A BRIEF STUDY OF THREE SUBVERSIVE ORGANIZATIONS
IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA, 1915-1946

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

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ATLANTA, GEORGIA
JUNE 1969

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Following periods of strain and stress or national crisis, one usually finds a climate that is most favorable and receptive to the growth of hate organizations. As a result of social change and events such as World War I, the Great Depression and World War II, the entire nation witnessed the appearance and relative success of a number of hate organizations.

Following World War I, Mecklin, in a socio-psychological study of the Ku Klux Klan, wrote:

The Klan belongs to that crop of patriotic organizations that sprang up during and after the war and have for their general object the preservation of that measure of like-mindedness which was felt to be absolutely necessary not only for the prosecution of the immediate task of winning the war but also for coping successfully with the welter of problems created by the war. To this extent, the Klan undoubtedly represents the natural reaction of conservative Americans against the perils or revolutionary and un-American ideas. It is a militant attempt to secure team-work in national life.  

The effects of World War II were described by Brigance as follows:

...War always affects the people at home. ... First, now that the war is over we face the danger of transferring our hatred against the Japanese and Germans to somebody else.

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During the war we built up a gigantic hatred of the enemy.

But the pressure of hate is still there, and we are in danger of transferring it to someone else. Do you ask who?

First, the Negro. Unless we are careful there will be an increase in lynchings in the South and race riots in the North.

Second, the Jew. I know we did not like Hitler's persecution of the Jews, but there are some Americans who hate the Jew.

Third, Catholics and Protestants. These two great religious groups have been living together now for 400 years. They ought to know by this time that they can trust one another. But we had a Ku Klux Klan after the last war, and we can have a new name for this old hate after this war. ... This, then, is the first problem that we face, the danger of transferring our hatred from the Japanese and Germans over to someone else.¹

Referring to the effects of the Great Depression, Garrett said:

...During the economic depression of the 30's, the Klan again became active on a wide scale, especially against trade-union organizers in the South. It also openly threatened Negroes with dire punishment if they exercised their right to vote, and it collaborated with fascist Black Shirt elements and organizations.²

In this study, three of these hate organizations will be discussed: (1) the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan; (2) the American Fascisti Order of Black Shirts (Black Shirts); and (3) the Columbians, Incorporated. A brief history of each organization will be given and the activities, purposes and opposition to each group will be discussed. The discussion of the activities of the organizations will be limited to those taking place in the city of Atlanta.

In Chapter II, the author will discuss the ways in which the


Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (the Klan) used the fears and insecurities of the people of Atlanta to its advantage and an attempt will be made to compare the influence of the Klan before and during, and after the War. It is the belief of the author that the phenomenal growth of the Klan was a direct manifestation of post-World War I conditions throughout the entire nation.

The impact of World War I on the inhabitants of Atlanta had many consequences, one of which was the transferral of hate from the Germans to the Negroes, Catholics and Jews. Although opposition to the Klan was relatively slight, mention will be made of opposing factions.

The conditions that followed the economic depression in the thirties that brought about the necessary conditions to promote the incredible growth of the Black Shirts within a period of ninety days, will be discussed. Instead of treating the exaggerated anti-communist purposes claimed by the Black Shirt organization, the author will deal with the consequences of the Depression, i.e., the phenomenal rise in unemployment. The fear of loss of jobs and the need for jobs was one of the main factors contributing to the appeal of this organization; however, in order to give an impartial view of the purposes and activities of the Black Shirts, the author will discuss not only their organization but those groups and individuals who opposed them.

The Columbians Incorporated, represented another "benevolent" and "patriotic" group of people who found that the post-World War II climate was an appropriate time to form an organization. The ways in which the Columbians tackled the problem of "keeping Negroes in their place" will be discussed in detail; the methods they used to
create racial warfare in order to attempt to achieve power and control in Atlanta, and subsequently in the State of Georgia, the South and the United States, will also be discussed. It will be mentioned that, at the time of the initiation of the Columbians, there was a revival of the Klan's activities, although this reactivation will not be discussed in detail. Evidence of the opposition to the Columbians will be shown.
CHAPTER II

THE KNIGHTS OF THE KU KLUX KLAN

A Brief History

The Klan of Reconstruction days that flourished in the South and was disbanded in 1868 by the Imperial Wizard, Nathan Bedford Forrest, evidently lived on in the minds of many people even after the turn of the century. On at least two occasions when racial tensions were running high in Atlanta, the capital city of Georgia, some individuals expressed the need for a revival of the Klan. During the course of the Atlanta Riot of 1906, the worst in the city's history, Atlanta saw white mobs roaming the streets attacking Negroes indiscriminately. While Negroes were being killed and their property destroyed, one editor of a newspaper called for a revival of the Klan.¹ On another occasion, following the case that involved the murder of a fourteen-year-old white girl (Mary Phagin), allegedly by Leo Frank, a Jewish factory owner, Tom Watson, the editor of the Jeffersonian Magazine, also spoke of the need for a revival of the Klan.²

William J. Simmons, founder of the Knights of the Ku Klux


Klan, familiarly known to Atlantans by the name of "Doc," witnessed the racial animosity produced by these events in the city, but he claimed that his concept of the Klan developed from childhood memories. These memories involved stories told to him by "Aunt Viny," the family Negro servant, who told him about his father's activities in the Reconstruction Klan. Simmons also testified that one day while sitting on a bench he had a mystical or spiritual experience which awakened in him the idea of raising a "salvation" army by reactivating the Klan. This experience occurred in 1901. In 1911, Simmons was involved in an automobile accident and while recuperating from his injuries, he laid out plans to organize a group patterned on the old Klan of Reconstruction days. 

