dr. John Weber

This thesis examines the influence of Reverend James "Catfish" Cole on the North Carolina Ku Klux Klan (KKK). By focusing on the white supremacy movement, it shows efforts made by white North Carolinians who opposed the Civil Rights Movement. Cole’s contributions to the white supremacy movement are unique. As an evangelist and Grand Wizard of the North Carolina Knights of the KKK, Cole believed he was ordained by God through what he called his “divine commission.” His divine commission led him to believe he was a prophet leading whites in a fight against civil rights.

A study of Cole’s time as Grand Wizard reveals that the North Carolina Civil Rights-era Klans were struggling to find a balance between violent and nonviolent tactics. This struggle led to infighting and factionalism allowing Cole to stay a key player on the white supremacy circuit from 1956 to 1967 despite colossal embarrassments at the hands of African Americans and Lumbee Indians in Monroe and Maxton, North Carolina. Furthermore, it examines how perceived “progressive” politics from North Carolina politicians allowed the Klan to maintain its status as a viable political option for white working-class men of the Civil Rights-era. Overall, this thesis shows how white resistance to African American civil rights created a netherworld where
working-class white men like Cole became powerful and influential leaders among their peers.

Sources include the James “Catfish” Cole personal papers located at East Carolina University, various North Carolina Governors papers, North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) and State Highway Patrol (SHP) reports, and North Carolina Supreme Court records courtesy of the State Archives of North Carolina. Results of this research show that despite being perceived by historians as ridiculous and unimportant, James “Catfish” Cole played a vital role in growing and maintaining the white supremacy movement in North Carolina.
Dedicated to a group of individuals in Concord, North Carolina I am not at liberty to name.

*Forever circled.*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a fan of the Drive-by Truckers, and growing up the son of a proud Virginia Military Institute graduate and funeral director, Southern storytelling has been a part of my life since I was old enough to be photographed (at nine months old) in a “Southern by the Grace of God” hat. Therefore, I wish to embrace that side of my life as to thank those who helped make this work possible.

Around the age of seven, I began thinking about the culture of race in the South after watching WCYB News Channel Five in my hometown of Bristol, Virginia. Coming from a family that allowed my brother and I to play with all races of children, I was fascinated by these men dressed in white robes and pointy hats marching through the streets of downtown Bristol. I asked my father “if we were going” to which he replied, “No son, we don’t associate with people like that.”

From that moment on, the idea of white supremacy has fascinated me. For a progressive upbringing that taught me to value my fellow man regardless of race, I thank my parents, John A. and Deborah Hinton. Their egalitarian values taught me the difference between right and wrong shaping who I have become and why I have chosen to study the South.

After working as a morticians apprentice for three years, I began to feel my calling was to pursue a master’s degree in history. In February 2013 after a long day of washing hearses, working funerals, and helping to embalm a body or two, my wife emailed me a link to NPR’s Fresh Air in which Terry Gross interviewed sociologist David Cunningham about his work, Klansville, U.S.A.: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights Era Ku Klux Klan. After listening, I was astounded that the state I called home (North Carolina) was the most active
Klan state of the Civil Rights-era. After reading Cunningham’s work, I knew there was much more to the story of James “Catfish” Cole.

For the push in the right direction, I must thank my lovely wife, Natalie. My research began in May 2014 and she has stood by my side for trips to Greenville, Charlotte, and Raleigh, North Carolina as well as Montgomery, Alabama. Times have been difficult, but she always encouraged me to finish what I started. For that, I will always be grateful no matter what the future holds for us. I love you.

Next in line is Dr. John Weber. Dr. Weber and I share a common interest in the Civil Rights Movement, and he was kind enough to take me on as his first advisee directing this project. Many thanks to him for taking time to read drafts of “See and Hear James “Catfish” Cole” despite his busy schedule. His knowledge of Civil Rights historiography pushed me in a direction that shaped this project into a study of identity and masculinity.

Many thanks to Drs. Maura Hametz and Elizabeth Zanoni who round out my thesis committee. I was fortunate enough to encounter them during my first semester at ODU. Scared to death that I had just made a terrible decision leaving the funeral business, their guidance, patience, and knowledge helped me realize that history is “my calling.” I would have never gained the self-confidence to pursue a work of this magnitude without you both.

My brother, Michael, helped grow my self-confidence as well. In September 2013, I called him and told him I was going to quit ODU and ask for my old job at the funeral home back. Reminding me that I had trained my replacement at the funeral home and there was no job for me there, he told me to follow the only rule in the Pawnee Rangers Handbook: BE A MAN. I am very happy followed his advice. Thanks brother.
There are many others I wish to thank, but the ones who directly contributed are mentioned here. To my friend Caleb True—thank you for taking the time to read numerous drafts of “See and Hear James “Catfish” Cole.” Your criticisms and suggestions have helped craft me into the writer I aspire to become. To my mother-in-law, Robin Morris—thank you for providing Natalie and I with a place to stay and some gas in the tank to travel the South in an attempt to make sense of its past and learn its rich culture. To my cousin John Wood, his wife Nancy, and daughter Eliza—thank you for providing me shelter in Wilson so I could explore the James “Catfish” Cole papers at East Carolina University. I enjoyed our commutes each morning as well as the first-class meals, walks around the neighborhood, and nighttime conversations on the patio. To my friend John Moss, I do not even know where to start. Thinking logically about my thanks to you, it makes sense to say thanks for letting me stay at your lovely apartment, but that does not feel like enough. The countless hours of entertainment, three-week old croissants, and Del Boca Vista are memories I will treasure forever. I only hope that future research will allow many more visits to the “Dickey Moss Bed & Breakfast at The Oberlin.”

Last, but certainly not least, I extend a large amount gratitude to Josh Hager at the State Archives of North Carolina. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know you during my time in Raleigh, and look forward to working with you again at some point in my career. Many thanks is required to the rest of the staff at the archives as well—Vann Evans, Doug Brown, Allison Thurman, Colleen Griffiths, and Gay Bradley. None of my research there would have been possible without leads from archivist Chris Meekins. I encountered his master’s thesis, “Caught Between Scylla and Charybdis: The Civil War in Northeastern North Carolina,” for a paper in my Civil War and Reconstruction seminar and immediately struck
up a conversation via email. Chris pointed me in the direction of the State Archives, and for that, I thank you. A warm debt of gratitude is extended to Martha Elmore at East Carolina University’s Special Collections in Joyner Library as well. As caretaker of the James “Catfish” Cole papers, Martha opened up a world that always fascinated me. Since my initial trip there in June 2014, she has answered questions, found documents I neglected at the time, and most importantly, been a positive voice of encouragement. Finally, many thanks to Mark Potok and Heidi Bierich at the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in Montgomery, Alabama. Heidi put me in contact with Mark, who took time from his busy schedule to return my phone calls and emails offering his expertise on the history of the KKK, and even treated Natalie and I to a tour of the SPLC facilities as well as lunch when we visited Montgomery in July 2014.

There are many others who played some kind of role in shaping my desire to study the dark sides of Southern culture, yet are not acknowledged here. To those I forgot, thank you and know that I am grateful for your contributions.
NOMENCLATURE

CNLEC  Citizens National Law Enforcement Commission
FBI    Federal Bureau of Investigation
HUAC   House Un-American Activities Committee
KKK    Ku Klux Klan
NAACP  National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NBC    National Broadcasting Corporation
NRA    National Rifle Association
SANC   State Archives of North Carolina
SBI    State Bureau of Investigation
SHP    State Highway Patrol
UKA    United Klans of America

KU KLUX KLAN NOMENCLATURE

Dragon  President of Statewide Klan Chapters
Exalted Cyclops  Chapter President
Imperial  National Level Officer
Grand    State Level Office
Klaiff   Vice President
Klavem   KKK Chapter
Klokapd Lecturer
Klonklave Meeting of KKK Chapter
Kludd    Chaplain
Kligrapp Secretary
KU KLUX KLAN NOMENCLATURE CONTINUED

Klabee  Treasurer
Kladd  Conductor/Recruiter
Klarogo  Inner Guard
Kleagle  Recruiter
Kleexter  Outer Guard
Klokan  Investigator
Klokann  Board of Investigators
Nighthawk  Assistant/Courier to Titan and Cyclops; Overseer of New Recruits
Titan  Overseer of Klan Chapter and Exalted Cyclops
Wizard  President of National Klan Chapters
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION—WHO WAS CATFISH COLE?

On December 21, 1957, National Broadcasting Company (NBC) radio reporter Paul Mason arrived in Greensboro, North Carolina. As Mason drove through town, he could not help but notice the holiday cheer. Christmas lights adorned downtown, kids ogled storefront displays, and Salvation Army bells clanged. Mason, however, was not in Greensboro for the holidays; he came to attend his first *klonklave*—a meeting of the North Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and investigate its self-proclaimed Grand Wizard, James W. “Catfish” Cole.¹

Arriving at the *klonklave*, Mason noticed large amounts of guns and ammunition. As Klansmen sized up the NBC reporter in their midst, a sleek, well-manicured Klansmen presented himself to Mason. Identifying himself as Grand Wizard, Mason asked Cole, “why all the guns?” Cole smirked at Mason and replied, “because we have the right to carry arms under our Constitution.” Not satisfied with Cole’s answer, Mason pressed harder. “You won’t tell me why you are carrying guns?” Finally, Cole gave Mason the answer he was looking for:

> I think they speak for themselves. I got five guns and I got money in the bank to buy five more, and as long as the Constitution gives me the right to bear arms, there ain’t going to be no Negroes in school with my children. I will tell you this: In North Carolina[,] if the Pearsall Plan is not enough then the Smith & Wesson Plan is.

¹ Evidence suggests Cole was never actually elected Grand Wizard of the North Carolina Knights of the KKK. It appears Cole created this title simply for himself.
Mason, however, noticed something interesting about Cole. Despite his advocacy for the right to bear arms, James “Catfish” Cole was the only Klansmen present without a personal firearm.²

Catfish Cole had worked on distancing his Knights from past North Carolina Klans, specifically those led by Georgia native Thomas Hamilton. Hamilton, known throughout North Carolina for his terror campaigns against miscegenation and integration in the early 1950s, had led the Carolina Klans, renowned for kidnapping and whipping both whites and blacks. Even segregationists recoiled at the sight of the Carolina Klans.³ In Columbus County, North Carolina, some citizens even began hording weapons believing law enforcement had failed to protect them from Hamilton.⁴ In December 1956 in Statesville, North Carolina, speaking before a crowd of 3,000, Cole distinguished the Knights from the Carolina Klans. At the Statesville rally, Cole’s descriptions of his “nonviolent Klan” left the Davie County Sheriff’s Department convinced they policed the “most orderly” Klan rally they had ever attended.⁵

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⁴ SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, William Kerr Scott Collection, 1949-1954 [hereafter Kerr Scott Collection], General Correspondence, Box 96, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Mayor Lee Braxton to Governor William Kerr Scott, December 13, 1951.
Cole successfully branded his Klan as a nonviolent alternative to Hamilton’s “outlaw Klan.”^6 Nine months after Statesville, Cole preached a different message. In response to Monroe NAACP President Robert F. Williams leading protests to desegregate a public pool, Cole told a crowd in Monroe that “a Negro who tries to get into a white swimming pool is not looking for a bath, he’s looking to get killed.”^7 Throughout the summer and fall of 1957, Cole and the Knights drove noisily through Williams’s neighborhood harassing those they encountered. In one instance, they forced an African American woman to dance as they shot at her feet.^8

Cole preached both ardent nonviolence and vicious retribution creating a contradictory identity for himself. This study explores the life of James “Catfish” Cole and his KKK from 1956 until Cole’s death in 1967. It will reveal the contradictory nature of Cole’s leadership and, in doing so, help to explicate the perverse logic of the white supremacist mentality. Furthermore, an in-depth look at Cole’s leadership in the Klan shows how white supremacists struggled to find balance between nonviolent and violent tactics in ways similar to African American civil rights leaders. Cole’s contributions to the Klan are unique as he tried craft nonviolence as a main tenet of Klan masculinity unlike his predecessors in the Reconstruction-era and 1920s Klans. Often times, however, his preaching of nonviolence led to violent situations.

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Cole, like most Klansmen, felt it was his duty to protect Southern white womankind from the perceived dangers of African American men. Cole, however, believed he did more though. Cole believed he was protecting all whites from the dangers of integration and Communism. Fear formed the basis for Cole’s identity and articulations of manhood. It unhinged him from reality leaving him in a fantasy world in which, regardless of his actions, he engaged in protecting whites from the evils of African Americans and Communists. The KKK was his weapon in the fight against integration and Communism. The KKK, however, also became his downfall. Through it, Cole gained power, influence, and money. His fantasy soon became less about leading a “holy war” against integration and Communism and more about holding power at any cost.

While Klansmen typically were driven by fear of integration, Cole is set apart by what he called his “divine commission.” In his rewriting of the 1957 Kloran—the KKK’s constitution and bylaws—Cole explained “divine commission”:

I believe that God created races and nations, committing to each a special destiny and service; that the United States through its white, Protestant citizens holds a Divine commission for the furtherance of white supremacy and the protection of religious freedom; that its Constitution and laws are expressive of the Divine purpose.

At least in Cole’s mind, he was a prophet leading the white race. Cole’s oratorical skill gained him an audience, and even when he faltered in the spotlight, he was able to

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10 Cole Papers, 40.2.A, undated letter entitled “Dear Friends” from James W. Cole describing the fight against integration and Communism as “holy war.”

convincingly rebrand himself again and again relying on belief in his “divine commission.”

As Grand Wizard in the 1950s, Cole was driven from Monroe, North Carolina by a militant local chapter of the NAACP. Cole regrouped, only to be defeated by Lumbee Indians four months later at a rally known as the Battle of Hayes Pond in Maxton, North Carolina. Despite Cole’s defeats and allegations that he embezzled money from the Knights, fellow Klansmen welcomed Cole back time and again. Despite his inability to provide a stable financial life for his family, Carolyn Cole extolled her husband’s greatness, saying he was like “General [Nathan Bedford] Forrest, Abraham Lincoln, and George Washington.”

Cole’s time in the North Carolina KKK reveals white opposition to the Civil Rights Movement in a state that many outside the South viewed as “progressive.” Perceived “progressivism” from North Carolina Governors Luther Hodges, Terry Sanford, and Dan Moore made the KKK a viable political option to North Carolina’s white working-class. Cole exploited this “progressivism” to fashion an identity as Grand Wizard believing it anointed him leader of white working-class North Carolinians. In reality, while “progressive” politics kept the Klan politically relevant, it divided working-class Klan leaders who were intoxicated with power through their newfound leadership.

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12 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, February 8, 1958, September 28, 1958, and November 1, 1958.

roles in the Klan. In other words, perceived “progressivism” in North Carolina equally united and divided the North Carolina KKK.

***

Thus far James W. “Catfish” Cole has only been a passing figure in the historiography of the Civil Rights Movement in North Carolina. In her study of the 1920s Athens, Georgia Klan, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*, historian Nancy MacLean says that “the [Athens, Georgia] Klan’s conservative ideology was a deeply gendered phenomenon,” meaning Klansmen understood and interpreted social issues through a lens of idealized masculinity. MacLean contends that most of the 1920s Athens Klan was comprised of what she calls “petite bourgeoisie”; Athens Klansmen were “not really bourgeois, nor were they working class.” Economic insecurities drove men into the Klan as they believed membership provided a safety net should they suffer economic failure. This belief in turn cemented Klan cohesion, as an important part of Southern masculinity was to be a reliable and sufficient breadwinner. In other words, the Klan supported the man, and the man, the Klan.

Catfish Cole fits MacLean’s definition of a “petite bourgeois” Klansmen in theory only. Like MacLean’s Klansmen, Cole climbed his way up the social ladder by working as a “circus pitchman” for a traveling carnival before obtaining his “Doctor of Divinity” degree and opening Southern Bible College in Marion, South Carolina in 1953, and the

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16 MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 68.
James W. Cole Printing Company in 1961. Many of MacLean’s Athens Klansmen ran legitimate businesses such as funeral homes, barbershops, and grocery stores. Cole’s Southern Bible College was anything but legitimate. According to Timothy B. Tyson, it was a degree mill where anyone with enough money could add letters to the end of their name. While the Athens Klan used the KKK to help stay afloat in difficult economic times, Cole used the KKK as a money-making opportunity. MacLean’s 1920s Klan flogged men who failed to provide for their families, yet the Civil Rights-era Klan in North Carolina continuously allowed Cole to return to a position of leadership despite his theft, squandering, and tactical blunders.

Timothy B. Tyson’s Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power, and Malinda Maynor Lowery’s Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South: Race, Identity, and the Making of a Nation offer the only look into Cole’s role in the Klan and relationship to the Civil Rights Movement in North Carolina. Tyson explains Cole’s orchestration of the Klan’s rise in Civil Rights-era North Carolina through the harassment of Robert Williams and the Monroe NAACP. He portrays Cole’s tattered masculinity;

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18 Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 79.
19 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, February 8, 1958, September 28, 1958, and November 1, 1958. Also see: SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, Klansmen Francis M. Caldwell to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, December 2, 1957.
20 See MacLean’s description of the Athens Klan flogging fellow Klansmen Arnold Moss for failing to provide financially for his family. MacLean, Behind the Mask of Chivalry, 156.
describing Cole as a man who “abandoned [the cause of protecting] white womanhood” when he left his wife Carolyn to fend for herself at the Battle of Hayes Pond in 1958.21

Malinda Maynor Lowery picks up where Tyson left off detailing the Lumbee Indians’ struggles to create a tribal identity. Lumbees were unable to prove their ethnic identity to the United States Government as a result of possessing no ancestral records, treaties with the federal government, or any official form of tribal recognition. Lumbee ethnicity relied on kinship networks that often resulted in periodic factionalism and resentment over who was deemed Lumbee by the Office of Indian Affairs. To Lowery, however, Catfish Cole’s insistence on holding a rally at Hayes Pond in Maxton allowed all factions of the tribe—for one night—to come together as a nation to oust the Klan from Robeson County.22 The irony here is that Cole’s decision to hold a rally to propagate hate in fact caused unforeseen unity and amity among the factions of the local Lumbees, Cole’s antagonists.