Although Simmons took credit for the formulation of the plans for the revival of the Klan in 1915, other sources indicate that other individuals also claim credit. Edgar Fuller, a former Klansman and author of the book, *The Maelstrom: The Visible of the Invisible Empire*, said that Jonathan Frost presented the idea of the revival of the Klan at a Woodsmen Convention. Frost, one-time head of the Woodsmen of the World and one of the co-founders of the Klan, had the idea of organizing a fraternal order which would be based on the principles of the Reconstruction Klan. Fuller said that Simmons had stolen the idea outright from Frost. 

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The film, The Birth of a Nation, which electrified not only audiences throughout the country but in Atlanta as well, helped lay the psychological foundations for the invisible order of the Klan. When the motion picture opened in Atlanta on December 6, 1915, the film broke all existing attendance records at movie houses in the city (even at the price of $2.00 a ticket). The Birth of a Nation related the story of a vanquished South, rescued from the scalawags, carpetbaggers, drunken Union soldiers and unprincipled freedmen by the glorified Ku Klux Klansmen. Possibly Simmons knew when the film was scheduled to appear in Atlanta for, several months prior to its opening, he sprang into action with his plans for a revival of the Klan.

On Thanksgiving night, 1915, Simmons, one-time preacher, traveling salesman and experienced promoter of fraternal orders, accompanied by thirty-three close friends, went to the top of Stone Mountain and, at midnight, went through the solemn ceremony of resurrection and bringing back into active life the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Two of Simmons' associates on this occasion were bona fide members of the original Reconstruction period Klan. Another source said there were at least three bona fide members.

A few days following the ceremony that marked the beginning of the secret order, an advertisement in the Atlanta Journal announced to the public the revival of the Klan. The advertisements of the KKK and of the showing of The Birth of a Nation were side by side in the

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2Mecklin, op.cit., p.45.
Perhaps Simmons felt that the public might associate the Order with the film, which, of course, would benefit the Klan.

From the initial stages of the Klan, the organization drew many solid middle-class Atlantans into its ranks. Membership was open to native-born white, Protestant males, 16 years of age or older. Included in the organization in its early years was Louis David Wade, a successful executive with the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company, who was secretary of the National Klan. From Atlanta's business community came H. C. Montgomery, a well-known businessman who became the treasurer of the National Klan, and Paul S. Etheridge, an influential man in Fulton County as well as a prominent member of the Atlanta bar; he became the attorney for the Klan. The individuals mentioned above and others were active and influential in the Atlanta community and were considered to be civic leaders.

In 1920, Simmons found two prominent Atlantans to help him with the organization aspect of the Klan, for he was not an effective organizer himself -- he was more an idea man. They were Edward Young Clarke, an intense, nervous, former newsman, and Mrs. Elizabeth (Bessie) Tyler, two publicists and professional fund raisers. Likins believed


4 Lowe, op.cit., p.16.
that it was Clarke who introduced the anti-Jewish features of the Klan and also the anti-Catholic and anti-Negro elements, to which Simmons was bitterly opposed:

The race question, the Negro question, the Jewish question, Catholic question, none of these were ever dreamed of being incorporated into the make-up by Col. Simmons. . . . Had the Ku Klux Klan remained what Colonel Simmons intended it to be when he organized it, the world would have been spared one of the most dangerous organizations that has ever existed since civilization.\(^1\)

Following the public announcement of the Klan's revival by the Atlanta newspapers, there was no apparent period of rapid growth. Possibly, it lacked money to operate at its full potential; possibly, Simmons did not have too much time to devote to the Klan because he was already a member of fifteen other secret organizations. There were also many other organizations of a similar nature already functioning in the community.

It would seem that Simmons was aware of the lucrative fraternal organization insurance field when he organized the Klan. Of the first ninety-two members who joined the order during the first few months, forty-two signed up for a total of $53,000 worth of Klan life insurance.\(^2\)

When the United States entered the war in 1917, Simmons found a purpose for the Klan that could be related to the masses. The Klan took on the job of defending the home front against alien enemies whose actions would endanger victory by the Americans. Even in this role,

\(^1\)W. M. Likins, *The Trail of the Serpent* (Boston: W. M. Likins, 1928), pp.8-10, 73.

which was unique for the times, the Klan did not create any greater appeal to the masses.

On October 16, 1915, thirty-four men signed a petition requesting a charter for a fraternity patterned after the Klan of the post-Civil War period. Both ceremonially and legally, then, 1915 marks the beginning of the secret order. The organization was formally defined as a "patriotic, secret, social, benevolent order under the name and style of Knights of the Ku Klux Klan." The charter was granted to W. J. Simmons, H. D. Shackelford, E. R. Clarkson, J. B. Frost, W. L. Smith, R. C. W. Ramspeck, C. D. Couch, L. M. Johnson, A. G. Dallas, W. E. Floding, W. C. Bennett and J. P. V. Saul on July 1, 1916.¹ An earlier charter had been granted on December 4, 1915, but the Klan was not incorporated until July 1, 1916.

The order spread to the neighboring states of Alabama and Florida, with a few chapters scattered in other parts of the South. By 1920, its total membership was still well under two thousand.² This rather slow growth was due, in part, to the fact that Simmons was more a dreamer than an organizer and partly due to the fact that, for the first five years at least, the raison d'etre of the society was the memorialization of the Reconstruction Klan.