In 2013, David Cunningham produced Klansville, U.S.A.: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan. Cunningham looks at labor rights, law enforcement, politics, and Civil Rights legislation in tracing the rise and fall of the Klan in North Carolina. Though Cunningham focuses most of his analysis on Grand Dragon J. Robert “Bob” Jones and his United Klans of America (UKA), his analysis contributes to an understanding of Catfish Cole by showing that Cole’s religious and political organizations were “always subsumed by his identity as a Klansmen.”23 As an evangelist in the 1950s, Cole “preached the gospel” while advertising himself to congregations as an

21 Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 137-140.
22 Lowery, Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South, 251-254.
23 Cunningham, Klansville, U.S.A., 41.
"outspoken State Righter and Segregationist." As President of the Committee for Better Government in 1965, Cole advertised rallies not as "Committee for Better Government" rallies but as "Rights for Whites" rallies. By 1967, Cole declared his candidacy for Governor of North Carolina "not as a Klansmen, but [as] a citizen of North Carolina."²⁴ No matter what he did, Cole always found a way to promote the Klan in his everyday life.

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In Blood Done Sign My Name, Timothy B. Tyson declared that "the 1950s Klan career of James 'Catfish' Cole is a fascinating and largely unexplored topic."²⁵ Without Cole's meddling, infighting in the North Carolina Klan may not have been as virulent as it was. Had infighting not been an issue, Bob Jones's UKA, with its "3,000 dues-paying members, 40 klaverns, and tens of thousands attending rallies," might have turned itself into a political powerhouse by the mid-1960s.²⁶

Chapter one of this study details how Cole successfully organized the North Carolina Knights of the KKK in 1956 and 1957 as a nonviolent alternative to Thomas Hamilton's Carolina Klans of the early 1950s, culminating in the Monroe NAACP's successful stand against Cole's Knights in October 1957.

Chapter two highlights the fallout from Cole and Williams’s showdown in Monroe, and explains how Cole’s failures in Monroe allowed Georgia-based Grand Dragon of the U.S. Klans Eldon “E. L.” Edwards to ramp up recruiting efforts in North Carolina, creating two opposing Klan factions in the state. Edwards’s attempt to poach Klansmen from the North Carolina Knights led to desperate attempts by Cole to hold onto power. This led to Cole’s designating Lumbee Indians public enemy number one. Unlike the Monroe NAACP, Cole believed Lumbee Indians were not threatening.

Chapter two concludes with the Knights making preparations for the rally at Hayes Pond in Maxton.

Chapter three details the Lumbees successful removal of Cole and the Knights from Robeson County while showing how Cole rebounded from another failure at the Battle of Hayes Pond. Chapter three also shows how the handling of Hayes Pond put North Carolina Governor Luther H. Hodges in the national spotlight, and how Lumbee Indians, for the first time in their history, gained national attention for their success in ousting the Klan.

Chapter four details how Cole desperately tried to hold onto power despite his failures, an impending state prison sentence for inciting a riot, and accusations of embezzlement from the Knights. Cole went to extreme lengths not only to keep his Grand Wizardship, but to thwart U.S. Klans recruiting efforts and “get back” at Governor Hodges for publicly excoriating him after Hayes Pond.

Chapter five examines how Cole held onto his “divine commission” in prison, and how he weaseled his way into Bob Jones’s UKA circles after his release. This study
concludes with an epilogue tracing Cole’s final resurgence in 1967 with the North Carolina Klan and the Klan’s ultimate downfall in the Tar Heel state.

Cole’s actions are bizarre if not downright comical at times. However, it must be kept in mind, that he was part of a group that terrorized citizens for over a hundred years in the United States. Law enforcement officials looked the other way, allowing the KKK to perpetrate their crimes in anonymity denying justice to many victims for generations. But, by the 1960s, as the popular singer/songwriter Bob Dylan noted, the times they were “a-changin’.”
CHAPTER II

A "PUDGY EX-GROCER," THE "SMITH & WESSION PLAN," AND THE "MOST MILITANT NAACP CHAPTER" THE UNITED STATES HAS EVER SEEN

From 1950 to 1952, Thomas Hamilton, a "pudgy ex-grocer" from Georgia led the reorganization of the Carolina Klans in southeastern North Carolina's Columbus County.\(^1\) His work in North Carolina followed on successful organization in South Carolina under the guidance of Atlanta native and Imperial Wizard Dr. Samuel Green.\(^2\) No evidence suggests Cole had a relationship with Hamilton, but Cole's initial nonviolent Klan was shaped in response to Hamilton's violent actions in Columbus County.

Columbus County shared a border with Robeson County and South Carolina, and the locals of the adjacent counties suffered under Hamilton's reign of terror from 1950 to 1952. Hamilton's Carolina Klans kidnapped whites and blacks, insulted, threatened, and flogged them, then either returned them to their homes or dumped them on the side of the road.\(^3\) Ostracized by Klans in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, the Carolina Klans quickly became known as the "outlaw" group in the Klan circuit.\(^4\)

Columbus County Solicitor Clifton Moore recognized the lawlessness of Hamilton's Carolina Klans and attempted to take a stand against them. At the discretion of North Carolina Attorney General Harry McMullan and Governor William Kerr Scott, Moore scolded Hamilton in 1951, telling Hamilton that if he did not return to Georgia,

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\(^1\) "Thomas Hamilton Boss of Klansmen Given Four Years: 62 Others Face Sentence Today in One of the Largest Mass Trials in History of State." *The Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), July 30, 1952.
\(^3\) Cunningham, *Klansville, U.S.A.*, 27-29.
the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation (SBI), North Carolina State Highway Patrol (SHP), and Columbus County Sheriff’s Department would intervene. Hamilton scoffed at Moore’s threat, vaguely promising Moore that “he had something special” in store for Columbus County.⁵

By 1951, Hamilton’s rallies were drawing thousands.⁶ Kidnappings and floggings increased throughout the county; residents pressured Moore to take action against Hamilton and his nighttime raids, calling them a “stench in the nostrils of the people of North Carolina [that caused] the deepest nausea of shame and disgust.”⁷ Others saw Hamilton’s Carolina Klans as comparable to “Hitler’s Gestapo” or the “Soviet KGB,” and reminded Governor Kerr Scott that the “world [is] watching,” an ominous forecast of the impact Jim Crow had on the world news by the 1960s.⁸ The biggest impact on the Carolina Klans, however, came from Columbus County’s neighbor to the west, Robeson County. As Hamilton attempted to organize a klavern in Robeson, Junior Chamber of Commerce Corresponding Secretary Douglas McIntyre and Robeson County Solicitor Malcolm B. Seawell stepped in. The twosome informed Hamilton that he had “twenty-four hours to get out of the district or be placed under arrest and charged under Robeson statutes pertaining to subversive activities.”⁹

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⁵ “Ku Klux Klan Meeting Despite Threat.” *High Point Enterprise*, August 9, 1951.
⁷ SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Kerr Scott Collection, General Correspondence, Box 96, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Roger S. Riley of Raleigh, NC to Governor William Kerr Scott, August 14, 1951.
⁸ SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Kerr Scott Collection, General Correspondence, Box 96, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, W. T. Fullwood of Southport, NC to Governor William Kerr Scott, November 23, 1951 and W. A. McGirt, Jr. of Whiteville, NC to Governor William Kerr Scott, August 18, 1951.
⁹ SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Kerr Scott Collection, General Correspondence, Box 96, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Corresponding Secretary Douglass McIntyre to President Harry Stewart, North Carolina Junior Chamber of Commerce, September 11, 1951.
“Subversive” was a nasty word to Hamilton. Being labeled “subversive” put the Carolina Klans on par with Communists. Hamilton heeded McIntyre and Seawell’s warning and returned to Columbus County, but his time as Grand Dragon was drawing to an end. Columbus County Solicitor Clifton Moore began working with North Carolina Attorney General Harry McMullan to bring Hamilton down. After a meeting with Governor Kerr Scott, McMullan and Moore had local law enforcement and the North Carolina SHP tail Hamilton and record license plate numbers at his rallies. They worked with the local press to publish the names of the vehicle owners, destroying Klan anonymity. Additionally, officers began enforcing anti-masking laws, forcing the Klan to remove their hoods in public. While their actions curbed the growth of the Carolina Klans, it did not stop the kidnappings and floggings.

In December 1951, Hamilton’s Klansmen kidnapped a white mechanic in Whiteville, flogged him, and returned him to his downtown home early that morning. This incident spurred Mayor Lee Braxton to write Governor Kerr Scott seeking state intervention in shutting down the Carolina Klans. Braxton explained that the mechanic lived a “stone’s throw from the courthouse, school, and fourteen different churches.” Of greatest concern to Braxton, however, was not the fact that this happened in downtown Whiteville, but that a manufacturing executive read about it in the local newspaper while touring Whiteville with Braxton. At the time Whiteville was trying to obtain a major manufacturing plant, and after the executive saw the article he grew concerned about

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10 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Kerr Scott Collection, General Correspondence, Box 96, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Hon. Attorney General McMullan to Solicitor Clifton Moore, October 12, 1951.
11 “Ku Klux Klan Meeting Despite Threat.” High Point Enterprise, August 9, 1951.
worker safety in Whiteville. On top of losing a major manufacturing plant, Braxton was also alarmed by his citizens arming themselves against the nighttime marauders.12

By February 1952, the state finally took action. Hamilton was arrested along with approximately one-hundred other Klansmen and charged with kidnapping, assault, and conspiracy. At a May 1952 rally, Hamilton remained defiant despite the charges. Hamilton told attendees “only God and me know that I am innocent.” He went on to dismiss the charges against him as “trumped up,” a result of “spineless” newspaper reporters.13 Mayor Braxton was relieved that Hamilton was on the defensive, but his bravado was worrisome. In a letter to Governor Kerr Scott, Braxton wrote:

The people of Columbus County are very happy that some progress has been made with reference to the Klan activities in this area. We sincerely hope that all efforts will continue until this thing is completely broken up. We do not believe that the back has been broken, but that a definite start has been made.14

While Braxton did not believe the Carolina Klans were finished, they in fact were. Hamilton was sentenced to four years in state prison for the kidnapping and flogging of an African American woman named Evergreen Flowers. At the sentencing hearing, Judge Clawson L. Williams told Hamilton “to serve his time, come out of prison, and make his life worthwhile.”15

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12 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Kerr Scott Collection, General Correspondence, Box 96, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Mayor Lee Braxton to Governor William Kerr Scott, December 13, 1951.
13 “Newsmen Irk Wiz; KKK Rally Is Held.” The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), May 27, 1952.
14 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Kerr Scott Collection, General Correspondence, Box 123, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Mayor Lee Braxton to Governor William Kerr Scott, February 22, 1952.
15 “Thomas Hamilton Boss Of Klansmen Given Four Years: 62 Others Face Sentence Today In One Of The Largest Mass Trials in History of State.” The Evening Telegram (Rocky Mount, NC), July 30, 1952.
Three and a half years later, Catfish Cole set out to reorganize the KKK in North Carolina. It was an uphill battle; due to Hamilton’s midnight kidnappings and floggings, many North Carolinians had soured on the Klan. Further, law enforcement officials in Robeson County had taken a firm stand early on, stunting the Klan’s growth. By contrast, in Columbus County, a lack of early intervention led to greater problems. Attorney General McMullan and Solicitor Moore eventually turned to the press to help identify known Klansmen, and Governor Kerr Scott made use of the state’s anti-masking laws to eventually bring Hamilton down.

In Brown v. Board in 1954, the Supreme Court’s ruling that cleared the way for the integration of public schools served as inspiration for Cole to take advantage of white fears of integration to rehabilitate the Carolina Klan. In the end, however, Brown v. Board served as inspiration more than impetus. Cole’s belief in his personal “divine commission” was far more important.16 Coming off his evangelical successes, Cole set out to organize a new Klan known as the North Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Cole distinguished his Klan from Hamilton’s by claiming that it was centered on nonviolence.

Evidence suggests Cole organized the North Carolina Knights in late 1955. Working with a man named “Hank” and a lawyer from Gastonia, Cole sought to obtain a state charter for the Knights.17 The attempt, however, suggests that Hamilton’s debacle was fresh on his mind; Cole did not want the Knights to be branded as “subversive.”

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16 “Divine Commission” is in reference to Cole’s 1957 rewriting of the Kloran. The term appears in quotation marks indicating it is Cole’s term. See: Cole Papers, 40.6.A, “Kloran: Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Copyright 1957, James W. Cole.”
Being chartered by the state of North Carolina, Cole believed, would keep the Knights off state and federal subversive lists.

Though Hamilton’s escapades were fresh in the minds of Robesonians, Cole exploited fears about Brown v. Board to gain recruits. By October 1956, Cole held a rally in the small town of Shannon between Parkton and Pembroke in Robeson County. The rally drew between 400 and 500 attendees. Cole spoke on the ills of integration, but also took time to condemn the press for what he perceived as unfair treatment of Hamilton.18

Two days before the rally at Shannon, however, The Robesonian published an editorial on the Klan’s reorganization in North Carolina. While Cole is not named in the piece, The Robesonian editorial’s words angered Cole. The editor wrote:

The circular says that a public speaking will be held, with a full dress demonstration and cross burning. Of course it takes right much of a show these days to get folks away from their TV sets at night. And Halloween comes up in the next two weeks so that spooks are in season. Right now, hardly any juvenile celebration would be complete without them.

The editor’s piece suggests the Knights were nothing more than a bunch of children celebrating Halloween early. While insinuating that the Klan enjoyed playing “dress-up,” the editor jabbed at the Knights, questioning their commitment to Christianity:

Cross-burning is something else. A lot of people have reverence for the Cross as a symbol of Christianity. The burning of a cross is a practice more readily associated with paganism. It is understandable that cross-burners would wish to use hoods and robes and other means of cloaking their identity.

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18 “Ku Klux Klan Hold Big Rally In Robeson County.” The Daily Times-News (Burlington, NC), October 20, 1956.
Not only were Cole and the Knights dressing up like children, they were doing so to participate in anti-Christian rituals. To further add fuel to the fire, the editor questioned the Klan’s desire to fight Communism:

The Klan circular says, “Today Communism is our enemy.” Maybe this is something new. Just a few years ago, young American men fought in Korea against the Communist government of Red China. There was a Ku Klux Klan here in the States, but its most notorious exploits consisted of kidnapping and whipping civilian men and women.\textsuperscript{19}

Not only did \textit{The Robesonian} lampoon Cole’s efforts, the editor of \textit{The Daily Times-News} of Burlington did as well. Though Cole did not have the opportunity to read \textit{The Daily Times-News}, his associate and Grand Titan of the North Carolina Knights Greensboro klavern, James Garland Martin, did. Martin lived in Reidsville, North Carolina, and helped organize the Knights in the Piedmont.\textsuperscript{20} Reidsville was only thirty minutes from Burlington, those there had access to \textit{The Daily Times-News} in which an editorial urged its citizens to stay away from the Klan. The editor of \textit{The Daily Times-News} explained that any organization that “intimidates people, takes them for night rides, applies tar and feathers to their naked skin, is controlled by primitive, pagan, barbarism” should be shunned by all citizens. Echoing the editor at \textit{The Robesonian}, the editor of \textit{The Daily Times-News} questioned the Klan’s devotion to fighting Communism.

Regarding the battle against Communism in North Carolina, the editor concluded that “[Robeson County was] as barren of possible results as a cue ball of fleas.”\textsuperscript{21}

In order to revive the Klan, Cole had to change the way the press perceived the North Carolina Knights. In December 1956, Cole ventured out of Robeson County to

\textsuperscript{19} “Klansmen Try Again.” \textit{The Robesonian} (Lumberton, NC), October 18, 1956.


\textsuperscript{21} “Ku Klux Klan Was Scheduled For Rally In Robeson Tonight.” \textit{The Daily Times-News} (Burlington, NC), October 19, 1956.
hold the Knights’ first rally in the Piedmont town of Statesville. Cole invited the Statesville Record & Landmark to the rally, where he planned to focus solely on integration; a topic he deemed the “Scandal of the Century.” The editor from the Statesville Record & Landmark not only declined Cole’s invitation, but also published an editorial explaining why. The editor cited a previous commitment to attend the opening of the Statesville Record & Landmark’s new headquarters on the evening of the rally, but quickly went on to condemn the rally, saying: “we feel it more important to stay here [at the Statesville Record & Landmark office] and meet our own friends than to go traipsing off to North Iredell to meet a bunch of strangers wrapped in bedsheets.”22 Despite the editor’s rebuke, the rally was newsworthy and so the Statesville Record & Landmark. Reporter L. F. Amburn, Jr. covered it.

Along with Amburn, the Iredell and Davie County Sheriff’s Department were in attendance. Iredell Sheriff Charlie Rumple lined up deputies at the county border near the intersection of Highways 64 and 901. Davie County Sheriff Ben Boyles deployed what he considered a “small force” to patrol the rally itself.23 Cole, aware that both Amburn and the Sheriff’s Department were in attendance, mounted the makeshift flatbed truck stage.

Cole began the rally with a prayer then launched into his anti-integration sermon entitled “Scandal of the Century.” At its conclusion, Cole and the Knights lit a “35 by 11 foot cross.” As the cross burned, Cole’s demeanor changed and he returned to the microphone. Speaking to close to 3,000 people, Cole pulled out a written letter from

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22 “Our RSVP.” Statesville Record & Landmark, December 5, 1956.
23 “ Sheriff To Eye Kluxers’ Rally.” Statesville Record & Landmark, December 5, 1956.
landowner Paul H. Sigmon allowing the Knights to hold a rally in his field. Looking into the crowd, Cole used the letter to explain that the Knights were “not an organization [that took] the law into their own hands.” He continued to say that unlike Hamilton, his “intentions were honorable and that he wanted to bring the truth to the people.” Cole’s brethren in the Klan cheered him while the audience praised him with “Amens.” Cole added that the North Carolina Knights worked with law enforcement as a kind of citizens’ police force. Cole explained that Knights in Davie County contacted Sheriff Boyles warning him of delinquent “negroes and bootleggers.” Their tips, Cole claimed, resulted in raids and arrests of law-breaking citizens. Cole concluded with a special message to Amburn and the Statesville Record & Landmark; too often, Cole said, the press only gave negative attention to white, blue-collar Southerners. Cole told Amburn to print “something good about their own folks.”

The Statesville rally depicted the Knights as champions of white working-class North Carolinians. Cole showed attendees that working-class whites played a positive role in the community standing up to Communism, criminals, and integration. Closing the rally, Cole led the 3,000 attendees in a prayer followed by the “Star Spangled Banner” and the classic church hymn, “Old Rugged Cross.” As attendees cheered Cole, he stepped down and made his way through the crowd shaking hands, kissing babies, and stopping to pray with attendees. Davie County Sheriff’s Deputies referred to the rally as “most orderly” while Amburn noted that there were “no demonstrations or violence [from

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Cole had successfully rebranded the Klan. Using his charismatic oratory, Cole convinced attendees that the North Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan were centered on Christianity, law and order, and the protection of the white working-class.

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Despite the success of the Statesville rally, Cole deferred to Martin in further recruitment efforts in the Piedmont and continued his organizational efforts in Robeson County from the cozy confines of Fairmont Free Will Baptist Church where he served as pastor. Whereas Amburn provided Cole and the Knights with positive press exposure following Statesville, *The Robesonian* did not. After sending handbills to *The Robesonian* advertising a rally set for June 22, 1957 in Shannon, Cole arrived at the rally to a dismal 150 attendees. *The Robesonian* labeled Cole a “flop,” and wrote that Cole’s speech was nothing more than “hate, Bible, and libel” distributed in “equal proportions.”

To combat *The Robesonian*, Cole and the Knights donned their “full regalia” and took to the streets of St. Pauls. The march did little for recruitment, but highlighted Cole’s impulsive behavior. By the end of July, Grand Titan James Garland Martin wrote Cole detailing that recruiting efforts were “going well” in the Piedmont. Martin informed

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27 *Cole Papers*, 40.3.A, “James W. Cole’s business card as Minister of Fairmont Free Will Baptist Church and Host of the Free Will Hour on WFMO 860.” Also see: *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, NC), passim, during 1955 and 1956. Cole is listed in their “Church Happenings” section as minister of Fairmont Free Will Baptist Church.
Cole that he recruited close to twenty members in the Greensboro area, though only five
signed up. Martin had, however, secured permission from a Guilford County resident to
use a field for rallies. Should Cole be willing to increase recruitment drives in the
Piedmont, Martin believed the Knights could establish an active *klavern* there by 1958.30

Martin was right, but Cole was firmly committed to building the Knights in
Robeson County. The twosome compromised and decided to hold rallies on the second
weekend of August 1957, one in Monroe—a town in North Carolina’s southern Piedmont
near Charlotte—and the other in Fairmont. The rally in Monroe was of particular interest
to Cole because Monroe was home to the “most militant” NAACP chapter in the United
States, led by President Robert F. Williams and Vice President Dr. Albert Perry, Jr.
Williams’s philosophy involved physically confronting the forces of white supremacy.
He did not advocate going out and starting trouble, but insisted upon armed self-defense.
Williams’s NAACP chapter was quite distinct from other NAACP chapters nationally in
that Williams recruited mostly working-class African Americans. Together with Perry,
they built an NAACP chapter comprised primarily of farmers, laborers, domestic
workers, and the unemployed.31

Williams’s militancy grew out of a life of racial oppression. As an eleven-year
old, Williams watched Monroe Police Chief Jesse Helms, Sr., beat an African American
woman. Williams’s grandparents, Sikes and Ellen Isabel Williams had, perhaps, the
greatest influence on him. Sikes Williams was a paragon of activism and agency in
Monroe. As a member of the Republican Party, Sikes Williams worked tirelessly

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Copyright: 1962), 41-52.
registering local blacks to vote, and later organized a coalition with the Populist Party to topple Democratic rule in North Carolina in the 1896 election. He coupled political activism with pragmatism. Sikes kept a loaded shotgun by the door if the Klan paid a visit.\textsuperscript{32}

Ellen Williams taught Robert Williams about the hypocrisy of the world. Williams learned from his grandmother that Americans fought for “democracy” around the world, yet were unable to provide the same for their own African American citizens. Ellen taught Robert about Adolph Hitler’s rise to power and the Holocaust, contributing to Williams’s disenchantedment with and opposition to pacifist resistance. Born of a master/slave sexual relationship, Ellen Williams also taught her grandson about the double standards of Jim Crow. Daily, Robert Williams witnessed whites abusing blacks with little regard. At night, however, “darkness brought an influx of prowling white men in quest for black sex.”\textsuperscript{33}

As a teenager, Williams and a group of friends formed a group called X-32 to protect black women from prowling white men in Monroe. In one instance, X-32 followed a white man named Clarkston. When Clarkston harassed a black woman, X-32 leapt into action. The group smashed Clarkston’s car windows with bricks, scaring him off.\textsuperscript{34}

In 1956, Williams’s NAACP led protests over an all-white public swimming pool in Monroe. Though the pool had been built from both black and white tax dollars by the Works Progress Administration, it was designated off-limits to African American

\textsuperscript{33} Tyson, \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, 10, 24.  
\textsuperscript{34} Tyson, \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, 20.
children. Williams’s goal was to either have the pool desegregated, or have a black-only pool constructed in Monroe. The city of Monroe informed Williams that a separate pool would be too expensive, and there was little they could do to help. Williams advocated that the city allow blacks to swim for two days a week in the white-only pool, but the city again insisted that such an allowance was too expensive, as they would be forced to drain and then refill the pool for white swimmers. The protests continued throughout the summer of 1957.\(^{35}\) On top of Williams’s militancy, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System had enrolled its first African American students to attend Harding High School. A short drive from Monroe, Harding was set to be one of the first high schools integrated in North Carolina.\(^{36}\)

Thus, Monroe presented Cole with an opportunity. Williams’s militancy no doubt gained the North Carolina Knights new recruits in the Piedmont; the impending integration of Harding High School helped as well. If Cole organized high turnouts in Monroe he could not only increase the Knights’ membership, but he could paint Williams as an antagonist and a danger to public safety. Cole planned to hold the August 8, 1957 rally in Monroe then drive back to Robeson County for a second rally on the evening of August 9\(^{th}\).

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\(^{35}\) Williams, *Negroes with Guns*, 52-53.

The August 8th rally in Monroe brought only 200-300 attendees, but Cole did not let the low attendance diminish his enthusiasm. After Cole’s customary prayer, his speech turned radical. Cole criticized Williams’s pool demonstrations, explaining “a Negro who tries to get into a white swimming pool is not looking for a bath, he’s looking to get killed.”

Cole also addressed the newly passed Pearsall Plan to the crowd. The Pearsall Plan allowed local school boards in North Carolina to determine when their schools integrated. Unlike Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia where state governments refused to integrate, North Carolina sought to appear “moderate” in the eyes of the federal government, adopting the Pearsall Plan to slow integration by giving power to localities. Cole let the crowd know that if the Pearsall Plan failed, his “Smith & Wesson plan” would ensure continued segregation. When questioned about his “Smith & Wesson plan,” Cole boasted that the Knights would “muster 50,000 men by the time schools open in the fall [and] not stand for integration, voluntary or any other way.

Cole concluded the rally with the “Star Spangled Banner” and “Old Rugged Cross” to cheers from attendees. The Knights, however, did not return to Robeson County. Cole’s Kludd, Reverend George Dorsett of Greensboro, decided the Knights needed to assure the Monroe NAACP they intended to carry out their “Smith & Wesson plan.” Dorsett made a phone call to NAACP Vice President Dr. Albert Perry. Perry’s wife answered the phone. On the other end of the line was a man who called himself

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"George." "George" explained to Perry's wife that a KKK rally happened that night in Monroe, and that "tomorrow night we'll be coming to get Perry." 42

The North Carolina Knights, however, did not "get" Perry the following night. Cole instead took the Knights back to Fairmont to hold his August 9th rally in Robeson County, which drew only 250 attendees. Cole introduced himself as the Grand Wizard of the North Carolina Knights and said he was leading the cause to prevent an "obvious collision between blacks and whites" over integration. Towards the end of the rally, however, Cole abruptly stopped his integration tirade as he noticed North Carolina SHP Sergeant G. D. Dodson taking down license plate numbers. In an improvised show of manhood, Cole left the truck platform and questioned Robeson County Sheriff Malcolm McLeod over Dodson's actions. McLeod, after speaking with Dodson, told Cole that "license plates belong to the State of North Carolina, and they can be inspected anywhere at anytime by a law enforcement official." Following this confrontation, Cole immediately called off the rally. Despite the excitement, The Robesonian took little notice of the August 9th rally. Disappointed by the "lack of publicity" from The Robesonian and increased law enforcement surveillance, Cole and the Knights abandoned efforts in Robeson County for the time being. 43

By the fall of 1957, Robert F. Williams and the Monroe NAACP became the main targets of the North Carolina Knights. In Monroe, Cole and the Knights built their following among the white working-class by "linking" Williams to Communists, labeling

43 "Klan Flays 'The Stupid Press' But Shuns Car-Plate Publicity." The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), August 12, 1957.
Williams’s NAACP chapter the “CINAACP” or Communist Inspired National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.44

Cole dug in his heels in Monroe. As Cole refocused on Union and Mecklenburg Counties as bases for the North Carolina Knights, the Knights’ behavior grew more radical. Throughout August and September 1957, Cole and the Knights held rallies throughout Union County with some seeing thousands of attendees.45 After the rallies, Monroe Police Chief A. A. Mauney guided “Klan motorcades” through the African American community in Monroe. The Knights honked horns, yelled, and threw glass bottles at African Americans. In one instance, they shot at an African American woman’s feet, “forcing her to dance”; in another they physically assaulted an African American couple leaving a black restaurant.46 Cole, though not directly implicated in any of these attacks, allowed the Knights to veer from the nonviolent image he crafted for them in December 1956. The Knights gradually came to resemble Hamilton’s Carolina Klans.

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Turning a blind eye to the Knights’ violent behavior, Cole himself adopted less violent means to rid Monroe of Williams and Perry. Cole and the Knights presented Williams and Perry with a petition signed by 3,000 white residents asking the men to disband their NAACP chapter and leave Monroe. Williams and Perry refused. Williams

44 Williams, *Negroes with Guns*, 53-54.
appealed to North Carolina Governor Luther H. Hodges to intervene, citing the Knight’s rallies and harassment. Hodges declined to help, stating “that the Klan had not broken any laws and were not acting disorderly.” Williams went above the impotent Hodges, seeking intervention from President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Eisenhower, however, ignored Williams.47

Without intervention from the state or federal government, Williams took matters into his own hands. Williams and Perry armed their NAACP chapter. A veteran of the United States Marine Corps, Williams contacted officials at the National Rifle Association (NRA) in Washington, D.C. who provided Williams with an official charter, making him and his NAACP chapter official NRA members. With the charter, Williams and Perry stockpiled guns. To fund their armament, Williams appealed to churches in the North raising money for Civil Rights campaigns. Having secured sufficient funding, Williams expanded the Monroe NAACP’s arsenal.48

Meanwhile on September 21, 1957, the North Carolina Knights returned to Robeson County for a rally in Parkton. At a gas station down the road from the rally, service attendants notified the North Carolina SHP of “nine carloads” of African Americans in their parking lot yelling at passing Klan vehicles. The SHP immediately responded to the attendants’ call, and found a shotgun and a rifle in two of the African Americans’ vehicles. The African American protestors were arrested.49 In an editorial, The Robesonian editor warned Cole and the Knights, “Klansmen are not the only persons

47 Williams, Negroes with Guns, 53-57.
48 Williams, Negroes with Guns, 57.
49 "Negroes Gather As Klan Meets; Patrol On Job." The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), September 23, 1957.
equipped for hit-and-run action [...] other races are just as able to become night riders if they choose to do so." Tracing Klan intimidation of blacks to Reconstruction, the editor noted that the difference between 1867 and 1957 was that when African Americans saw the "bogy men" in 1867, they ran. In 1957, however, "they said "boo" right back."\(^{50}\)

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The responses of African Americans in Parkton and the editorial in *The Robesonian* foreshadowed the events in Monroe on October 4, 1957. After another successful rally in Monroe, Police Chief A. A. Mauney led a Knights motorcade of fifty cars through Dr. Albert Perry’s neighborhood. Honking horns, yelling racial slurs, and throwing glass bottles, the Knights were met with what sounded "like a carbine" coming from Perry’s house. Williams, Perry, and the Monroe NAACP opened fire on Cole and the Knights. The Knights, apparently shocked by the NAACP’s actions, fired at random into Perry’s house, leaving eight bullet holes. Williams and the NAACP fired back, and the Knights retreated.\(^{51}\) Williams wired President Eisenhower asking for help, stating: "Racial violence increasing. KKK raided Negro neighborhood Friday night. Eight racial incidents. Please have Monroe, N.C. police checked as possible Klan sympathizers."\(^{52}\)

Williams’s wire to President Eisenhower put Police Chief A. A. Mauney on the defense in the press. Mauney explained that his officers reported no gunfire between the

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\(^{50}\) "Klan Meets Defiance." *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, NC), September 24, 1957.


\(^{52}\) "Monroe Negro Wires Ike That Cops Cover Up KKK." *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, NC), October 7, 1957.
two groups though there were reports that his officers "heard what sound like a carbine coming from the Doctor's house."53 No charges were filed against either group, but the city of Monroe passed an ordinance barring Klan parades.54 One week later, however, Perry was charged with criminal abortion after supposedly performing an abortion on a white woman the day of the Klan/NAACP shootout.55 Williams argued that the charge stemmed from the anger directed at a "white physician whose car Negroes have repeatedly seen in Klan motorcades."56 Perry, after several appeals, was sentenced to five years in state prison in 1959 only to be paroled in 1960.57

Cole returned to Robeson County the following night. Speaking to a crowd of 250, he denied the shootout. Instead, he focused on The Robesonian, News & Observer (Raleigh, North Carolina), and the Charlotte Observer labeling the press as "hypocrites and scalawags." After his attack on the press, Cole suggested that African Americans in Robeson County belonged in Indian schools as Lumbee children were allowed to "scalp them."58 By December 1958, however, the Lumbees became Cole's target. Concerned


56 "NAACP Charges Klan Pushed Negro Abortion Charge At Monroe." The Gastonia Gazette, October 17, 1957.


58 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Luther H. Hodges Collection, 1954-1961 [hereafter Hodges Collection], General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 227,
about miscegenation between soldiers stationed at Fort Bragg and local Native American women, Cole’s new goal was to rid Robeson County of Lumbee Indians who made up a third of the county’s population.\(^\text{59}\)

While Cole was busy with the Lumbees in Fairmont, the Knights engaged in fear campaigns directed at African Americans in and around Greensboro. In Davidson County, they burned a cross in the yard of an African American family, and in Greensboro they threw a large rock through the front window of the home of school Superintendent Ben Smith. In Greensboro, the Knights also planned to help Cole rid Robeson County of the Lumbees. One of Cole’s enforcers, Walter “Dub” Brown, secured weapons including a .303 rifle, multiple .38 Smith & Wesson revolvers, automatic Colt .45 handguns and dozens of automatic shotguns and rifles.\(^\text{60}\) Brown also hoped to secure machine guns should the Lumbees outnumber the Klan.\(^\text{61}\) While Brown planned for battle, Cole believed the Knights could achieve their objective with a simple “rally and cross burning.”\(^\text{62}\)

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\(^\text{60}\) SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, January 2, 1958.

\(^\text{61}\) SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, January 27, 1958.

Before Cole declared war on the Lumbees, he first had to deal with a threat to his power. Georgia-based U.S. Klans Grand Dragon Eldon “E. L.” Edwards questioned Cole’s ability to organize North Carolina. Edwards brought his U.S. Klans into the Piedmont shortly after Williams and Perry chased the Knights out of Monroe. As a result, Edwards began poaching Knights in the Piedmont region who, like Edwards, questioned Cole’s leadership. Edwards’s arrival prompted a power struggle that forced Cole to reassert his authority while simultaneously crafting plans against the Lumbee Indians. His handling of Edwards demonstrates how desperate Cole had become: he sought to hold onto power even if it meant working with law enforcement officials against a fellow a Klansmen.
CHAPTER III

THE BEST WAY TO GET RID OF A DOG

By October 1957, Catfish Cole was consumed by his evangelism and role as Grand Wizard of the North Carolina Knights. However, Cole convinced himself that in order to uphold the “divine commission” bestowed upon him, he needed the help of the State of North Carolina. As Imperial Wizard E. L. Edwards’s U.S. Klans moved into North Carolina and poached Cole’s Knights, Cole sought out the assistance of North Carolina Attorney General George B. Patton.¹ Cole assumed the tone of a concerned minister when writing Patton, citing the Knights’ opposition to violence in contrast to Edwards’s violent Klan.²

On October 26, 1957, Imperial Wizard E. L. Edwards held his first rally for the U.S. Klans in Concord, North Carolina. After Cole’s debacle in Monroe, his rallies failed to excite the media frenzy that Edwards’s rallies did. The Georgia Imperial Wizard’s visit to North Carolina set journalists abuzz. *Concord Tribune* photographer James M. Babb, one journalist in attendance at Edwards’s rally, squeezed in between Edwards and his Klan entourage to take Edwards’s picture. Klansmen guarding Edwards seized Babb’s camera and smashed it. In the ensuing scuffle, female reporter Kay Hardison was knocked to the ground but not injured. Babb pointed the finger at Edwards, and Concord

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¹ SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, Various letters from James Cole to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, October 1957.

² SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, James Cole to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, October 27, 1957.
Police arrested the Imperial Wizard and charged him with assault.\(^3\) Word of events in Concord spread to the Knights, and many of Cole’s brethren sympathized with Edwards and the U.S. Klans.\(^4\) Cole, however, saw the incursion of the U.S. Klans into North Carolina as little more than a threat to his power.

After Edwards’s arrest, Cole spent late October 1957 writing North Carolina Attorney General George B. Patton. Cole’s first correspondence with Patton reveals not only that Cole was “conspiring against the interest and prosperity” of Edwards, a fellow Klansmen, but reveals Cole’s intent to keep the North Carolina Knights nonviolent.\(^5\) Cole explained that the Knights were different from Edwards’s U.S. Klans primarily because of their nonviolent ideology. Cole also revealed to Patton that he had been talking to the North Carolina SBI.