In 1920, the Klan's creed was expanded to exclude (in addition to Negroes) Catholics, Jews, and the foreign-born in the list of un-American elements in the society. But until that time, the secret

¹Records of Superior Court of Fulton County, Georgia. Petition for Charter of the Ku Klux Klan, July, 1916 (hereinafter cited as Petition).

fraternity appealed primarily to those who held romantic notions about the Klan of a former period. As a matter of fact, before 1920, it had been reported that Benjamin H. Sullivan, the leader of the No.1 Klan, often invited Simmons to preside over its meetings. In his customary fashion, Simmons would draw two revolvers, place them on a nearby table and shout to his audience, "Bring on your niggers."¹

In a pamphlet entitled "KKK Yesterday, Today and Forever" Simmons justified the doctrine of white supremacy but made no mention of hatred toward Catholics and Jews. However, Dykeman and Stokely said that:

The Klan of 1915 and later vintage circulated such jingles as:

"I'd rather be a Klansman robed in pure white
Than a Catholic priest black as night,
Loyal to the United States, my home,
Rather than the dago Pope of Rome."²

Until the 1920's began, it could be said that the Klan was a localized, fraternal, numerically weak organization, dedicated to the doctrine of white supremacy, yet not causing too great a stir in the communities in which its chapters were located. According to one observer, the Klan "had less strength in Atlanta than the B'nai B'rith."³

Following World War I, the nation witnessed a period of depression (1920-21); the Red Scare, rural discontent; unemployment, strikes


and riots throughout the country, especially in the Southeast. Americans also experienced a feeling of disillusionment that promoted the beginnings of isolationism.

Although Atlanta did not experience all these particular problems, fear, distrust and suspicion began to grow in the hearts of its citizens. The emotions caused by the war laid the foundations for movements of extreme bigotry and prejudice for, during the war, people had been taught to "hate the enemy." One fear that developed in the hearts of white people in Atlanta was the fear of the "new Negroes," Negroes whom the war had made more aggressive and more independent. The fear and hatred people had previously had for Germans was transferred to Negroes, Jews and Catholics.

No sooner had the doughboys got into action, however, than the war came to a sudden and unexpected close. But the hate survived. . . . Immediately the racial and religious prejudices in our pristine force and hate but recently concentrated on the Kaiser, transferred itself overnight to Bolsheviks, Negroes, Catholics, Jews and foreigners.  

In a speech made by Simmons to the Junior Order of United American Mechanics in Atlanta on April 30, 1922, one can sense his recognition of the effect of the war on Atlanta Negroes:

. . . Men tell me that the Negroes in this State, and I am not now going outside the State of Georgia, are paying their poll taxes for as far back as fourteen years and qualifying to vote. . . . I am informed that every buck nigger in Atlanta who attains the age of twenty-one years has gotten the money to pay his poll tax and register, and that 6,000 of them are now ready to vote, and that these apes are going to line up at the polls, mixed up with white men and white women. Lord forgive me, but that is the most sickening and disgusting sight you ever saw. (Loud Applause.) You've got to change. . . . Keep the Negro and

the other fellow where he belongs. They have got no part in our political or social life. If in one, he will get into the other.\(^1\)

In other words, he put into words what other people were beginning to fear -- Negroes were able to find jobs and, therefore, earn more money; they were showing eagerness to vote (perhaps by paying back poll taxes, as alleged by Simmons); and they were asserting their newfound independence taught to them during the war. The news had reached the country, and Atlanta, that Negroes had associated freely with white people in France, soldiers and civilians, and the thought of Negroes associating with white women (whether they were American women or not) terrified the upholders of white supremacy. Americans and Atlantans were aware that many Negroes now knew how to handle weapons, which was another cause for fear.

On the one hand, President Wilson, in a speech to a group of Negro clergy at the White House, told his visitors that they must expect nothing less than the enjoyment of full citizenship rights, the same rights that are enjoyed by every other citizen.\(^2\) On the other hand, in Atlanta, Jones described a scene in which a mob of white people were trying to lynch a Negro.\(^3\)

Although Negroes in the city represented only one third of

\(^1\)Charles P. Sweeney, "The Great Bigotry Merger," Nation, CXV (July 5, 1922), 9.

\(^2\)Rollin Lynde Hartt, "The New Negro -- When He's Hit, He Hits Back!" Independent, CV (January 15, 1921), 60.

\(^3\)Jones, op.cit., p.126.
Atlanta's total population during the 1920's and there were no major racial disturbances, the white people of Atlanta were becoming more and more fearful that Negroes would demand more political and social rights. The Atlanta Independent, the only Negro-owned newspaper in Atlanta at that time, declared that: "There will be no peace, until all classes and conditions of men shall have equal opportunities in the race for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."¹ Later, however, the Independent stated that: "The 85,000 Negroes do not realize their great strength. Their progress has been due in a large measure to the genius of a few leaders. . .Atlanta Negroes are not organized."²

The National Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) met in Atlanta in the latter part of May and early June, 1920, and although the mayor of the city welcomed this civil rights organization, the white press gave a factual account of the proceedings, which did not help to alleviate the fears of the local whites. They began to see a need for an organization to uphold white supremacy and automatically turned to the Klan, which began to witness a period of rapid growth following June, 1920.

Atlanta had had no major racial disturbances since 1906, but the white people in the city were afraid that Atlanta would follow Washington, D.C. and other cities in this respect. The Atlanta Planning Commission and the City Council moved in to dispel these fears.

¹Atlanta Independent, October 18, 1919, pp.34-35; George Brown Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1915 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1967), p.156.