Please talk to S.B.I Agent Boyd about the talk he and I had. You and the Governor may know that we (North Carolina Klans) are with you 100%, and will do everything that we can to help you. We are opposed to violence, and I do not intend to be a part to any organization that advocates such an approach.\(^6\)

Cole’s letter explained that he recently banished three Klansmen—Alvin Burnette of Concord, Lonnie Dunn, Jr. of Lexington, and C. J. “Klick” Plummer, of Salisbury—“with dishonor for failing to keep the oath of Klansmen.” The implication, of course, is that the men acted violently—Cole mentions the three men “had beat up some nigger[,]”

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\(^3\) “Klan Chief’s Hearing Set for November 7.” Charlotte Observer, October 28, 1957.

\(^4\) SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, Francis M. Caldwell to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, December 2, 1957.


\(^6\) SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, James Cole to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, October 27, 1957.
creating a “black-eye to all good honest Klansmen.” It is further likely that Burnette, Dunn, and Plummer were in some way questioning Cole’s leadership. Cole mentions the men had joined the U.S. Klans, saying that “they were bragging that they [U.S. Klans] were doing something while we [North Carolina Knights] were just talking.”

The banishment of Burnette, Dunn, and Plummer not only suggests deterioration in Cole’s authority, but also deterioration in the Knights’ confidence in Cole’s ability to preside over the Klan. It is impossible to know what was going through Cole’s mind after he wrote that first letter, but his second letter, received the very next day by Attorney General Patton’s administrative assistant, suggests extreme paranoia and hope for instant resolution of his problems with Edwards and the U.S. Klan. Comparing North Carolina Knights rallies to U.S. Klan rallies, Cole wrote, “we have had over 30 rally’s [sic] in the past twelve months without any trouble at all. This is their (U.S. Klan) second rally, and you can see what has happened. Mr. Patton you can do something about this—Please do.”

To drive home the dangers Imperial Wizard Edwards and the U.S. Klans posed to North Carolina, Cole sent Patton a copy of a sixteen-point manifesto entitled the Jew Klux Klan that laid out sixteen questions that supposedly proved Edwards was not an authentic Klansmen. Although the document does not list an author, evidence related to

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7 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, “Banishment Memo signed by L-1, Grand Wizard of the North Carolina Knights of the KKK,” Attachment to letter from James Cole to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, October 27, 1957.

8 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, James Cole to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, October 27, 1957.

9 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, James Cole to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, October 28, 1957.
an incident between Edwards, Babb, and Hardison at the Concord rally suggest that Cole was behind it. Questions twelve and thirteen of the Jew Klux Klan read:

12. Was it the U.S. Klan that beat and kicked a newspaper man and slapped [sic] a lady in a North Carolina town a few weeks ago?

13. Was it the U.S. Klan that said to a lady in Concord, North Carolina that “This is a Christian organization if you don’t get out of here I’ll slap the hell out of you?” CHRISTIAN????????????10

The multiple question marks and emphasis on Christianity point to Cole’s authorship. Also, in his second letter to Patton, dated October 28, 1957, he attached the Charlotte Observer article detailing Edwards’s arrest at the rally. Cole’s attention to the Christian duties of the Klan here is congruent with Cole’s religious revisionism with the North Carolina Knights, specifically his rewriting of the Ku Klux Kreed in the Kloran. The Christian emphasis is reinforced in Jew Klux Klan questions fourteen and sixteen:

14. Does this man (Edwards) attend a church, or is he a member of a church, or has he ever been a member of a church????

16. Does the U.S. Klan want to preserve Segregation and our Christian way of life or do they want to devide [sic] the other Christian organizations in the South so that we will be in the hands of the NIGGERS, JEWS AND THE COMMUNIST????????????????11

The tone of the document precisely reflects Cole’s headstrong dogmatism and belief in the “divine commission.” It also suggests that Cole believed Patton would acknowledge the Knights as a fraternal, Christian organization, thus labeling Edwards’s U.S. Klans as subversive. Cole’s nonviolent argument hides the threat Cole felt to his masculinity from

10 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, Jew Klux Klan: These Are The Questions That Should Be Answered! These are Questions That Demand An Answer! These are Questions that E. L. Edwards Has Refused to Answer! Why. ******** Why!

11 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, Jew Klux Klan: These Are The Questions That Should Be Answered! These are Questions That Demand An Answer! These are Questions that E. L. Edwards Has Refused to Answer! Why. ******** Why!
Edwards, and justified his decisive banishment of Burnette, Dunn, and Plummer from the Knights. Lastly, the *Jew Klux Klan* exposed another contradiction in Cole’s persona. A hand-written note at the bottom of the document read, “The best way to get rid of a dog is to stop feeding him.”

This violent conclusion certainly does not fit Cole’s program of Christian nonviolence. While Cole advocated that Burnette, Dunn, and Plummer’s violent tendencies created a “black-eye to all good honest Klansmen,” he clearly suggested at least a *type* of violence as the only possible way of stopping the U.S. Klans’ incursion into North Carolina.

No evidence exists to suggest that Attorney General Patton ever replied to Cole’s letters. At a *klonklave* on November 30, 1957, Cole explained to the North Carolina Knights present that over the last several months he had contemplated resigning his Grand Wizardship. However, he told the men, he had been talking with Attorney General Patton and Patton had “begged him” to stay at the helm. Francis Caldwell, a Knight from Charlotte, North Carolina, found this claim suspicious. Caldwell wrote Attorney General Patton the following day. Introducing himself as a member of the North Carolina Knights of the KKK, Caldwell coyly inquired as to whether or not the Knights’ had “obtain[ed] a statute dealing with foreign corporations” to avoid breaking

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12 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, *Jew Klux Klan: These Are The Questions That Should Be Answered! These are Questions That Demand An Answer! These are Questions that E. L. Edwards Has Refused to Answer! Why ********* Why!*

13 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, James Cole to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, October 27, 1957.

14 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, Francis M. Caldwell to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, December 2, 1957.
"new laws" passed by Governor Luther H. Hodges. Playing the innocent, Caldwell then brought up the subject of Cole’s leadership:

It was said the 30th of November, 1957, by the Grand Wizard [Cole] that in the past week he personally consulted you with the reference to his resignation to this order [North Carolina Knights of the KKK], and then stated that you, Atty. General of North Carolina, begged him, the Grand Wizard of the North Carolina Knights of the K.K.K., not to resign. I would like to know if this statement is true? Caldwell goes on to suggest that Cole’s statement was made because of Edwards’s successes in recruitment. Caldwell asked, “how could organizations fighting for the same principles act in this manner?” Concluding the paragraph, Caldwell requested “any information on this organization [North Carolina Knights of the KKK] and the conversations between yourself [Patton] and the Grand Wizard [Cole] of the North Carolina Knights of the K.K.K.” Caldwell further alleged that a crime was taking place within the ranks of the North Carolina Knights. The Knights suspected Cole was embezzling funds to support his family. Stating, “no one should receive personal gain from this organization,” Caldwell told Attorney General Patton that “any legal information [on Cole] would be greatly appreciated.”

Caldwell’s accusation of embezzlement not only suggests the North Carolina Knights were questioning Cole’s integrity, it also suggests that money—not family or

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15 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, Francis M. Caldwell to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, December 2, 1957, and James Cole to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, October 28, 1957.

16 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, Francis M. Caldwell to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, December 2, 1957.

17 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, Francis M. Caldwell to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, December 2, 1957.
even fraternity— was Cole’s priority. As donations poured into the Knights, Cole found a steady stream of income. Income for Cole had been difficult to come by before organizing the Knights. For instance, Cole only worked as an evangelist and radio host after having “peddled spurious diplomas” from his defunct “Southern Bible College” in 1953. Prior to opening Southern Bible College, Cole was described as a “one-time circus pitchman” working for a traveling carnival. Proving allegations of wrongdoing would not, however, be easy.

From December 1957 through January 18, 1958, Cole embarked on a public campaign to reinforce his position with the Knights. Cole professed nonviolence to Patton, but maintained a personal armed escort at rallies. In Greensboro on January 11, 1958, B.J. Grantham from nearby Asheboro, North Carolina began yelling at Cole, interrupting his speech. Cole’s guards forcibly removed him. Not only did a personal guard shield Cole from hecklers, his escorts’ black robes caused Cole to stand out authoritatively in a sea of white-clad Klansmen.

The following week, a reporter asked Cole about Sheriff Malcolm McLeod’s statement that he would “not provide any special protection [for the North Carolina Knights but rather] let the situation [at Hayes Pond] Saturday night determine the course

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18 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, Francis M. Caldwell to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, December 2, 1957 and Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, September 28, 1958.


21 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, September 6, 1958.
of action.” Cole responded to the reporter by comparing the Knights situation to the “Little Rock 9”, a group of nine African American students who enrolled at an all-white high school in 1957. Cole said, “If Ike [President Eisenhower] had the right to call out troops for nine burly-heads [Little Rock 9] I see no reason why he can’t do the same for us at Maxton.” Cole, no doubt, was further enraged when Simeon Oxendine, son of Mayor J. C. Oxendine, told a reporter that he did not understand Cole’s focus on Lumbees in Robeson County. Oxendine said, “Lumbee Indians and whites have been inter-marrying for the last 25 years. Indians and whites attend school and church together here [in Robeson County] and [our] children belong to the same Boy Scout Troops.” With Cole, McLeod, and Oxendine feeding into the media frenzy, the Hayes Pond rally had the potential to either cement Cole’s role as Grand Wizard or further undermine his influence among the North Carolina Knights.

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CHAPTER IV

THE KLAN NEVER BACKS DOWN

Bruce Roberts, editor and publisher of the *Scottish Chief* and *Lumberton Post*, went to work the same as always on Monday, January 13, 1958. A typical day’s work for Roberts involved researching articles for both publications. Roberts planned that week to get his deskwork done early in order to cover the Klan rally at Hayes Pond on Saturday night. As Roberts worked in his office, a white man barged in, begging to speak with him. Roberts recognized the man as a member of the North Carolina Knights known to him only as “Guy.” Knowing how most Klansmen felt about reporters, Roberts found it odd Guy wanted to speak with him. Roberts invited Guy into his office. Guy told Roberts that in preparation for the rally at Hayes Pond the Knights were planning to burn two crosses that night in East Lumberton and St. Pauls, and invited Roberts to tag along to cover the story.¹

Roberts arrived at the meeting house that evening at 6:30 p.m. Roberts was greeted by Guy who took him inside and introduced Roberts to the other Klansmen. One Klansman in particular wanted to speak with Roberts about the events that evening. That Klansman was Grand Wizard James “Catfish” Cole.²

While Cole insisted to Sheriff McLeod that he was unaware of any cross burnings, Roberts’ testimony tells a different story. In the house on Fifth Street that night, Cole told Roberts he “wanted a news story” written on the Knights’ actions. Roberts obliged; indeed, at 7:00 p.m. that night, Roberts accompanied Cole and the other Klansmen to a vacant parking lot in the town of St. Pauls. There Roberts witnessed fifteen men exit their vehicles, grab their robes and hats from their vehicles’ trunks, and change into Klan attire. Distinguishing himself from the other Klansmen, Cole donned a purple robe “trimmed in gold” signifying his Grand Wizardship. The Klansmen rode to the home of a Lumbee woman and placed a large cross in her front yard; Cole stood beside it and explained to his Knights that “an Indian woman lived in this house and she was having an affair with a white man; that this cross was [to be] burned as a warning to her.”

Cole and the Knights observed the burning cross for a few minutes then began their drive across Robeson County to East Lumberton. There the Knights erected a cross in the front yard of a Lumbee family that just moved into an all-white neighborhood. After the cross was lit, Roberts decided to leave. Shaken by the Knights’ activities, Roberts decided not to run the article in the *Scottish Chief* or the *Lumberton Post*. As he

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was a correspondent to the *Charlotte Observer* and *Fayetteville Observer*, however, Roberts allowed their reporters to develop the story.6

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On Wednesday, January 15, 1958, Robeson County Sheriff Malcolm McLeod arrived for work expecting to deal with conflict between Lumbee Indians and the North Carolina Knights. The previous day McLeod had received complaints from several Lumbees in the St. Pauls and East Lumberton areas of Robeson County. In St. Pauls, the Knights burned a cross at the home of a Lumbee woman accused of “having an affair with a white man.” In East Lumberton, a cross was burned in a Lumbee family’s front yard in response to their having moved into an “all-white” neighborhood.7

As Sheriff McLeod settled into his office, his telephone rang. On the other end was Pembroke Mayor J. C. Oxendine. The mayor informed McLeod that he needed to get to Pembroke City Hall as soon as possible. Waiting at City Hall were thirty Lumbees who after having read articles detailing the events in the *Charlotte Observer* and *Fayetteville Observer* arrived to protest the Knights actions the previous Monday night.8 Lumbee elders gave McLeod a warning to pass along to Cole. Although Lumbee leaders had been trying to “quell ill feelings” towards Cole and the Knights, many—including

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Mayor Oxendine’s son and World War II veteran Simeon Oxendine—were upset and planned to make their presence known at the rally.9

Once the meeting at city hall ended, McLeod contacted Captain Raymond Williams and Sergeant G. D. Dodson of the North Carolina SHP. Informing Williams and Dodson of the problems looming in Robeson County, the three decided to take a trip to Marion, South Carolina to visit the home of Catfish Cole.10

When McLeod, Dodson, and Williams arrived at Cole’s home, Cole’s wife, Carolyn, welcomed the men. They sat down with Cole and McLeod explained that “tension was growing” in Robeson County, and while he could not stop the Knights from coming nor assembling, he explained it would be in Cole’s best interest to cancel the rally at Hayes Pond in Maxton. McLeod questioned Cole about the Charlotte Observer and Fayetteville Observer’s coverage of the cross burnings in St. Pauls and East Lumberton as well. Cole explained that he was not aware of their coverage, nor “did he harbor any hard feelings towards the Indian people of Robeson County.”11

Cole provided McLeod no clues as to whether or not he would cancel the rally. Knowing Cole to be a vocal advocate of First Amendment freedoms, McLeod found it odd that Cole did not try and argue the Knights “right to assemble” in Maxton.12

McLeod reminded Cole of his Greensboro speech stating that “a man said [to McLeod] he wouldn’t get up and make that same speech for $25,000.” Unfortunately, McLeod’s warning only stoked Cole’s egotism and reinforced his conviction to hold the rally.

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Sheriff McLeod described the beginnings of the Hayes Pond rally as “quiet but not quiet”; that “tension was high, like something was about to happen to you.” Though Cole was playing the forthright evangelist, his fragility showed when Sheriff McLeod approached him on the night of January 18, 1958 at the Klan rally in Maxton. After McLeod reminded Cole “that Lumbees did not want them [KKK] there,” Cole replied, “I didn’t want to come, but the rest wanted to come, and I had to come with them, and that is the reason I am here.”

After their conversation in which Cole expressed his desire not to be there, Cole asked if the sheriff had plans to protect the Klan’s “lawful” right to assemble. McLeod looked around and noticed Klansman Dub Brown unloading ammunition and guns from his vehicle, passing them out. Reverend George Dorsett instructed the Klansmen to “shoot only if the Indians shoot first.” After observing Cole’s men, the sheriff said, “I

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16 SANC (Raleigh), State of North Carolina, Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, “Maxton Klan Meeting-1/18/58” Agent L. E. Allen to Director Anderson.
don't think you can call it a lawful assembly, you with men armed with guns and rifles.”

Cole had reason to be worried. Of an estimated six hundred people at Hayes Pond, five hundred were Lumbee Indians. A single bulb lit the makeshift flatbed truck stage and behind Cole’s microphone was a large KKK banner in red and white. After speaking with Cole, McLeod, Dodson, and Williams of the North Carolina SHP retreated to safer positions at the periphery of the rally. Just before Cole took the makeshift stage, McLeod overheard Lumbees chanting “we want Cole, give us Preacher Cole!” As Cole took the makeshift stage, however, a lone gunshot rang out. The shooter hit the bulb above the stage and everything went dark. Lumbees pounced on Klansmen as they bolted towards their cars, hoping to escape before carnage ensued. Four people were nonfatally shot; the speaker system and Reverend George Dorsett’s vehicle were destroyed, leaving the Reverend stranded. Mayor Oxendine’s son Simeon perhaps dealt the biggest blow to Cole and the Knights. As riot ensued, Oxendine and fellow Lumbee

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Charlie Warriax tore down the KKK banner strung above the stage. As they did so, undercover Robeson County deputies hurled canisters of tear gas to “quell the rioters.”

When the air cleared, Catfish Cole had disappeared. As Sheriff McLeod put it, Cole “left before the shooting [even] started.”

Whether Cole indeed left preemptively or in response to the first gunshot is not known. Cole was in such a hurry, however, that he left his wife at the rally. Carolyn Cole spent the night in Hamlet, North Carolina with Klansman Red Morgan while Cole made his getaway in a 1956 Ford pickup truck registered to a friend in Charlotte.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Hayes Pond, Grand Titan James Garland Martin, Cole’s second in command, was arrested by McLeod. Even worse for Martin, he was ridiculed in The Robesonian. Complaining about the Knights’ speaker system being destroyed by the Lumbees, Sheriff McLeod asked Martin to tell a Robesonian reporter who owned the speaker system. Speaking sarcastically, Martin said “I told you it belonged to a Negro.”

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24 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, “Maxton Klan Meeting-1/18/58” Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson.

25 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, January 27, 1958.

26 “Cole Faces Indictment; Disgusted Knight Quits.” The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC) January 21, 1958.
Grand Titan Martin faced the most serious charges: carrying a concealed weapon; and—as he was visibly drunk at the rally—a drunk and disorderly charge as well. On Wednesday, January 22, 1958, Martin was found guilty, fined sixty dollars and given a suspended sixty-day jail sentence. Together, both Martin and Cole were charged with inciting a riot, which carried a maximum sentence of eighteen- to twenty-four months in state prison. North Carolina's Ninth District Solicitor E. Maurice Braswell planned on trying both men "as a single case."