²"Our Civic Organizations," Atlanta Independent, December 13, 1923, p.3.
by preparing a comprehensive zoning plan. The Ordinance was enacted by the City Council in 1922 -- the Council, of course, was Klan infected. Atlanta was the first Southern city to adopt a zoning plan, its major objective being to prevent race riots by segregating white residential areas from Negro residential areas. The plan had some opposition from E. C. Kontz, a judge in Fulton County, who said that the Ordinance was "an attempt to maintain segregation of the races."\(^1\)

The fear of Bolshevism throughout the country also affected Atlanta. Simmons, the Imperial Wizard of the Klan, took advantage of the "Red Scare" and tied the fear of Bolshevism to hatred for Negroes and Jews. He said that the Bolsheviks would not be satisfied with imposing their system on Russia only, but would attempt to impose it on America also. He believed that the Bolsheviks were arming and teaching to fight white Americans.\(^2\) He added that the obvious way to defend the country from revolution was to join the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan; this fear of Bolshevism drew more members to the ranks of the organization.

The Atlanta Klan appeared to see the Catholic Church perhaps as the most serious threat facing the country, judging from some of its activities and publications. In 1919, there were rumors of a Catholic plot to unseat Congress and toss the President into the


The Klan played on the emotions of the defenders of Protestantism and gained even more support.

By 1922, the Atlanta Klavern was at the peak of its influence and power; the *New York World* estimated that its membership was 40,000. It was the largest in the city of Atlanta and although there were other klaverns operating in the area, including one in East Point, most local members belonged to Klan No.1.  

The mayor of the city, Walter S. Simms, the Representative from Fulton County to the Georgia Legislature, J. O. Wood; the U.S. Congressman from the Fifth District, William D. Upshaw; and other important elected officials in the county and city governments were members of the Klan.

The Klan was prospering under Exalted Cyclops Henry J. Norton. With substantial strength in the southeast quadrant of the city, and west of the Georgia Institute of Technology in the northeast, the Atlanta klavern enrolled at least fifteen thousand members by 1923 and boasted of the largest fraternal hall in the city. That the basis of its newer membership was lower middle class may perhaps be inferred from the Searchlight's occasional denunciations of "well organized commercial clubs" and "the autocratic chamber of commerce."  

It should be pointed out that a personal estimate of the total size of the Klan membership in Atlanta during the years 1915 to 1914 given by Jackson was the more conservative figure of 20,000.  

\[1\text{Sweeney, } \text{loc.cit., p.9.}\]

\[2\text{Jackson, } \text{op.cit., p.262.}\]

\[3\text{Ibid., p.37.}\]

\[4\text{Ibid., p.239.}\]
While Simmons and Edward Young Clarke were in control (1920 to 1922), the Atlanta Klavern benefited from their personal connections with the national headquarters. This connection gave prestige and power to the local klavern.

In November, 1922, the National Klanvocation met in Atlanta. At this meeting, new leadership emerged. On the evening prior to the opening of the meeting, a plan was hatched at the Piedmont Hotel by Hiram W. Evans, Fred Savage, H.C. Ramsey, D. C. Stephenson, H. C. McCall and Judge J. C. Comer, none of them Atlantans, to overthrow Simmons and Clarke. One obvious reason for this usurpation of power was that both Simmons and Clarke were constantly involved in serious scandals. Simmons had been picked up by police many times\(^1\) (usually for drunkenness -- he did not go to court; he paid the fines out of court) and Clarke was convicted of violating the Mann and Volstead Acts.\(^2\)

The conspirators presented Simmons with the idea that he should not submit his name for renomination for office of Imperial Wizard, because a segment of the Texas delegation and others were planning to criticize him if he continued in his present position. Pretending to be loyal, Fred Savage, one of the conspirators, promised Simmons that he would kill anyone who criticized the character of the Imperial Wizard on the floor of the National Klanvocation. Although reluctant and supposedly surrounded by friends, Simmons accepted the idea that Dr. Evans should act as Imperial Wizard until the scandals


\(^2\)Ibid., p.107.
blew over. While the plan was accepted as a temporary arrangement, Simmons accepted the higher position of Emperor, which turned out to be permanent though powerless; Evans became Imperial Wizard.

With the new leadership firmly in control, Evans not only turned a cold shoulder toward Simmons but also toward members of the Atlanta Klavern because he felt that it had enjoyed unwarranted privileges because of its close affiliation with the Klan national headquarters. The new Imperial Wizard criticized the Atlanta Klavern members for using the Imperial Palace as a hangout and as a meeting place. Evans' criticism was not very well accepted by the Atlanta members.

Although the Atlanta Klansmen were not particularly happy with the new leadership, there was no widespread disloyalty until Evans terminated the lucrative propagation contract of E. Y. Clarke and broke publicly with Simmons over the issue of a female branch of the Klan (Kamelia)

It is interesting to note that as late as January 6, 1923, Senator Walter George wrote a letter to Simmons, addressing him as if he were still head of the Klan -- Evans answered the letter as the Imperial Wizard. Even more interesting is the fact that the letter was written while the conflict was still going on between the two. In the letter, Senator George wrote:

1Ibid., pp.101-103.