Cole, however, was declared a fugitive. He had fled to his Marion, South Carolina home. Sheriff McLeod called Cole on January 20, 1958 and notified him of his bond hearing set for the following day. Cole replied that he needed to speak with his lawyers first. Angered by Cole's defiance, Solicitor E. Maurice Braswell contacted the South Carolina governor's office for an extradition order, and Marion County Sheriff J. Leon Gasque was ordered to place Cole under arrest. Calling Cole before leaving for his house, Gasque recommended Cole to "get himself a bondsman and come on in if he didn't want to waive extradition." Cole complied with Gasque's request but voiced his displeasure with Sheriff McLeod. Promising to sue McLeod in Federal Court for

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“depriving Klansmen of civil liberties,” he accused McLeod of violating his First Amendment rights. Cole fought extradition, but there was little he could do. He took his case all the way to South Carolina Governor Bell Timmerman, Jr. where he was granted an extradition hearing on February 7, 1958. Timmerman’s office ruled in favor of Solicitor Braswell, and Cole gave authorities “no trouble” when extradited.

Lumbees expressed immense pleasure to media outlets in the Knights downfall. Simeon Oxendine, after posing for Life magazine with Charlie Warriax and their captured KKK banner, told reporters the Lumbees planned to “bury the banner and then burn it[...], symbolizing that the Klan [was] dead in the area.” Lew Barton wrote the editor of The Robesonian, claiming he expressed “the true sentiments of my people [Lumbees] and most Robesonians.” Barton wrote:

The majority of our people in all races know that it [KKK] is a lawless, godless mob, spawned by hell itself. These people [Klansmen] care nothing for liberty, except as it favors them. They [Klansmen] have all never acquired the knowledge that is elementary to all high school citizenship classes, namely that my individual liberty ends where my brother’s begins.

Bringing up the contradictions inherent in Klan Christianity, Barton wrote:

They [Klansmen] care for nothing except themselves. The most blasphemous of all acts, it seems to me, is their use of the Cross of Christ, an eternal symbol of love, suffering, and good-will, as their symbol of protest. When they burn the cross, they are subconsciously demonstrating

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35 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Solicitor E. Maurice Braswell to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, February 8, 1958.
36 “Indian Custodian of KKK Banner May Bury Symbol.” The Evening Telegram (Rocky Mount, NC), January 20, 1958.
their true evaluation of that blessed system [...] the activities of the KKK are unChristian [and] unAmerican.37

Lumberton resident James P. Hunt summed up the feelings of the Lumbees in rhyme, personally attacking Cole:

I know an old time preacher,
    His name is James Cole,
He turned out to be a Ku Klux,
    Instead of saving souls[...] 
So pray for me now Preacher Cole,
    And everybody else,
But the one that needs prayer most of all,
    Is your individual self.38

To add insult to injury, W. S. Mooneyhamm, executive secretary of the National Association of Free Will Baptists in Nashville, Tennessee, told reporters: “Mr. Cole may be a minister in some other church or religious organization, but never in this denomination.”39

North Carolina Governor Luther H. Hodges dealt a further blow to Cole’s dignity. Issuing a public statement Hodges made it clear what he thought of Cole and the North Carolina Knights, saying:

The Ku Klux Klan has shown itself to be an organization of violence and intimidation. The consequences of its usual activities are the unlawful oppression of individual citizens, or else the arousement, incitement and provocation of groups of citizens which lead to public disorder.

Driving the stake through heart of the Klan, Governor Hodges continued:

The Ku Klux Klan and its leaders who rant against Communism actually give aid and comfort to Communist Russia. The Klan is responsible for

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provoking incidents that are exploited in propaganda by Russia and other Communist nations.

Hodges concluded saying “to the alleged leaders of the Ku Klux Klan—your message of hate and violence is a mockery to the religion you often profess.”

Historians praised Hodges for bringing industrial and educational reform to North Carolina but have neglected the impact of the Battle of Hayes Pond on Hodges’ popularity and political career. Hodges’s tough stance on Cole and the Knights thrust him into the state and national spotlight. Americans joined in commending Hodges for “no longer tolerating the stigma of such an organization [the KKK].” “Right thinking” North Carolinians assured Hodges the vote should be decide to make a Presidential run, proud “he had guts enough to defy a bunch of thugs who want[ed] to make [their] state a [breeding] ground for tyrants.” Most unique is that Hodges’ statements against the Klan united many white Southerners across class, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Pastor Zeb Moss wrote Hodges thanking him for being hard on “Reverend” Cole. Jeanette Harman of Christiansburg, Virginia commended Hodges for his disciplining of the “termite-like” Klan, and hoped Hodges would next join Virginia’s Sixth District Congressmen Richard Poff in “fighting the sending of low [brow] pictures through the

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1. SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, “Statement by Governor Luther H. Hodges,” January 30, 1958.

2. SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, James B. Church of Southport, North Carolina to Governor Luther H. Hodges, February 10, 1958.

3. SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, Mrs. Susan Gower Smith of Durham, North Carolina to Governor Luther H. Hodges, January 31, 1958 and Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Richards of Southern Pines, North Carolina to Governor Luther H. Hodges, February 1, 1958.

4. SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, Pastor Zeb V. Moss of Caroleen, North Carolina to Governor Luther H. Hodges, February 14, 1958.
mail."44 Chicago businessman Rufus B. King, a native Southerner, commended the example Hodges set abroad. King explained that he had "lived outside the continental U.S. and knew how such incidents get front page treatment in many newspapers of the world." Hodges' tough stance, King concluded, slowed the spread of Communism in the world.45 Rabbi F. I. Rypins and the National Conference of Christians and Jews expressed thanks to Hodges for removing the "blot" on North Carolina's good name.46

The outpouring of support validated the Lumbees' actions at Hayes Pond and contributed to a sense of state- and nationwide unity against hate groups. Welton Lowry, an Indian school principal from Lumberton, assured Hodges that the "Klansmen will not return"; the "true peace loving people of this GREAT NATION OF OURS" would never allow them back.47 Hodges eventually became U.S. Secretary of Commerce under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Many still supported Catfish Cole and the North Carolina Knights. Charlotte resident Parks A. Yandle insisted that McLeod failed in his duties by not protecting Cole and the Klan. Yandle wanted McLeod, rather than Cole, to be charged with inciting a

44 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, Mrs. Jeanette Harman of Christiansburg, Virginia to Governor Luther H. Hodges, February 1958.
45 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, Mr. Rufus B. King of Elgin, Illinois to Governor Luther H. Hodges, February 9, 1958.
47 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, Mr. Welton Lowry of Lumberton, North Carolina to Governor Luther H. Hodges.
riot. Quentin T. Johnson of Winston-Salem accused Hodges of “appeasing the Communists,” and of failure to understand how school integration inevitably leads to miscegenation. Citing Cole and Martin’s arrest as “reverse racism,” Mrs. M. Gillon of Phoebus, Virginia accused Hodges of not only scaring “white people from taking an active part in the Klan,” but also of “being a Jew” in disguise. More disturbing letters reached Hodges’s desk as well. J. B. Easter of Walnut Cove, North Carolina expressed interest in knowing whether or not it was “lawful for a gang of white people to break up their [the NAACP’s] meetings with gunfire.” Donald U. Green of Laurinburg, North Carolina added that the Klan would only get “bigger and bigger” in North Carolina lamenting that Governor Hodges had left whites with no choice but to “join the Ku Klux Klan and take matters into their own hands.”

In the immediate wake of Hayes Pond, Cole retreated from his Grand Wizardship with the Knights. He was convicted of inciting a riot in March 1958 and sentenced to twenty-four months in state prison. Appealing his conviction, however, Cole was free on

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48 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, Mr. Parks A. Yandle of Charlotte, North Carolina to Governor Luther H. Hodges, January 22, 1958.

49 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, Mr. Quentin T. Johnson of Winston-Salem, North Carolina to Governor Luther H. Hodges, February 13, 1958.

50 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, Mrs. M. Gillon of Phoebus, Virginia to Governor Luther H. Hodges, January 31, 1958.

51 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, Mr. J. B. Easter of Walnut Cove, North Carolina to Governor Luther H. Hodges, February 10, 1958.

52 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, Anonymous from Dunn, North Carolina to Governor Luther H. Hodges, January 31, 1958, Mr. Donald U. Green of Laurinburg, North Carolina to Governor Luther H. Hodges, February 17, 1958.
bond until his North Carolina Supreme Court trial set for March 1959. Faced with the resurgence of the oppositional U.S. Klans in North Carolina, Reverend George Dorsett, not Cole, embarked on a war of words and disruption against the U.S. Klans. Cole, however, had bigger plans.

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53 "Klan Wizard Cole Gets 2-Year Sentence; Titan Martin Draws 12 Months: Both Free On Bond; Both File Appeal." The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), March 14, 1958.
CHAPTER V

MY INITIALS ARE THE SAME AS JESUS

From his home in Marion, South Carolina, Cole planned his return to North Carolina. Newspapers reported that the humiliated Grand Wizard of the Knights was planning a large rally on a farm in Burlington scheduled for Saturday, January 25, 1958. Cole reported to the media that he “did not expect any trouble,” but was “sure the Maxton situation would be discussed.”\(^1\) North Carolina SBI agents told Cole that if he attended the Burlington rally, he would be arrested.\(^2\) Cole excused his absence explaining “it would be embarrassing to be arrested in North Carolina.”\(^3\) By Saturday, however, it did not matter. Property owner Thurman Wagoner canceled the rally explaining that “there will be no meeting of the Ku Klux Klan on any property owned or possessed by me and I have forbidden same and desire that the public be so informed.”\(^4\)

Cole was not deterred by the cancellation. He had another rally planned the very next day—at Hayes Pond. Blaming heavy rain for the cancellation in Burlington, Cole spent the weekend planning the “largest Klan rally since the 1920s” with Virginia Grand Dragon Reverend James Milligan, Sr. Predicting 5,000 attendees, Cole assured Klansmen there would be “more Klansmen than Indians.” Not only did Cole plan on

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3 “Cole Changes Tune About Coming to NC.” The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), January 24, 1958.
4 “Property Owner Refuses Site For Saturday K-Rally.” The Evening Telegram (Rocky Mount, NC), February 5, 1958.
bringing in Klansmen from “four or five Southern states,” he expected “Klan representatives from all over the world” to descend upon Robeson County.”

While Cole may have thought he would be welcomed back into the North Carolina Knights once his legal issues settled down, he was wrong. On January 23, 1958, a klonklave was held outside Jamestown, North Carolina. With Cole deemed a fugitive, Grand Titan James Garland Martin—fresh from his Hayes Pond convictions—led the klonklave. Martin and enforcer Dub Brown berated the Knights and an absent Cole for their failures at Maxton. Knowing law enforcement was cracking down on the Knights, Brown advised the Klansmen present to stop carrying membership cards. Going forward, Klansmen would no longer use their legal names. Brown issued each Klansmen an identification number instead. Knowing that “the KKK lost prestige at the Maxton rally,” Brown said the Klansmen had to learn how to carry themselves in the face of adversity; if violence was the only way to uphold white supremacy, the Knights could not afford to “turn the other cheek.” If a Klansmen could not bring himself “to fight and shoot,” Brown said he should withdraw membership from the North Carolina Knights. Many Knights, led by Reverend Walter Johnson, in fact took Brown’s advice, saying they “were getting out of the Klan because it was getting too dangerous.”

James Garland Martin and Dub Brown knew the North Carolina Knights of the KKK were in shambles. North Carolina SBI agents, Martin claimed, had visited him at his Reidsville, North Carolina home. Agents wanted Martin to turn over evidence on the

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6 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, SBI Intra-Bureau-Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, January 27, 1958.
Knights and to lure Cole to the proposed rally in Burlington. Martin explained to Brown and the remaining Knights' that he “refused them and ran them off his property.” Martin then called a vote to break away from Cole and the Knights to form their own Klan. Seeking to remind the Knights of Cole’s embezzlement charges, Martin informed those present that he intended to drive to the Charlotte home of Knights’ secretary Joe Bryant and, using the Knights’ financial records there, prove Cole had embezzled money. Dub Brown heartily approved, voicing the need for their new Klan to be more militaristic; he planned on purchasing more weapons and teaching Klansmen “how to use firearms and defend themselves in any type of riot.”

Starting a new Klan, however, proved too great a task for Martin and Brown. Instead, they channeled the dissident Knights into E. L. Edwards’s U.S. Klans now headquartered in Salisbury, North Carolina. The Exalted Cyclops in Salisbury was former North Carolina Knight C. J. “Klick” Plummer, who presented the U.S. Klans as actually “doing something,” whereas the Knights were “just talking.”

While Martin sought to expose Cole’s embezzlement, Dub Brown suspected Martin lied; that Martin had indeed talked to the SBI and that, as Cole’s second-in-command, he helped Cole embezzle money. On the night of February 6, 1958, per Dub Brown’s request, Knights including Reverend George Dorsett and Clyde A. Webster set out to Reidsville intending not only to question Martin but to flog him as well. Martin

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7 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, SBI Intra-Bureau-Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, January 27, 1958.

8 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, James Cole to Hon. Attorney General George B. Patton, October 27, 1957.
evidently answered the Knights’ questions satisfactorily, as he was neither flogged nor forced to resign as Grand Titan.⁹

Returning from Reidsville to a klonklave at Midway Baptist Church in Jamestown, North Carolina, Dorsett and the other Knights discussed the need to banish Cole from the North Carolina Knights. During the discussion, U.S. Klans Exalted Cyclops Klick Plummer arrived. Instead of banishing Cole, Plummer suggested that the remaining Knights join the U.S. Klans in Salisbury. Trying to convince “nonviolent” Cole supporters, Plummer described nonviolence as a central tenet of the U.S. Klans. Plummer invited the Knights to a klonklave the following Tuesday, February 11, 1958 in Lexington. Dub Brown announced that between the klonklaves, he, Martin, Dorsett, and Bryant planned to visit Cole in Marion to discuss the allegations of embezzlement against Cole.¹⁰

No record exists of what happened when Brown, Martin, Dorsett, and Bryant visited Cole on Sunday, February 9, 1958. Evidence after February 9th suggests Cole handled the visit in his typical manner: he hid behind a shield of lies. At the previous klonklave on January 27th, Martin vowed to collect financial records from Knights secretary Joe Bryant, but never did.¹¹ Further, Bryant, who had been roped into accompanying the others to Marion, brought no such records with him. Bryant explained

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⁹ SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, February 8, 1958.

¹⁰ SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, February 8, 1958.

¹¹ SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 293, Folder: Segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, SBI Intra-Bureau-Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, January 27, 1958.
that the incriminating records were “locked up” and inaccessible on the weekend.\(^{12}\) The result of the disgruntled Knights road trip visit to Marion was yet another split; Dub Brown finally quit the Knights for good. Bringing many lower-ranking Knights with him, Brown rose in prominence in the U.S. Klans, eventually becoming an Imperial Kladd in charge of recruitment.\(^{13}\) Dorsett, Bryant, and Martin, however, remained loyal to Cole and the North Carolina Knights.

This partial display of loyalty reinforced Cole’s confidence and sense of divine mission. Once again, Cole resumed planning rallies. At one rally in Greenville, South Carolina only twenty people showed up.\(^{14}\) Not deterred, Cole planned on. While estimates vary, Cole spoke in Graham, North Carolina to between thirty-five and seventy-five people. Cole’s message was quite different from his usual pro-segregation, anti-Communist rhetoric. Cole explained he was taking time to focus on his evangelical career. As he put it, he “was not a religious imposter” as Governor Hodges charged. Blasting the media as well as Governor Hodges, Cole described himself to the crowd as the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. Hodges was trying to execute him just as Pontius Pilate and the Romans had executed Christ. Cole said, “My initials are the same as Jesus’. J. C.—James Cole, J. C.—Jesus Christ. He was 33 [years old when executed]. I am 33 [years old].”\(^{15}\)

\(^{12}\) SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, February 8, 1958.

\(^{13}\) SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, July 20, 1958.

\(^{14}\) “Cole’s Wizardry Pulls No Crowds.” The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), February 24, 1958.

\(^{15}\) “Cole’s Wizardry Pulls No Crowds.” The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), February 24, 1958.
Cole’s speech in Graham highlighted his belief in “divine commission” and distanced him from the colossal embarrassment of Hayes Pond. It also allowed Cole to hold onto some of his power as Grand Wizard of the Knights. While Cole slandered Governor Hodges, George Dorsett engaged in a war of words against turncoat Dub Brown and Klick Plummer. Dorsett argued that the U.S. Klans were infiltrated by Governor Hodges, and that E. L. Edwards was controlled by a Jewish man named Chuck Cline.¹⁶

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As early as May 1958, the U.S. Klans had successfully established \textit{klaverns} in the North Carolina Piedmont towns of Monroe, Concord, Salisbury, Mocksville, High Point, Jamestown, Statesville, and Lexington, with the two largest \textit{klaverns} in Salisbury, boasting fifty-one members, and Jamestown, with twenty-two.¹⁷ The major difference between the U.S. Klans and Cole’s North Carolina Knights was a professed willingness to resort to violence. Newly anointed Imperial Kladd Dub Brown, for instance, boasted of driving through Jamestown throwing dynamite and roofing nails into people’s driveways. SBI reports, however, do not verify Brown’s account beyond citing his own claim.¹⁸ In Winston-Salem, U.S. Klansmen planned on breaking up an NAACP meeting,

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¹⁶ SANC (Raleigh), State of North Carolina, Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, May 25, 1958.

¹⁷ SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, May 25, 1958.

¹⁸ SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, June 29, 1958.
but North Carolina Grand Dragon Thurman Miller objected.\textsuperscript{19} Both instances suggest that in the late 1950s the Klans in North Carolina were preoccupied with infighting. Brown’s tale of dynamite and roofing nails was meant to lure Knights fed up with nonviolence to the U.S. Klans.\textsuperscript{20}

Another difference between the U.S. Klans and the North Carolina Knights of the KKK was organization. Cole’s Knights were loosely organized by 1958 and turned out smaller crowds than the U.S. Klans, who typically attracted hundreds. The U.S. Klans had concession stands at rallies providing not only food and drink to spectators, but also a festival-like atmosphere.\textsuperscript{21} At the end of rallies, speakers offered membership to all white males in the crowd. Fifteen to twenty plain-clothed Klansmen planted in the crowd stepped forward enthusiastically encouraging attendees to follow suit.\textsuperscript{22}

In theory, violence was shunned by the U.S. Klans just as it was by Cole. While the U.S. Klans were more willing to use violence than Cole’s Knights, they were still reserved enough to shun the most violent among their own ranks. For example, Exalted Cyclops of the Salisbury Klavern and Knights outcast Klick Plummer was eventually banished from the U.S. Klans. Plummer threatened the lives of Klansmen in the

\textsuperscript{19} SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, September 20, 1958.