2"Leader of Klansmen..." Atlanta Constitution, April 1, 1923, p.5B.
After the primary in Georgia, I agreed with my friends . . . to come in as a member of a provisional Klan. This I did with full understanding that I might withdraw if for any reason I thought withdrawal wise. Shortly afterwards I did withdraw for reasons in no wise reflecting upon the principles of the Klan. I did not and do not mean to indicate any disapproval of the essential principles and teachings of the Klan by my withdrawal but I find my course proper and necessary by reason of the situation here. . . . In order to function effectively, I will be called on to say whether or not I am a member of the Klan. . . . I wish you to know my reason for withdrawing and also wish you to say for me, if I find it necessary at any later time — that I am not a member and have no connection with the organization. If any order by you is necessary, I feel sure you will pass the order.1

In a last ditch effort to regain some of his lost power, Simmons set out to organize a female branch of the Klan. Not only did Simmons claim to be the responsible head of both the Klan and the Kamelia, but he encouraged Klansmen throughout the country to aid him in his efforts. Evans responded by forbidding Klansmen to have anything to do with the Kamelia. Simmons made a statement to the Atlanta press about Evans, which was not at all complementary.2

Among the damaging events, apart from the exposed scandals of the former top Klan officials, Simmons and Clarke, Atlantans witnessed the use of their city as a battleground between the Simmons' and Evans' factions. One of the Atlanta newspapers was informed that over 6,000 Klansmen had arrived in the city in less than 48 hours to

1Letter from Walter F. George to Colonel Simmons, January 6, 1923 (Personal papers of Senator Georgia; Atlanta: State of Georgia Archives).

show support for Simmons.\(^1\) A few days later, another incident occurred. When Evans was in New York, a group of local Klan members, led by Simmons, forcibly took control of the Imperial Palace. During the course of the take-over, two loyal Evans' followers, N. N. Furney and T. J. McKinnon, managed to hide important papers and $107,000 worth of funds belonging to the national Klan.\(^2\)

At the same time, complicated legal battles between members of the Klan were taking place at the Fulton County Court House. The name, property and everything the Klan owned, except the members, were copyrighted and registered in the name of William Joseph Simmons. Simmons claimed to be the legal head of the Klan -- so did Evans; in dispute was the ownership and copyright of the organization. Finally, the suit was settled out of court, Simmons being granted $1,466,000. Later, Simmons claimed he had received only $90,000.\(^3\)

During Evans' legal battle with Simmons and Clarke, Evans, in July, 1923, suspended the charter granted to the Atlanta Klavern, giving his reason for the suspension the fact that the chapter had not paid its Imperial taxes to the national organization.\(^4\) As a last resort, in an effort to stop the dissension in Atlanta, Evans organized other chapters in the Fulton County area. On January 8, 1924, he revoked

\(^1\)"Leader of Klansmen Clash over Relations to Kamelia," ibid., April 1, 1923, p.58.
\(^2\)"Police Seek Klan Agents and $107,000 Funds," ibid.
\(^3\)Gillette and Tillinger, op.cit., pp.49-50.
\(^4\)Jackson, op.cit., p.40.
the charter of the powerful pro-Simmons Atlanta chapter.\(^1\)

These legal battles and other scandals severely damaged the Klan's reputation in Atlanta. In view of this, late in 1925, Evans decided to move the national office to Washington, D.C., in order to be nearer the political center of the country, although in June, 1923, he had said there was no truth in the report that the Klan headquarters would be moved to Washington.\(^2\) Possibly, his later decision was influenced by the increasingly hostile atmosphere he found in Atlanta toward the Klan.

Dr. Evans' absence from the city did not cure the problems of the Atlanta Klan. Seven out of the nine chapters of the Klan in Fulton County were in Atlanta,\(^3\) but they did not prosper nor grow, possibly because Atlantans were not sorry to see the Invisible Empire leave the city. Even with the threat of a possible Catholic President (Al Smith) in 1928, many Atlanta Klansmen refused to follow Evans' instructions, which were to not support Smith. As a result of their refusal to obey orders, many Klansmen were banished and others sent in their resignations.\(^4\)

In 1929, due to the membership of the Klan decreasing

\(^1\)Ibid.
\(^2\)"Evans and Simmons Vary on Charges in Klan Injunction," Atlanta Constitution, June 1, 1923, p.1.
\(^4\)Chalmers, op.cit., pp.76-77.
rapidly and the lack of the national headquarters' influence on national policies, Evans moved the national headquarters back to Atlanta. By this time, Simmons was completely powerless, although he still lived in the city in a modest home and spent many hours recounting his experiences to anyone who cared to listen. He wrote his book, *American Menace or the Enemy Within*, and formed other hate organizations, such as the Knights of the Flaming Sword, which floundered for six months as a powerless pseudo Klan, before collapsing, and the White Band.

The return to Atlanta of the national headquarters of the Klan did not prove to be successful. People did not rush to join or re-join it, or even become active members again. In other words, there was no active hate organization in Atlanta around 1929, and this left a vacuum to be filled. About this time, the first effects of the Great Depression were being felt -- people were losing their jobs, there was a threat to white supremacy because of rumored limited communist activity in which whites and Negroes would become equal; and the general fear that Negroes would take advantage of the restlessness of the city to attempt to attain social equality (another threat to white supremacy).

**The Purposes of the Klan**

When a comparison is made of the purposes as expressed by

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the charter of the Klan and the actual actions of the Klan during the 1920's, a great difference between the two is to be found.

According to Mecklin:

... The Klan at first was a purely fraternal and patriotic organization. It may be seriously doubted whether its founders ever intended at first that the Klan should play the role of the reformer, seek to check the spread of the Catholic Church, or pose as the champion of the white race.  

According to Simmons: "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan is a purely patriotic fraternal organization designed to memorialize the Klan of the Reconstruction period and perpetuate the principle for which it stood."  

Up until 1920, there was no indication that Clarke, Tyler and Simmons had conceived the Klan initially as little more than another fraternal organization, with emphasis on white supremacy, at least in the South. As a matter of fact, the petition for the Charter requested the same "rights, powers and privileges as are now extended to the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Free and Accepted Order of Masons, Knights of Pythias, et al., under and by virtue of the laws of the State of Georgia."  

Evidently several leading Masons did not feel that their organization had the same rights as the members of the Klan. Richard E. Hann, who was Deputy to the Supreme Council of Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Freemasonry, made the statement on October 25, 1921,  

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1Mecklin, op.cit., p.39.  
2Ibid.  
3Petition, op.cit.
that:

True Masonry insists on just laws, rigorously enforced and is ready at all times to assist the constituted authorities in that enforcement, but never to violate the Laws in the Enforcement Program. This Ku Klux Klan is to be avoided as one would a pestilence.1

The Masons admitted to having no such rights or privileges that permitted them to break the law or create violence and they objected most vigorously to being compared to the Klan by the Klan.2

Even though many of the high ranking Mason leaders, both national and state, denounced the Klan, many Masons were also Klansmen. As late as 1928, four of seven of the Klan meetings were held in Masonic Halls in Atlanta.3 Evans himself was a 32 degree Mason; Simmons had membership in the Masons and in the Royal Arch Masons.

Although the petitioners for the Charter desired to form a fraternal order, many politicians saw the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan as little more than a political group or party. Several office-holders or candidates for office in Atlanta felt that the Klan had abandoned its fraternal role and had taken on a political one. "The KKK is now primarily a political party and only in a lesser sense a fraternal organization. It ought, therefore, to be recognized as a political party and combated as such."4 Even Imperial Wizard Evans

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stated his reason for moving the national headquarters from Atlanta to Washington was political.

Whether considered a fraternal or political group, the petitioners for the Charter desired the Klan to confer membership on: "only white male persons of sound health, good morals and high character"; but apparently the initial wishes were altered because in August, 1921, Simmons made it possible for women to join the Klan. When Evans' forces organized "Women of the Ku Klux Klan," Simmons contradicted his earlier position and accused Evans of "violation to the original charter which defines that only white males shall be admitted to the order."

The stipulation of "sound health, good morals and high character" of members of the Klan was questioned by L. D. Wade, a former member of the Klan, during a hearing of a suit he filed against the Klan in September, 1922. During the case, Wade said that:

...Clark sic and Mrs. Tyler are using said order for their personal aggrandisement, and being in control of its funds have become suddenly enormously wealthy from ill-gotten gains collected from the ranks of the Klansmen. The said Clark sic has gained complete control over the Chief Executive Officer of the organization, and has either kept him drunk or has taken advantage of his drunken condition. ...
There were no indications in the petition for the Charter that the Klan would act as a champion of Protestantism -- in fact, there was no mention whatsoever of religion in the petition. However, the petition for the Charter did state that the Klan was to be a non-profit order. In Wade's testimony, he stated that:

Clark[sic] has thereby turned a great and benevolent organization into a vast body of tribute payers, whose money enriches his coffer, so that he has reduced the other members of the Klan to practical serfdom. . . . The Klan purchased two hundred and fifty acres of land in Fulton County for the sum of $150,000.00, and sold the most valuable part of it to an organization in which Clark [sic] was the dominant stockholder for the sum of $35,000.00, thereby placing upon the Klan the burden of paying $115,000.00 for the less valuable portion.1

As well as owning land and holding stock in a number of businesses, it is estimated that about two thirds of the $16.50, which it cost to join the Klan, finally finished up in Atlanta.2

The Activities of the Klan

Although the Congressional investigation into the activities of the Klan which took place in 1921 revealed relatively few Klansmen in city government, by 1922, Atlanta Klansmen had made their first important entry into the political arena. Possibly their actions were motivated by Mayor James L. Key's prohibiting masked parades in the streets of Atlanta. Even though there were many Klansmen who ran for a number of political positions in Atlanta, perhaps the most interesting contest was that for the office of mayor. In this election,

1Ibid.
2Gillette and Tillinger, op.cit., pp.33-34.
six men ran in the Democratic primary for the position, which Key had vacated in order to run for U. S. Congressman for the Fifth District. In this race, the issue of the Klan could not be avoided because one of the contestants, James L. Beavers, then Chief of Police, kept bringing to the attention of the voters the fact that another of the contestants, Walter Sims, was a member of the Klan. Beavers contended that the Klan should not be allowed to influence or control or even enter politics.\(^1\) In reply to Beavers' attack, Sims not only called Beavers an incompetent Chief of Police but defended the Klan's philosophy and organization.

During the primary, Sims, who was an anti-Catholic symbol because he had attempted to get the City Council to pass an ordinance to investigate the Knights of Columbus and had also spoken of the Catholic threat to the country, campaigned for the office of mayor on a platform that was consistent with his past political activities as well as on his Klan philosophy, i.e., the maintenance of white supremacy, the Christian ideals and the "protection of the Southern white woman."\(^2\) With the support of the Searchlight, the organ of the Klan, and with a strong Klan membership, Sims was confident of victory. On September 5, the polls indicated that, with six men in the race, Sims did not quite receive a majority of the votes cast and he was forced into a run-off with James G. Woodward, a man who had been Mayor of Atlanta three times before.

\(^1\)Jackson, op. cit., p.38.