\textsuperscript{20} SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, June 29, 1958.

\textsuperscript{21} SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, June 29, 1958.

\textsuperscript{22} SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, August 10, 1958.
Salisbury Klavern who disobeyed him as well as Imperial officers.23 As a result of his banishment, Plummer organized a group known as the “Black Shirts,” associated with the National Defenders of State’s Rights in January 1959.24 The Black Shirts consisted primarily of violent white supremacists banished or barred from any and all of the North Carolina Klans.25

On May 17, 1958, tension reached a boiling point between the U.S. Klans and the North Carolina Knights at a klonklave in Jamestown. As U.S. Klans Grand Dragon Thurman Miller finished the initiation ceremony of new Klansman Paul Brown, the door burst open. Four unknown North Carolina Knights entered, and after taking seats as if they were part of the klavern, one Knight picked a fight with U.S. Klansman and building owner Doug Brown. Outnumbered twenty-one to four, the North Carolina Knights were ejected from the klonklave. Grand Dragon Thurman Miller suspected Cole and Dorsett were behind the meeting’s interruption and formed a security committee to prevent future distractions. Miller established that “ten men in plain clothes would be responsible for [controlling] any trouble that brewed up.” At the next Jamestown klonklave on May 22, Joe Bryant, secretary for the North Carolina Knights, showed up seeking membership in

23 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, North Carolina SBI Investigation Record of C. J. Plummer and his organization “The Black Shirts,” Agent R. H. Garland, February 6, 1959.


25 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, North Carolina SBI Investigation Record of C. J. Plummer and his organization “The Black Shirts,” Agent R. H. Garland, February 6, 1959.
the U.S. Klans. Finding this suspicious, Miller and the Jamestown Klavern voted against Bryant’s membership, citing Bryant’s “prior troubles” with North Carolina Knights.26

At the U.S. Klans rally on Saturday, May 24, 1958, Miller and his men were vigilant. Just before Miller took the stage, Knights George Dorsett and Clyde Webster entered the crowd. Taking pictures of the rally, Dorsett and Webster were soon beset by Miller’s security committee. Dorsett and Webster backed off, but were allowed to remain on the periphery, where the two Knights ended up speaking with an undercover North Carolina SBI agent. They bragged to the undercover agent that they had “BB compressed air pistols in their cars[,] and were planning to use them had they had the opportunity.” They also explained to the agent that Cole was supposed to have met them there, but canceled in order to plan “a series of Evangelical meetings for the summer.” Asking the informant if he was a member of the U.S. Klans, the informant responded that “he was at the rally just looking around.”27

Dorsett’s shenanigans at U.S. Klans klonklaves and rallies paid off. At a Jamestown klonklave in June 1958 U.S. Klansmen addressed diminishing membership. They blamed the continuing influence of Cole on the North Carolina Knights. The U.S. Klans, like the Knights, were fractured. Ikie Brown, Dub Brown’s brother, left the U.S. Klans for the Knights. Dub Brown maintained his allegiance to the U.S. Klans, vowing “to do everything possible to prevent Cole from holding anymore meetings in North

26 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, May 25, 1958.

27 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, May 25, 1958.
Grand Dragon Thurman Miller valued Dub Brown’s leadership and worried the loss of his brother might bring out his more violent tendencies. Seeking to resolve their issues with Cole, Brown and Miller took out an injunction with the State of North Carolina against Cole and the Knights designed to prevent them from slandering the U.S. Klans.

First, Brown and Miller chose a High Point, North Carolina lawyer named Morgan. Morgan, upon learning Brown and Miller were Klansmen, quickly dropped them “due to having a large number of Jewish clients.” Brown and Miller then found Ed Austin, a lawyer from Greensboro. Austin agreed to help but “was currently working on the Pearsall Plan,” legislation designed to prevent the integration of North Carolina public schools. Brown and Miller moved on to Bob Cahoon, another lawyer from Greensboro. No information exists of their working relationship with Cahoon, but it appears, as a legal injunction never materialized, lawyers were skeptical of working with known Klansmen regardless of their feelings about integration.


28 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, July 6, 1958.

29 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, June 29, 1958.

30 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, July 6, 1958. Pearsall Plan information found in Cole Papers, 40.6.A, “The Pearsall Plan to Save our Schools.”
Klavern confronted them. Jones invited the Knights to “come out in the road [to] settle the matter” like men. Jones’s challenge silenced the Knights; the Pruitt brothers, Pinkleton, Hudgins, and Lowe were docile for the rest of the rally.31

Paranoia, however, grew in the U.S. Klans of North Carolina. Not only had the North Carolina Knights grown in size, evidence suggests Cole and the Knights had infiltrated the ranks of the U.S. Klans. For example, the SBI thought that T. J. Nichols, a Knight and brother-in-law of Knight Clyde Webster, worked covertly for the Knights within the U.S. Klans.32 By focusing more on Cole and less on recruitment, the U.S. Klans lost ground to the Knights. While it is unlikely Cole was the sole mastermind of this reversal, his presence, whether attending rallies or not, influenced the outcome.

Many left the U.S. Klans, but not always to join the ranks of the Knights. Bob Jones, who challenged the Knights hecklers at the August 2nd rally in Salisbury, left the U.S. Klans by January 1959, and joined Klick Plummer’s Black Shirts. Similar to Jones, other young U.S. Klansmen left “to get out and do some dirty work,” complaining that older U.S. Klansmen were too busy “abiding by the laws [to] keep down any violence.”33 Paradoxically, some U.S. Klans members upset about progressive integration did in fact join or rejoin “James Cole’s group [the Knights] so that they could do something about

31 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, August 10, 1958.
32 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, August 10, 1958.
33 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, September 29, 1958.
the segregation in the schools.” The “war of words” waged between the Klans caused younger U.S. Klansmen to see the Knights as the organization that actually saw “some action.”

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While Dorsett and Webster voiced threats of “BB guns,” other Knights made more dangerous threats. On June 18, 1958, E. W. Luther, a Knight from Siler City, North Carolina, formed a “motorcade of Klansmen” and drove through an African American community in Greensboro threatening African American men with a loaded rifle. The motorcade proceeded to do the same thing in Burlington, leaving the SBI with the impression that the North Carolina Knights had become “the most active and most vicious” Klan in North Carolina.

At the same time, Cole was perceived by authorities as a greater threat. In May 1958, Cole became involved with an attorney from Louisville, Kentucky named Milliard Dee Grubbs, an outspoken advocate of segregation and editor of the white supremacist publication American Eagle. Grubbs’s writings echoed Cole’s hatred for Governor Hodges. In a letter to Representative and Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee Carl Vinson published in American Eagle, Grubbs complained:

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34 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, August 31, 1958.

35 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, August 24, 1958.

36 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, June 29, 1958.

37 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 313, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence, Chief Carl E. Heustis, Louisville, KY Police Department to North Carolina SBI Director Walter F. Anderson, May 5, 1958.
Sir, most of the great events of the world have been brought to pass by the
madness and corruption of political leaders who had thrown away mind
and soul in the vortex of base and criminal ambitions, and used the powers
of government to rob and persecute the people.38

Cole applied Grubbs’s ideology in organizing the Citizen’s National Law Enforcement
Commission (CNLEC) in North and South Carolina. Cole planned to use the CNLEC “to
make a citizen’s arrest of Governor Luther Hodges for the action he and others took
against [Cole] at Lumberton.”39

After developing a relationship with Grubbs, Cole worked in earnest on the
CNLEC with Reverend James Milligan, Sr., Grand Dragon of the Virginia Knights of the
KKK.40 Besides presiding over the funeral of Reverend George Dorsett’s father in June
1958, Cole retreated from his leadership position with the Knights, content to watch from
the sidelines as Dorsett waged his “war” on the U.S. Klans.41 Cole still attended rallies
from time to time. At one Knights rally on August 23, 1958, Cole commended the
Knights’ efforts to increase their influence while he waged his political battles. As Cole
ferociously attacked Governor Hodges, Milligan, dressed in plain clothes, milled through
the crowd talking to Knights and seconding Cole’s speech.42 Soon, however, Cole found
himself in dire financial straits. He came clean to Dorsett in September 1958 admitting
he no longer could provide for his wife and two children. He asked Dorsett and nine

38 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North
Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 313, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, “Copy of the American Eagle,”
Letter from Milliard Dee Grubbs to Chairman Carl Vinson.
39 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Hodges Collection, General Correspondence with North
Carolina State Bureau of Investigation et al, Box 313, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, SBI Intra-Bureau
Correspondence, Director Walter F. Anderson to Hon. Attorney General Malcolm B. Seawell, May 1, 1958.
41 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files
and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau
Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, June 29, 1958.
42 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files
and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau
Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, August 24, 1958.
other Knights to “raise $1,000 to help him pay off a note against his home and car in Marion.” Repulsed by his own need to beg, Cole departed before any Klansmen could answer him.43

Thinking Cole had worked the evangelical circuit while he battled the U.S. Klans, Dorsett and other Knights were surprised to learn what Cole was actually up to. Cole had worked with Milligan the “last 5 to 8 months” recruiting North Carolina Knights to a new business venture, the Milligan Detective Agency.44 In order to become a certified detective, Knights sent Milligan eight dollars for an identification card. At a Knights rally in Greensboro, however, Milligan made the mistake of soliciting an undercover SBI agent. The SBI agent paid Milligan eight dollars and later that week received an identification card listing him as “Detective N.C. 14.” The card registered the Milligan Detective Agency out of Lumberton, North Carolina, but the return address was “Post Office Box 9, Marion, South Carolina” suggesting Cole’s involvement.45

Cole used his “Jesus Christ=James Cole” rally in Graham to distract from the secret “war” he was waging against Governor Hodges.46 While the Knights and the U.S. Klans bickered and fought, Cole, working with Milligan, organized a detective agency and the CNLEC in a two-pronged attack against Hodges.

43 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, September 28, 1958.
44 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, August 24, 1958.
45 SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, September 28, 1958.
46 “Jesus Christ=James Cole” is in reference to “Cole’s Wizardry Pulls No Crowds.” The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), February 24, 1958.
In February 1959 Cole once again made headlines in North Carolina. While working on the CNLEC in Florence, South Carolina, Cole and Milligan were arrested for posing as “private detectives” and “allegedly trailing” unnamed persons. Both were also charged with not having “state-issued” detective licenses. They were convicted, fined one-hundred dollars, and given a twenty day suspended jail sentence. Once again, Cole threatened to appeal his conviction all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, reminding state officials that they had convicted a man who was nothing more than a “victim of public opinion.” It was to no avail. By April 1959, Cole began his eighteen- to twenty-four month sentence at a state prison in Ahoskie, North Carolina for inciting a riot at the Battle of Hayes Pond preventing him from making a citizen’s arrest of Governor Hodges.

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47 “Catfish Cole Jailed Again; For Making Like Private Eyes.” The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), February 3, 1959.
CHAPTER VI

GOD'S TEST FOR A HOLY MAN

James Cole and the North Carolina Knights of the KKK had an extremely complex relationship from 1958 to his imprisonment in 1959. Balancing his evangelical schedule, “organizing” the CNLEC, and his secret detective agency, Cole had little time for the Knights, embroiled in their feud with the U.S. Klans. The Knights eventually prevailed, in part because of Cole’s efforts against E. L. Edwards following the Imperial Wizard’s arrest in Concord.¹

Cole successfully shrugged off embezzlement charges from the Knights in February 1958 only to find himself on his knees before the Knights in September 1958, unable to provide for his wife and children. In the Klan, not being able to provide for one’s family was perhaps the worst sin.² Despite his inability to provide financial stability for his wife and kids, by November, the Knights invited Cole back to be their Grand Wizard.³ In an ironic turn, the Knights—just a week after inviting Cole back—pondered burning a cross in the front yard of a Randolph County man for the exact same

¹ SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, James Cole to Hon. Attorney General Patton, October 27, 1957, October 28, 1957 and Jew Klux Klan: These Are The Questions That Should Be Answered! These are Questions That Demand An Answer! These are Questions that E. L.Edwards Has Refused to Answer! Why ******** Why!. Also see: “Klan Chief’s Hearing Set for November 7.” The Charlotte Observer, October 28, 1957.
² See: MacLean, Behind the Mask of Chivalry, 156. MacLean describes the flogging of a white man by the Athens Klan as punishment for failing to provide for his mother and sister.
³ SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, February 8, 1958, September 28, 1958, and November 1, 1958.
sin: failing to provide for his family.\(^4\) Ten days after that, the Knights wanted to burn a cross in the front yard of an Asheboro man who had accepted employment by an African American in order to support his family.\(^5\)

Despite always coming second to the Knights, Carolyn Cole stood by her husband. Prior to Cole entering state prison in the spring of 1959, Carolyn Cole embarked on a letter writing campaign in an attempt to clear her husband’s name. Cole sent letters entitled “Dear Fellow Patriot” and “The James Cole I Know” to “one hundred of the greatest patriots in the United States.” Cole asked supporters for $1000 to file an appeal with the United States Supreme Court. Like her husband, Carolyn Cole blamed Lumbee Indians for Cole’s prison sentence. Carolyn denounced the “kinky-haired Indians” who crashed a Klan meeting on “leased land.” Further, Carolyn Cole encouraged supporters of her husband to take out their frustrations by crashing NAACP meetings. She described her husband as a freedom fighter, claiming that in his actions at Hayes Pond “he ha[d] more guts than all other Southerners put together […] we need this type of man free to fight for our freedom.”\(^6\)

One of Carolyn’s letters went to North Carolina Attorney General George B. Patton. Patton received copies of “Dear Fellow Patriot” and “The James Cole I Know,” but also a personal introductory note. In “The James Cole I Know,” Carolyn reminded Patton that at Maxton, Cole fought to “preserve the American form of government and

\(^4\) SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, November 1, 1958.

\(^5\) SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence Papers, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, November 10, 1958.

\(^6\) Cole Papers, 40.3.A, Carolyn Cole, “Dear Fellow Patriot.”
our great Constitution FROM THE PRESENT INSIDIOUS UNDETECTED DANGERS OF REDS.” In her type written note, Carolyn Cole insisted that Cole’s trial was a sham and disgraced the American justice system [sic]:

The Rev James Cole as every citizen of north carolina knows did not get a fair trial at lumberton, the Judge hated him and what he believes in, the Jury was composed by Indians who were all his enemies, his trial was only a mockery the public knows it.7

Carolyn Cole’s writing campaign accomplished nothing. However, Cole made us of his time in prison to correspond with Dorsett and many other white supremacists.

Cole prison letter’s reinforced his sense of his own innocence and victimization by the justice system. Also, they reflected his belief that he was on a divine mission to preserve the white race and that he martyred himself for that mission. Prison did not rehabilitate Cole so much as reinforce the powerful persona he crafted when he founded the Knights in the 1950s. The head of the National States’ Rights Party and Imperial Wizard of the Christian Knights of the KKK, J. B. Stoner wrote Cole:

Please be of good cheer. You are being persecuted because of your devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ and your loyalty to America and the great White Race, so you can be happy about your present ordeal and know that you will be rewarded in heaven. Your prison record will always be a mark of honor for you and it will be a record of your martyrdom for the cause of righteousness.8

Stoner’s partner at the National States’ Rights Party, Dr. Edward R. Fields wrote:

I know of no man [who] has done more for his country and fellow man then [sic] you have, only to be hounded and persecuted by those who fear the evils of communism, and hate folks with guts like you have, who

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7 Cole Papers, 40.3.A, Carolyn Cole, “The James Cole I Know,” and SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, Correspondence-Carolyn Cole to Hon. George B. Patton.
expose, and speak freely the true Gospel of Christ against communism and race-mixing. [sic] Bod bless you Reverend.

Reverend George Dorsett of the Knights too stayed in close contact with Cole, writing:

Bro—Cole, Do as Paul did. Take coverage because your suffering today will be a movement for the white race tomorrow. May God give you strength and victory.

In Christ,
Reverend George Dorsett

P.S. Remember God is keeping time on your enemy.

Eventually Cole’s beliefs were tested. Looking to get involved in the prison ministry, Cole tried to reassure Prison Minister Joe B. Mason of his calling. Mason asked Cole, “are you SURE that you are saved (born-again), and are you SURE that you are called to prepare for a prison evangelism ministry?” Asking “one of the South’s leading evangelists” if he was “SURE” he was saved had to hurt. All these seemingly minute annoyances and indignities accumulated and likely became part of a grand delusion of Cole’s, that God was testing his worthiness just as He might test any other holy man.

After being released from prison in 1960, Cole first moved to Portsmouth, Virginia where J. B. Stoner encouraged him to open a church, saying “there are bound to be some areas up there that need a church.” Instead, however, Cole earned a certificate of membership in the American Detective Association and operated in the Hampton

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12 “One of the South’s leading evangelists” is in reference to Cole Papers, 40.3.A, “News release entitled James Cole to Preach in Fairmont.”
Roads area, performing “all types of investigations day and night.” In Portsmouth, Cole also began working as a detective for the Bryant Detective Bureau run by former Knights secretary Joe Bryant out of Charlotte, North Carolina. Cole’s vague duties in Bryant’s organization included “Uphold[ing] Law and Order and Assist[ing] the Police Whenever Possible.”

Cole left Portsmouth in 1961, and returned to his birthplace of Kinston, North Carolina. In Kinston, he served as President of the Helping Hands C.B. Radio Club and opened up the James W. Cole Printing Company. One advertisement for his company read:

Let A Truly Great Patriot Do Your Printing For You. Don’t Take A Chance...Let A Man That Has Spent Over Half Of His Life Fighting To Help Save America Do It.

Most of Cole’s printing work was white supremacist propaganda printed for Cole’s right-wing group the Committee for Better Government. One of the posters, topped by the *Don’t Tread on Me* symbol, read:

Kinston Pastor Tells Husband He Told Church Member To Quit Husband.
My God, My God!!!! “Ministers” Suggest Broken Homes, What Is Our Great Country Coming To?

In Kinston, Cole also became President of the States Rights League. At a public speaking event in Hamlet, North Carolina, Cole wowed the sympathetic audience with his sermon titled “Segregation or Mongrelization?”

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Ultimately, however, Cole returned to Kinston to reorganize the North Carolina Knights of the KKK, who had been absorbed by former Black Shirt Bob Jones’s United Klans of America (UKA). Friends told Cole “he was crazy to move back to North Carolina after the sorrows” caused by politicians in the Old North State, but Cole explained that preserving white supremacy was a fight, and “if you must fight, you fight better in your own back yard.”¹⁹

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Cole’s reorganization of the North Carolina Knights was hindered by former U.S. Klansmen, Black Shirt, and awning salesman, J. Robert “Bob” Jones. In the early 1960s, Bob Jones began working with Tuscaloosa, Alabama-based United Klans of America (UKA) Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton and reestablished the fractured Klans of the Tar Heel State. Appointed Grand Dragon of the North Carolina UKA by Shelton, Jones launched major recruiting drives in 1963 while Cole was running his printing company in Kinston. Jones reformed the image of the North Carolina UKA, explaining to new recruits that the fight was for white preservation rather than white supremacy.²⁰ By 1964, however, Jones had sharpened his white preservationist rhetoric, explaining:

The white race is the minority in the earth, estimated to be only 1/6th of the world population. There is no unified direction for the defense of this minority, except the ethnic and religious bonds which hold them together. Other races have overwhelming numerical advantage[s], in addition to the fact they have organized pressure groups operating world-wide to promote

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¹⁸ Cole Papers, 40.3.E, “Patriots League Handbill—Public Speaking at City Hall featuring James Cole, President of the States Rights League.”
²⁰ SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Sanford Collection, General Correspondence, North Carolina State Highway Patrol Reports, Box 348, Folder: Segregation-WII, Col. David T. Lambert, NCSHP to Governor Terry Sanford, August 26, 1963.
their goals. [...] It is imperative that white Christians unify to repel determined efforts of the non-white majority to extinguish our race.21

Jones succeeded in convincing many white working-class North Carolinians that the Civil Rights Movement in North Carolina was not about obtaining basic rights for African Americans, but rather taking away the rights of whites. Jones’s UKA became the vehicle of frustrated white working-class North Carolinians. Sociologist David Cunningham contends Jones achieved this by holding “carnival-like” rallies complete with music, vendors, and numerous speakers.22 Jones also organized a UKA booth at the North Carolina State Fair in Raleigh that sold everything from “Klan [music] records” to Klan bumper stickers. Lastly, Jones even allowed WSOC-TV from Charlotte to film a large rally off Old Beatty Ford Road in Rowan County to air on the nightly news.23 By September 1964, Jones’s UKA boasted “3,000 dues-paying members, 40 klaverns, and tens of thousands attending rallies.”24 By 1966, the UKA was operating in thirty-nine states, but UKA members referred to North Carolina as Klansville, U.S.A. due to Grand Dragon Jones’s successes.25 Jones had an advantage Cole did not have in the 1950s: a healthy backdrop of widespread Civil Rights activism that stemmed from sit-ins in Greensboro to protests in Chapel Hill to marches all over Eastern North Carolina.

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21 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Sanford Collection, General Correspondence, North Carolina State Highway Patrol Reports, Box 420, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, 1964. United Klans of America Recruitment Letter signed by Grand Dragon James R. Jones.
22 Cunningham, Klansville, U.S.A., 45-47.
23 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Dan K. Moore Collection, 1965-1969 [hereafter Moore Collection], General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent W. F. Crocker to Director Walter F. Anderson, October 12, 1966 and Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, April 4, 1966.
25 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent William O’Daniel to Director Walter F. Anderson, March 14, 1966.
Jones also took advantage of the former North Carolina Knights’ experiences in organizing the Klan. Jones befriended Reverend George Dorsett, Cole’s longtime Kludd. Jones appointed Dorsett Grand Titan of the 6th Province of the Greensboro klavern. Not only did Dorsett find a friend in Jones, he also found one in Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton. Shelton appointed Dorsett Imperial Kludd, making him the national chaplain of the UKA. Jones and Shelton both featured Dorsett as a speaker at UKA rallies. Like Cole, Dorsett displayed oratorical expertise discussing Communist infiltration in United States’ government, schools, and churches at rallies. Joe Bryant, former secretary for the North Carolina Knights, eventually became Grand Klaiiff, or Vice President of the North Carolina UKA. Bryant spoke at UKA rallies and served as Jones’s gun connection, obtaining everything from Eagle Mark 2 .30 caliber rifles to blow guns that Klansmen hid in the sleeves of their robes. Bryant also ran the UKA radio station from UKA headquarters at Jones’s home in Granite Quarry, North Carolina. Bryant interspersed country music with the UKA’s message of white preservation. He also endorsed political candidates including Alabama Governor and Presidential candidate George Wallace. Lastly, Jones made former Knight Clyde Webster Grand Titan of the

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26 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, October 3, 1966.
27 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent William O’Daniel to Director Walter F. Anderson, March 14, 1966.
28 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, March 1, 1966.
29 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent F. E. Epps to Director Walter F. Anderson, October 7, 1966.
Province of the Greensboro *klavern.* James Garland Martin assisted Webster serving as *Kleagle,* in charge of recruiting for the 5th province.  

Jones further separated himself from Cole, working to make the UKA more inclusive. For example, Jones allowed former Black Shirt President Klick Plummer into the UKA even though he had been banished from E. L. Edwards's U.S. Klans and Cole's North Carolina Knights for violent behavior. Jones also allowed his wife, Sybil, to lead the Ladies Auxiliary Unit of the UKA. Sybil Jones was often a featured speaker at UKA rallies. Her topics ranged from the "correct way to raise children [by] respect[ing] their individual rights" to why "teenagers should take a stand against Communists to protect their rights." Sybil became so popular on the UKA speaking circuit that she eventually ran for Clerk of the Rowan County Superior Court.

Jones's Klan, however, was flawed like Cole's Knights. Problems with the UKA derived from Jones's belief that violence was an inextricable tenet of the UKA's philosophy. Violence was not only necessary to protect against the imagined threat to white feminine virtue, it was crucial to white preservation as well.

Jones was also greedy. As money poured into the UKA, Jones, like Cole, became suspected of embezzlement. With all of these factors threatening cohesion of the Klan in

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31 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, March 1, 1966 and Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, October 3, 1966.
32 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, March 1, 1966.
33 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent William O' Daniel to Director Walter F. Anderson, March 7, 1966 and March 14, 1966.
North Carolina, James "Catfish" Cole was determined to reorganize the North Carolina Knights.

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The violent reputation of Jones's UKA grew throughout 1964 and 1965. In June 1964 in Elm City, a group of black and white teenage Presbyterian missionaries gathered to restore an old African American church in town. The Elm City *klavern* showed up and "threaten[ed] the lives" of the young missionaries. By July 9, 1964 tensions in Elm City had not improved. Joining the Elm City *klavern*, Grand Dragon Jones arrived with close to forty gallons of paint. Concerned the UKA was there to damage the church, a Wilson County Deputy Sheriff joined Captain S. H. Mitchell of the North Carolina SHP to intervene. Jones explained to the officers that the UKA was there to paint the church. Jones and the Elm City UKA were turned away as the pastor of church explained to Captain Mitchell that he "didn't want white trash on the church property and didn't want the church painted by them." Unfortunately, this was not the end of the dispute. Just a day later, Elmo L. Henderson, an African American minister from Charlotte brought a group of white and black ministers and women to paint the church. Jones again threatened the volunteer group saying "someone would be killed trying [to paint the church] and that [the] people of North Carolina were not going to tolerate Whites and Negroes working side by side." Henderson explained to the press covering the story that

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35 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Sanford Collection, General Correspondence, Box 450, Folder: Segregation A-F, 1964. William M. Alexander of Laurinburg, North Carolina to Governor Terry Sanford, June 24, 1964.

“if they [the Klan] are going to kill, freedom of religion in America is worth dying for.”

Three nights later, Ronnie W. Howell and Kenneth Wayne Owens were arrested by Elm City police when they noticed Howell and Owens snooping around the building around 2:00 a.m. The officers found the church steps doused in gasoline.

Jones’s UKA continued its reign of terror throughout August 1964. At a rally near Salisbury on August 8, 1964, Jones gave an impassioned speech to a crowd of 2,000 at a farm in Rowan County. He explained that Governor Terry Sanford destroyed opportunities for white working-class North Carolinians by advocating “equality of all races” through his enforcement of committees such as the biracial North Carolina Good Neighbor Council. Shortly after the rally ended, Mount Zion Lutheran Church erupted in flames. Rowan County firefighters were called to the scene and subsequently put out the fire. Firefighters at the scene reported to the North Carolina SHP that the fire started with a newspaper soaked in kerosene that was placed in a small jar and thrown into the church. Investigators suspected, but could not tie the fire to Jones and the UKA.

Four days after the rally in Rowan County, Governor Terry Sanford awoke to find a cross smoldering on the front lawn of the Governor’s Mansion in Raleigh. North Carolina SBI agents focused their investigation on two Grand Titans connected to Jones and the UKA, former Knights Bob Hudgins of Wake County and Clyde Webster of

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39 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Sanford Collection, General Correspondence, North Carolina State Highway Patrol Reports, Box 420, Folder: Ku Klux Klan. North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles: State Highway Patrol Report, Col. David T. Lambert to Governor Terry Sanford, August 10, 1964.
Greensboro, based on an anonymous tip sent to the Governor’s office.41 Recovered from the cross was a burlap bag investigators believed to be coated in kerosene similar to those used by the UKA.42 When questioned, Webster and Hudgins admitted to past membership in Cole’s North Carolina Knights, but denied all ties to Jones’s UKA.

Hudgins explained to the officers that “five years ago he began having a family and that [had he continued with the Knights] he would be unable to take care of his family.” Conveniently, both men could not remember what they had been doing the night of the cross burning.43

Governor Dan K. Moore took office in January 1965. Within two weeks of Moore’s inauguration, Jones’s UKA was back in the news. In New Bern, North Carolina, cousins Edward and Laurie “Buddie” Fillingame had enjoyed a night out at New Bern’s Tip Top Restaurant with fellow Klansmen Raymond Mills. Mills explained to the cousins that he procured dynamite and desired to use it on an NAACP meeting at St. Peter’s AME Zion Church. The group piled into Mill’s automobile and drove to the church. The Fillingames’ took Mills’ dynamite and threw it under two cars parked outside the church; both cars exploded, but no one was hurt. As police investigated the incident, a third explosion rang out in the distance. Just a few miles down the road, the group had tossed more sticks of dynamite into Oscar’s Mortuary, an African American

funeral home in New Bern.\footnote{\textit{SANC} (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 73, Folder: Segregation, Federal Bureau of Investigation Report, Agents John W. Worsham, G. Dargan Frierson, and James M. Underhill, February 9, 1965, 94-99 and North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles: State Highway Patrol Reports, Col. David T. Lambert to Governor Dan K. Moore, January 25, 1965.} Federal and state officials tried to link Jones to the bombing, but Buddie Fillingame claimed that the entire scheme was hatched by Mills. Jones spoke out against the bombing, giving the typical "Klan does not approve of any type of violence" speech to the press but scolded the FBI, saying they had no right to "seize the New Bern Klan charter" and maintaining that Mills was innocent.\footnote{\textit{SANC} (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 73, Folder: Segregation, Federal Bureau of Investigation Report, Agents John W. Worsham, G. Dargan Frierson, and James M. Underhill, February 9, 1965, 99.}

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While law enforcement agencies could not connect Jones directly to the UKA’s terrorist activities, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) launched an investigation into Jones’s and Shelton’s finances. By October 1965, Jones, Shelton, and several other North Carolina Klansmen were subpoenaed to testify before HUAC. Investigators accused Jones and Shelton of producing "fraudulent accounts and destroy[ing] [UKA] financial records."\footnote{\textit{"Ku Klux Chieftain Complains." The Daily Times-News} (Burlington, NC), February 2, 1965. "Klan's Grand Dragon Scorns New Bern Arrests." \textit{The Robesonian} (Lumberton, NC) February 2, 1965. \textit{\"Harry Kelly, "Shelton Refuses To Tell Probers Anything Of Klan." The Daily Times-News} (Burlington, NC), October 20, 1965.} On October 19, 1965, Robert Shelton testified before HUAC but refused to supply any information on Klan finances, repeating:

I respectfully decline to answer that question for the reason that I honestly believe my answer might tend to incriminate me in violation of my rights guaranteed to me by Amendments 5, 1, 4, and 14 of the Constitution of the United States of America.\footnote{George Dixon, "Bookkeeping and the Klan." \textit{The Washington Post}, November 15, 1965.}
Jones took the stand the following day and pled the Fifth Amendment to each question asked by the committee. Jones was questioned on everything from the cost and resale value of material for UKA robes, to his prized Cadillac, and his possible involvement in the New Bern bombing. In front of HUAC, Klansmen saw their once larger-than-life Grand Dragon rattled for the first time. When not pleading the fifth, Jones followed Shelton’s lead saying, “I honestly believe the answer might be incriminating.”

The fallout from the HUAC hearings was detrimental to Jones and his UKA. Greensboro klavern Klabe Joseph Dubois became so disgusted by Jones and Shelton that he refused to plead the Fifth, explaining to the committee that “any vows [I] took for the Klan are secondary to my love for the nation.” Wilmington gun dealer and Klansman Richard J. Constantineau followed suit. Constantineau explained to HUAC that since he joined the UKA he had supplied members with everything from automatic weapons to tear gas. Lead HUAC investigator Donald T. Appell concluded that the UKA’s defense fund was mismanaged. Appell directed his interrogation at Jones’s first Grand Klaiff Grady B. Mars. As Jones’s number two, Mars had handled the defense fund. Appell showed Mars a series of canceled checks that were supposed to have gone to accused New Bern bomber Raymond Mills. Appell explained that instead of paying Mills’ lawyers, Mars withdrew the money and kept it for himself. Mars pled the Fifth,

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but on December 11, 1965, his wife found him dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.\(^{52}\)

While Jones dealt with the HUAC investigation and subsequent fallout, a familiar face reemerged among Klansmen in Eastern North Carolina’s Pitt County. One month before the HUAC hearings, James “Catfish” Cole announced his comeback to the Klan circuit. Cole had no desire to join Jones’s UKA, seeking only to reestablish the North Carolina Knights. Though most likely fabricated, Cole announced that in September 1965, North Carolina Knights from Charlotte, Hamlet, Winston-Salem, Raleigh, and Greenville descended on Kinston, North Carolina to elect Cole Grand Wizard once again.

Handbills advertising the Knights began popping up again in Greenville, North Carolina reading:


As before, Cole was attracting all ages to his rallies. An eight-year old Greenville resident wrote to Cole saying [sic]:

I saw your boy [Cole’s nine-year old son] at the rally with a Klan suit on just like yours.  And I want one of them and I want a size 10 and will you send it?  Write a letter telling me how much is it and I is 8 years old […] I was born with a Klansman and am going to die with a Klansman.\(^{54}\)


\(^{53}\) Cole Papers, 40.2.C, Knights of the KKK Handbill entitled, “Communist Plan Invasion Of Pitt County.”

\(^{54}\) Cole Papers, 40.1.C, Letter to James Cole from an eight-year old Greenville, North Carolina resident, May 9, 1966. The name is withheld for anonymity.
Cole recognized the violent tendencies of Jones’s UKA and matched it through speech not action. Cole crafted an image of himself as a freedom fighter looking to achieve Jones’s white preservation by any means necessary:

I am going to Mississippi for the purpose of making sure that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. never reaches his destination—I have seen too many people “bungle” the job of killing King—I am sure that I will not “bungle” it—I will kill him myself if no one beats me to it. I have seen that nigger run up and down this country ruining our way of life [sic] to long. I can and will put a stop to him. Yes, I will die happy, knowing that I have put a stop to that nigger—I hope that I can get several of them—But I know I will get Dr. Martin Luther, King, Jr. I will leave Kinston this weekend—I will go alone—I don’t need any help for this little job. The trip will be financed by friends and supporters of James “Catfish” Cole.

Cole’s aim was to inspire his former Knights and lure recruits away from Jones’s UKA. His timing was impeccable. As Jones faltered, Cole moved to make his comeback.

Following Jones’s HUAC debacle, cartoons surfaced among UKA members depicting Jones sitting atop the State of North Carolina surrounded by women and piles of money. In the bottom corner of the cartoon, a catfish was drawn jumping out of an ink pen and jar.

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In March 1966, Jones decided it was time to bring the UKA to Robeson County. Jones planned to hold a rally at Hayes Pond in Maxton, the site of Cole and the Knights defeat by the Lumbees seven years prior. Based on the history of the Klan in Robeson County, the move did not make logistical sense. Rather, it was an emotional reaction to

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56 *Cole Papers*, 40.3.A, Printed drawing of Jones surrounded by money and women sitting on top of North Carolina. Also see: Cunningham, *Klansville, U.S.A.*, 198. Cunningham explains that FBI agents created these depictions of Jones, and mailed it to him and other UKA officials. He also explains that FBI agents passed the depictions off as the work of Cole and Virginia Grand Dragon Bob Kornegay.
Cole's reappearance. Despite resenting Cole for the breakup of the U.S Klans in the late 1950s, Jones planned to feature Cole as the main speaker at the rally. Perhaps by inviting Cole back to Maxton, Jones hoped to humiliate Cole again in the location of his prior undoing. Jones likely believed that if the rally proved successful, it would give Lumbees as well as *The Robesonian* a second go at Cole. Knowing the camaraderie of Cole and Reverend George Dorsett, Jones sent Dorsett on a three-month recruiting trip in Florida. Having removed Dorsett, Jones threatened *klaverns* during visits, stating that if they were “giving out information on [his] Klan they would be given the machete treatment.”