\(^2\)Ibid.
Before the run-off took place, on September 11, Sims and Woodward debated at the meeting place of the Daughters of the American Revolution located on 15th Street. They discussed the campaign issues before 700 voters.\textsuperscript{1} Besides criticizing Woodward's past record as mayor, Sims also accused him of being the Knights of Columbus' candidate. Sims stated that the Catholic Church was attempting to destroy the public schools by teaching the children un-American ideals. He also charged that the Catholic Church had made a contribution of $50,000 to Woodward's campaign funds. Woodward responded to these charges by saying that "any man that makes a political plea on a platform of religious prejudices is unfit to be a mayor."\textsuperscript{2}

In the voting on September 20, 1922, Sims, then a relatively young man, received 7,244 votes against the 6,273 received by his seventy-year-old opponent, Woodward.\textsuperscript{3}

As a result of the newly-elected mayor being a Klansman, Atlanta witnessed parades of masked Klansmen, for he lifted the ban on this type of parade.

During these same elections in 1922, Clifford Walker, a Klansman, became the Governor of the State of Georgia; Walter F. George, a Klansman, became a U. S. Senator (the second senator from Georgia, William J. Harris, was a Klansman also, but was not running in the 1922

\textsuperscript{1} Mayoralty Race Issues Discussed at Joint Debate," Atlanta Constitution, September 12, 1922, p.1.

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{3} Atlanta Constitution, September 21, 1922, p.1.
elections); William D. Upshaw, a Klansman, won the U. S. Congressional seat for the Fifth District; Eugene Thomas, a Klansman, won the election as a Fulton Superior Court Judge; and J. O. Wood, a Klansman, became the Fulton County Representative to the Georgia Legislature. There were twelve candidates in this latter contest; Wood, who won the seat, openly boasted of his affiliation with the Klan in the Searchlight, of which he was editor. He was a former city councilman and ran in the Representative race on a platform which demanded more rigid inspection of convents and institutions run by religious orders\(^1\) (obviously he meant the Marist College in Atlanta, which was Roman Catholic-oriented).

A. A. Baumstark, one of the twelve candidates for Representative, who finished tenth in the race with approximately 2,000 votes, was the most vigorous of the anti-Klan candidates for the office of state legislator. It is significant that one of the six candidates for the office of mayor, James L. Beavers, who openly criticized the Klan during his campaign, received approximately 1,000 votes in the primary; it would appear, then, that the Atlanta and Fulton County anti-Klan vote during these elections numbered between one and two thousand, a relatively small percentage of the total votes cast. Woodward blamed his defeat by Sims (the Mayor's race) on the political influence of the Klan and stated that 90 percent of the city's Democratic Executive Committee were members of the Klan.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Chalmers, op.cit., p.76.

\(^2\)Atlanta Constitution, September 21, 1922, p.5.
From the City Hall to the State Capitol to the nation's capital in Washington, Klansmen swept into victory in the 1922 elections.

In the 1924 elections, in spite of the conflict between Evans and Simmons, which was constantly being brought to the attention of the public by newspaper accounts of their many court battles, and a decline in Klan membership in Atlanta and Fulton County, all of the major Klan incumbents were re-elected; however, the Klan issue was not so strongly injected into the campaign as it had been in the 1922 elections. In one race, where the Klan issue was raised, i.e., in the contest for Fulton County Superior Court Judge, the Klansman won a hard-earned victory. The incumbent, Gus H. Howard, who had been appointed to the judgeship by Walker, the Klansman Governor of Georgia, upon the death of Klansman Judge Thomas, was an acknowledged Klansman. The contender, L. F. McClelland, claimed that he had never been a member of the Klan, denounced the secret order because of its political character and asked for the support of former and non-active Klansmen.1

In the 1926 elections, the strength of the political influence of the Klan showed a definite weakening for the first time. R. A. Gordon, a Klansman, lost the race for the office of mayor of Atlanta to a non-Klansman, I. N. Ragsdale; J. O. Wood, a Klansman candidate for Governor of Georgia, lost his race to a non-Klansman; and Richard B. Russell, Sr., a Klansman, lost his race for the U. S. Senate to a non-Klansman. In other words, members of the Klan running for political

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offices in city, state and national governments suffered defeat.\(^1\)

In 1922, there were definite signs that the Klan was beginning to interfere in the religious and educational activities of the city. It will be remembered that in its original petition for the Charter, religion had not been mentioned. On several occasions, the local Klan warned Atlantans that the Roman Catholic Church was seeking to take over the Atlanta Public School System. Although it had very little evidence of this, its threats were based on the fact that some of the teachers were Catholic and the Klan said that these teachers would poison the minds of their students. The Klan attempted to intimidate the Board of Education into firing the Catholic teachers by threatening the lives of some of the members of the Board. At least two Board members, Carl F. Hutcheson and Julia O'Keefe Nelson, however, were sympathetic to the Klan's suggestion.\(^2\) There was a rumor that a school principal, who was a Catholic, had been discharged. "Miss Julia Riordan, who had taught in Atlanta for 20 years, was reportedly discharged in 1921 because she was a Catholic."\(^3\) Apart from these alleged two dismissals, it would appear that the School Board stood firm against the Klan's intimidation for no mass discharge of Catholic teachers took place.

In other forays into education, this time to create a

\(^1\)Chalmers, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.75-76.
\(^2\)Sweeney, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.9-10.
favorable public image through acts of altruism, the Atlanta Klan made a number of contributions to educational institutions. The city Klavern contributed $1,000 to Agnes Scott College in 1921,1 and $20.00 to Decatur Junior High School.2

With a view to training young men and women in the Klan philosophy, the organization purchased a small college, Lanier University, which had not been in operation since World War I. Lanier University was located on Highland Avenue and had three buildings and an enrollment of one hundred students.3

Simmons, at one time, had taught American history at this college and it was mainly his idea to re-open the institution. It was also his idea to change the name of the institution to the University of America and that all students would be required to take Bible study and courses in United States constitutional principles. Simmons' plans did not have enough time to materialize fully because he lost power within the next couple of years; however, the school was opened and, at one time, did enroll up to one hundred students.