Jones scheduled the Maxton rally for March 27, 1966. Just like Cole’s earlier rally in Maxton in January 1958, the UKA preceded the rally with a series of intimidation tactics in Robeson County. On March 16, 1966, a seven-foot cross was burned at the all-Lumbee Baptist Church in Pembroke. Sheriff Malcolm McLeod contacted SBI Agent William O’Daniel and explained his concerns about the upcoming rally. McLeod photocopied three threatening notes left anonymously to local Lumbees. One read [sic]:

Next time we hope to hit some of you damn Indians. We hate you red faced niggers. We’ll get to you all yet in Lumberton & Pembroke. No one can stop the mighty KKK anymore—we have police on our side[.]

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57 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, March 1, 1966.

58 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, January 5, 1966.

F.B.I. [.] prison guards[,] big businesses so we’ll be able to scalp you red faces yet. The way we want.

[Signed] Proud “KKK” Member 60

Jones underestimated the power of Robeson County law enforcement. Robeson County Solicitor John B. Regan wired Jones, telling him that the Lumbees were once again ready for war with the Klan, Regan explained that the Maxton rally would result “in violence, assault, injuries, death, and needless destruction of property.” Jones, however, ignored Regan. Regan sought out former Robeson County Solicitor and North Carolina Attorney General Malcolm B. Seawell, and together they wrote a petition, got three-hundred signatures, and were granted an injunction from Robeson County Superior Court Judge W. A. Johnson barring the UKA from Robeson County. Governor Dan K. Moore cheered the decision and assured Regan and Seawell that he would “assist [them] in procuring law and order as well.” 61

Jones’s plan to lure Cole back to the site of his downfall backfired. Jones tried to keep his composure, assuring Sam Dial, an associate publisher for the weekly newspaper The Lumbee, that “it did not matter if there was violence, trouble, bloodshed, or even loss of life[,] that the rally scheduled for Sunday the 27th of March would go on.” 62 A week later, Jones told reporters in Raleigh that the rally was about recruiting Lumbees, not intimidating them, saying, “We want to ally with the Indian and see he gets some civil rights from the government. The Indians have never had an ally and if we’re going to

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60 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent William O’Daniel to Director Walter F. Anderson, March 14, 1966.


62 “Grand Dragon Vows Rally Will Be Held Regardless Of Possible Consequences.” The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), March 17, 1966.
give civil rights to the niggers, we’re going to give them to the Indians.” No evidence points definitively to what Cole felt about the opportunity to return to Maxton. It is very likely, however, he was not keen to return. An editorial in the High Point Enterprise perhaps best represents what Cole might have felt about returning to Robeson County:

Some hate-blinded foolish ones would have turned up [at the March 27th UKA rally in Maxton], no doubt, but those who experienced the humiliation of seven years ago when outraged Lumbee Indians routed the Klan unceremoniously wouldn’t have gone within miles of the place where another collision was shaping.

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Upon his return from Florida, Reverend George Dorsett sought out Catfish Cole. On June 16, 1966, Dorsett attended a UKA State Security Guard meeting led by Grand Klaiff Joe Bryant in place of Jones. Back in 1958, Bryant proved he was not one to question authority by hiding the Knights financial records to protect Cole. In 1966, Bryant proved once again to be a pawn of the leadership. Jones was trying to get the UKA Security Guard, a group of 150 men, to purchase a new patch for their uniforms. The UKA Security Guard refused to purchase the patch as they claimed it was voted down at their previous meeting. Bryant, trying to be authoritative, told the UKA Security Guard that it was Grand Dragon Jones’s wish that they not only purchase but also wear the patch. Led by Harold Perry, a Major in the UKA Security Guard, thirty members of the Security Guard walked out on Bryant, seeing the patch as merely another ploy to line Jones’s pockets. Grand Titan Bob Hudgins joked with Bryant and others that those who

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64 “Robeson Klan Rally Off As Desperation Served.” High Point Enterprise, March 18, 1966.
walked out were “not being men.” Dorsett, perturbed at Hudgins and Bryant, told Hudgins that “he was going to walk out and that he was a man.”

Clyde Webster followed Dorsett out. Outside, Dorsett and the UKA Security Guard complained about the totalitarian nature of Jones’s UKA. After finally convincing Dorsett to return to the meeting, Webster helped Dorsett calm down Perry, and Bryant reconvened the meeting. Bryant told the UKA Security Guard “that the ones that wanted to buy the patches could buy them and the ones that did not want the patches did not have to buy them.” Dorsett, satisfied, informed the UKA that he, Webster, and Hudgins had contacted James “Catfish” Cole, and that Cole was contemplating joining the UKA. The deal would make Cole a member of the UKA, and provide the James W. Cole Printing Company all the UKA’s business. While on the surface the deal seemed reasonable, there were hidden ramifications. Bringing Cole into the UKA was the first step towards removing Jones from power. Cole told Dorsett, however, that he “was taking the matter [joining the UKA] under advisement at the time.”

Dorsett thus set out to gain support in overthrowing Jones. On July 18, 1966, Dorsett and other national and state UKA officials met with Jones and Shelton to discuss the UKA’s finances. Shelton explained that Jones was drawing a salary of around $10,500 a year as Grand Dragon, a state position, with additional bonuses totaling

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65 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, June 16, 1966.
66 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, June 16, 1966.
67 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Director Walter F. Anderson to Governor Dan K. Moore, July 1, 1966.
$4,600. Dorsett, as a national and state officer, was earning only $4,480 annually with no bonuses. Dorsett’s suspicions turned towards Sybil Jones, who ran the state office from Jones’s home. Sybil’s salary, however, was not discussed.68 Throughout the rest of 1966, Dorsett and others began demanding Jones remove Sybil from the state office. Jones’s inaction led to klaverns disbanding throughout North Carolina, either going over to Cole’s Knights or forming “independent groups.”69 Jones meanwhile grew more upset with Dorsett. Jones removed Dorsett from the UKA speaking circuit, replacing him with Howard B. Terry and Reverend Clyde Brown. Dorsett openly criticized Jones in UKA circles for this move. Dorsett suggested that Jones’s manhood should be questioned, since Jones allowed his wife to “worm her way back into the Klan office in Granite Quarry” where Dorsett believed she was embezzling money as well. He informed UKA members that other Titans backed him “to oust Jones as Grand Dragon.” Those Titans included Clyde Webster and Bob Hudgins, both former allies to Cole’s Knights.70

Tensions grew between Dorsett and Jones. Jones appointed Herbert A. Rouse Chief of the UKA Security Guard without any input from state or local leaders in the North Carolina UKA, confirming Dorsett’s position that Jones ran a dictatorial regime. To get back at Jones, Dorsett and Webster merged the 5th and 6th province klaverns in Greensboro together to support Dorsett. Jones was angered and worried by the move, as

68 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Director Walter F. Anderson to Governor Dan K. Moore, July 18, 1966.
69 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, October 30, 1966.
70 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, October 3, 1966.
it meant two of his largest *klaverns* were openly supporting his ouster. By January, tensions grew when Jones awarded Sybil a salary of one-hundred dollars a week to run the state headquarters. Jones’s actions further enraged Dorsett and Dorsett’s “rank and file” supporters. Meanwhile, Jones built a lavish home in Granite Quarry known as the Dragon’s Den.

While Jones was busy maintaining his power and lavish lifestyle, Cole took to the road in eastern North Carolina, using the same crowd-pleasing gimmicks that landed him his Grand Wizardship in the 1950s. To increase the membership of the North Carolina Knights in eastern North Carolina, Cole distributed handbills suggesting that at Knights rallies Cole openly distanced himself from Jones, and admitting that “mistakes have been made [in the Klan], BUT right or wrong this is OUR AMERICA!! God bless America! LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT[!]". At a rally in Greenville, Cole called upon attendees to vote President Lyndon Johnson out of office. As Cole’s popularity grew, former Klansmen forgot about the trivial humiliations of Hayes Pond and prison. In 1967, at a Knights rally, Cole declared his candidacy for Governor of North Carolina. Cole planned to run as the founder of the Confederate Party of North Carolina and informed attendees he was “not running as a Klansman[,] but a North Carolina citizen.” A curious spectator questioned Cole about his new political party and its link to the violent subversive group,

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71 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, October 3, 1966.
73 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, November 27, 1966.
the Confederate Underground. Cole looked at the spectator, smiling, and politely said "no comment."  

Dorsett and Webster noticed their former Grand Wizard was back to his old ways. Assuring Cole their invitation to join the UKA still stood, they were surprised when Cole accepted. Cole was in the right place, and it was the right time. By joining once again with Dorsett and Webster, Cole was sure to replace Grand Dragon Jones. In March 1967, Cole left his wife and two children behind in Kinston and joined Dorsett and Webster in Greensboro to overthrow Grand Dragon Bob Jones.77

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76 Cole Papers, 40.2-A, News Release by James W. Cole, "Last Night at a Klan Rally, Reverend Cole Announces Run for Governor in 1968."
CHAPTER VII

EPILOGUE—RECLAIMING THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

The saga of Cole’s return to the North Carolina Ku Klux Klan has all the drama of a theatrical production; at least an editor of The Daily Times-News of Burlington, North Carolina thought so. In “The Melodrama And The Cast,” The Daily Times-News editor poses a series of questions to readers regarding Cole’s move to Greensboro [sic]:

The drama, however, deepens. Is J. Robert Jones a grand dragon who is about to be dethroned? Is James (Catfish) Cole ready to reclaim the kingdom he had before he went to prison a few years ago? And what will be the role of the Rev. George Dorsett of Greensboro? Is he still to be satisfied with his role of kludd?

In March 1967, the drama had not yet played out. Cole claimed the move to Greensboro was to operate a health club.1 The details of this health club are vague, but the venture appears to be tied somehow to UKA Grand Klaiff and former Knights financial bungler Joe Bryant. Bryant opened a health club in the Charlotte area a year prior to Cole’s move to Greensboro.2 Clyde Webster, speaking on behalf of Cole, informed reporters that Cole was conducting “Klan business in addition to operating a health club” and that he hoped “any differences between Jones and Cole [could] be ironed out.”3

Cole, however, was less optimistic than Webster. Roy Thompson, a reporter for the Winston-Salem Journal, spoke with Cole in April 1967. When questioned about the move to Greensboro, Cole responded that he was “not the kind of man to die from natural

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2 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 149, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent J. N. Minter to Director Walter F. Anderson, March 1, 1966.
causes." Upon relocating, Dorsett and Webster immediately swore Cole into the UKA's Greensboro *klavern*. For Grand Dragon Jones, this was the last straw. Acting with the authority of Imperial Wizard Shelton, Jones banished Cole, Dorsett, and Webster. Afterwards, Dorsett went straight to the press, explaining Cole’s banishment brought “opposition to Jones to a head,” and that “North Carolina Klansmen had followed Robert Jones as far as they’re going to follow him.” Dorsett threatened that unless Imperial Wizard Shelton intervened, he, Cole, and Webster would begin setting up “independent Klan group[s],” as he had been “collecting charters from local Klan units that want[ed] to withdraw from the United Klans [of America].” Jones told reporters there was “no truth” to Dorsett’s comments. Jones insisted that he “wasn’t thrown into this organization [the Klan] and [that he] would not be thrown out.”

Tensions did not dissolve over the next few months. In May, Cole, Dorsett, and Webster led a group of twenty Knights in protest outside a UKA state meeting in Durham where Jones and Shelton were speaking. The UKA Security Guard kept the Knights at bay, but as Jones and Shelton exited, Cole, Dorsett, and Webster assured them they were headed to Lexington to protest another state meeting later that night.

The harassment went both ways. In May, Dorsett traveled to a UKA rally in Richmond, Virginia with the hope of poaching UKA members for the Knights. The plan backfired miserably. The UKA Security Guard surrounded Dorsett’s automobile and

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6 “Top Klansmen Parley As ‘Rebels’ Stand Aside.” *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, NC), May 9, 1967.
pounded it with rocks. Despite tensions between the UKA and the Knights, Cole and Dorsett gained a formidable following. In July, Cole, Dorsett, and Webster led three-hundred Knights in a cross-burning near the home of Reverend Frank Williams, an African American minister in Greensboro who had just moved into a white neighborhood. Speaking from a flatbed truck parked in front of Williams's home, Cole threatened the minister and his family, telling them to leave the neighborhood or end up like the "black-faced dummy" hanged by a noose dangling next to Cole. Just as Klansmen set fire to the cross, the Greensboro Police Department arrived. Cole, Webster, and Dorsett were arrested, and released the following morning on a $300 bond. All three were due to appear in a Greensboro court on July 31, 1967 to face charges.

Cole, however, did not make his court date. On Thursday, July 27, 1967, Cole was en route to a Knights fishing trip with friend Paul LeClair, Cole was involved in an automobile accident. Eleven miles outside of Greensboro, LeClair lost control of their vehicle, which flipped upside down and careened down a steep embankment. Both Cole, riding in the front passenger seat, and LeClair were killed on impact.

The North Carolina SHP ruled the accident a result of LeClair's reckless driving. Reverend George Dorsett disputed this claim. Dorsett believed a nail had been used to separate one of the car's tires from the rim, causing the vehicle to swerve out of control. Dorsett hinted that the UKA could have been behind it, and immediately launched an

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7 SANC (Raleigh), Governors Papers, Moore Collection, General Correspondence, Box 213, Folder: SBI/SHP Reports, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, May 24, 1967. For a more detailed version of this incident, see Cunningham, Klansville, U.S.A., 294.

8 "Catfish Cast in Clink; 300 Klansmen Burn Cross." The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), July 17, 1967.

On August 7, 1967, Dorsett explained to reporters that a nail had indeed been found in the left front tire, confirming his suspicions; however, foul play was officially ruled out as no evidence tied the UKA to Cole’s death. Cole’s estranged wife Carolyn handled his funeral arrangements. In fitting fashion, Cole, who had believed so strongly in his “divine commission,” was laid to rest on a Sunday. Widowed with two children, all Carolyn Cole received was a letter from Second Congressional District Congressman L. H. Fountain expressing his sympathies over her husband’s death.

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The death of James “Catfish” Cole marked the death of the Civil Rights-era Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina. It was revealed later that George Dorsett was acting as an FBI informant throughout most of the 1960s, and with the FBI’s assistance had fractured the UKA further after Cole’s death by starting a new Klan, the Confederate Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. The Confederate Knights, however, folded very quickly. Dorsett had neither the organizational skills nor the charisma of Catfish Cole. Grand Dragon Bob Jones tried to hold the UKA together, but hubris compromised his efforts. After Cole’s death, Jones’s greatest accomplishment was being sworn in as a Rowan County Volunteer Sheriff’s Deputy. Jones’s duties revolved around keeping order at his own rallies. It is ironic, but not surprising, that in the unstable and often contradictory

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11 “Foul Play Ruled Out In Death Of ‘Catfish’.” The Robesonian (Lumberton, NC), August 8, 1967.
climate of law enforcement in the South that Jones, a renegade, terrorist, and subject of
the infamous HUAC hearings, became a sheriff’s deputy. Less than a year after Jones
was deputized, justice finally caught up with Jones. In January 1969, he and Imperial
Wizard Robert Shelton were each sentenced to one year in federal prison for contempt;
they began their terms in March 1969.\(^\text{16}\)

Once Jones was in federal prison, former Grand *Klaiff* and Cole ally, Joe Bryant,
became Grand Dragon of the UKA. Bryant continued the tradition of infighting, feuding
this time with interim Imperial Wizard Melvin Sexton. Bryant accused Sexton of
embezzling funds from the UKA National Office in Tuscaloosa and acting as a “dictator”
in Shelton’s absence. To denounce all ties with the UKA, Bryant held a “card-burning”
ceremony in Concord, North Carolina. Klansmen stapled their UKA membership cards
to a sixteen-foot cross, and Bryant set the cross ablaze. The majority of the Klansmen
present showed up in three-piece suits. Tom Morris, a Klansman from Concord, told
reporters “[we] always wear a suit when [we] go to a funeral, and the United Klans of
America is dead.”\(^\text{17}\)

While Bob Jones is perhaps the most infamous North Carolina Klansman, Jones
could have never achieved what he did without Cole. Cole began his quest for power
with evangelism. As Cole’s success grew on the evangelical circuit, he branched out.
Like many working-class white men of his time, Cole saw civil rights for African

\(^{16}\) “Klan Leaders Get Ready For Jail.” *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, NC), January 22, 1969. “Klan

\(^{17}\) Howard Covington, “N. Carolina Klan Splits Over Funds.” *The Washington Post*, September 10,
“Klan In Trouble in North Carolina: Group Is Split and Bankrupt.” *The New York Times*, September 17,
1969.
Americans as a threat to his manhood. Cole’s perception of himself as both an evangelist and a Klansmen influenced all of his decisions. Had Cole not felt he held a “divine commission” to uphold white supremacy, he may have quit the Klan after Robert F. Williams and the NAACP ran the Knights out of Monroe. The same could be said of his experience after the Battle of Hayes Pond and finally, Cole’s attempted coup d’état of Jones. Cole, however, always fought back. His failings, rather than injuries upon his identity, were opportunities for Cole to actively reassert his manhood.

This dialogue between Cole’s emasculating failures and his reassertions of dominance reveals many internal contradictions. Klansmen, Cole claimed, defended white womanhood. At Hayes Pond, however, Cole left his wife Carolyn in their parked car to be rescued by the same Lumbee Indians who chased him out of town.¹⁸ Nine years later, Cole again left his wife to chase his dream of reclaiming the North Carolina KKK.¹⁹ White working-class male identity was often stuck in a fantasy world of defending white womanhood and national freedom from imagined black defilement and Communist incursion. In reality, Cole and other Klansmen were not only degrading the freedoms of white women and the tenets of American liberty, but embarrassing white Southern men everywhere. It is difficult to ponder the direction the Civil Rights Movement would have taken in North Carolina had Cole and his followers actually achieved a political base; had the country been, so to speak, forced to take seriously the views of Cole and the North Carolina Klans, both the Knights and the UKA. In the end, infighting, lust for power, and greed left the Klans of postwar North Carolina fractured and insignificant; Cole, by

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¹⁸ SANC (Raleigh), Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 1958, Closed Case Files and Correspondence, Box 9, Folder: Ku Klux Klan, SBI Intra-Bureau Correspondence, Agent L. E. Allen to Director Walter F. Anderson, January 27, 1958.

his own actions, became little more than a distant memory buried in the history of Civil Rights-era North Carolina.
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