It would seem fair to mention here that the Klan did advocate certain improvements in the field of education, e.g., better schools, school conveniences and services, increase in the salaries of teachers and a corresponding increase in the qualifications of the teachers,

1Jones, op.cit., p.122.
2Jackson, op.cit., p.37.
adding that these improvements were to be for all schools.¹

Insofar as religion was concerned, a fair percentage of ministers in churches of most Protestant denominations were members of the Klan.

In general, those who tolerated the Invisible Empire were financially aided by Klan members, as when Klansmen appeared with an offering at the close of a revival service at the Atlanta Christian Church, . . .²

As has been mentioned previously, the Klan was anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish in its philosophy. Jewish people, similar to Catholics, were not eligible for membership in the Klan because they were considered to be un-American, unpatriotic and foreigners. The Klan considered Jews to be as much of a threat to the United States as the Catholics.³ After the prosecuting attorney in the Leo Frank case (Clifford Walker) became Governor of Georgia, the Jewish community in Atlanta felt insecure.⁴

In the field of business, local Klansmen urged Atlantans to boycott merchants "with 'Roman sympathies,' and local employers to fire all Catholic workers,"⁵ and, according to a letter from Kamelia, the local Klan allegedly pressured a Mr. Manget, the owner or operator

¹ "The Klan and the Public School," The Kourier Magazine, VI (May, 1925), 25.

² Jackson, op.cit., pp.34-35.

³ Witcher, op.cit., p.51.


⁵ Sweeney, op.cit., p.9.
of hotels all over Georgia (two were in Atlanta), to be converted into the order by selecting one hundred highly influential men, who were members of the Klan, to intimidate him by threats of possible economic ruin.¹

Realizing that the Klan could catch more members with honey than with tricks, a sympathetic Klan source stated that more than $15,000 had been loaned by the Atlanta Klan to small tradesmen who needed capital to help their businesses, and this money was allegedly supplied without interest.²

In a letter to the editor of the Enquirer-Sun, the writer said that: "It is generally said, and belived sic to be true, that the Georgia Electric and Power Company finances the political activities of the Klan."³

In the case of The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan v. Wade, the defendant stated that:

... on information and belief that all uniforms and regalia which each members [sic] of the Klan is required to own are manufactured at a costs [sic] of not exceeding $1.90 each, but are sold by the manufacturer to the Klan for the sum of $4.00 apiece, and said Clark [sic] and Mrs. Tyler own a large, if not controlling interest, in the firm manufacturing such regalia. The said Clark [sic] is interested in various other enterprises with which the Klan deals, among them, the

¹Letter from Kamelia to the Editor, Enquirer-Sun (Columbus, Georgia), April 4, 1923 (Personal papers of Julian Harris: Atlanta: Division of Special Collections, Emory University} (hereinafter cited as Letter from Kamelia).

²Jones, op.cit., p.126.

³Letter from Kamelia, op.cit.
University Park Development [sic] Company.1

In connection with the regalia manufacturing operation:

Simmons arranged for official production in the factory of Atlanta Klansman W. E. Floding, one of the original petitioners for the charter until April 1923, when the contract was given to C. B. Davis's Gate City Manufacturing Company. Considerable internal criticism centered on this private monopoly, so the Invisible Empire in 1923 constructed its own three-story, twenty-thousand-dollar robe factory in Buckhead, less than a mile from the Imperial Palace. With efficient operation and a production rate that eventually reached several thousand robes per day, the basic price of a uniform was reduced from $6.50 to $5.00, a sum that still allowed for substantial profit.2

Another money-making venture of the Klan was the publication of the newspaper, the Searchlight, published jointly with the Junior Order of American Mechanics (an anti-Catholic fraternity). The weekly newspaper appeared on the Atlanta streets for the first time on June 22, 1919, and was sold for five cents. Publication ceased on March 28, 1923. As well as carrying the usual Klan warnings and threats, the Searchlight carried a number of business advertisements -- more being for Atlanta firms and businesses than for industries throughout the country.3 Both the owner and the editor of the Searchlight were Atlantans and members of the Klan.

When publication of the Searchlight was discontinued, other papers, the Imperial Night-Hawk and the Courier Magazine, were published independently by the Klan in their own printing office, which,

1Klan v. Wade, op.cit.
2Jackson, op.cit., p.36.
3Searchlight, July 12, 1924.
of course, printed all Klan imperial decrees, proclamations and pamphlets.

As most professions were represented by members of the Atlanta Klan, it would appear to be credible that many lawyers were Klansmen. One of the most prominent lawyers in the Atlanta area, Paul S. Etheridge, was the attorney for the local chapter. Walter A. Sims, Mayor of Atlanta from 1922 to 1926 and former City Councilman, was an attorney and, during the conflict between Simmons and Evans, acted as the former's counsel.

Governor Walker (a Klansman) appointed Gus H. Howard, a Klansman attorney from Macon, to fill the position of Fulton Superior Judge, left vacant by the death of Eugene Thomas (also a member of the Klan). This judicial appointment was praised by the leading Klansmen of the city of Atlanta and the state of Georgia.

Specific areas of Klan operation have been mentioned during the years 1919 through 1925 in the city of Atlanta; during these years, of course, the usual activities of the organization, i.e., parades, barbecues, burial prayers, open-air meetings, sports meetings and demonstrations, were carried on. The general public witnessed the open-air activities of the Klansmen and their female counterparts and it more or less accepted them as being part of the social life of Klan

1Jones, op.cit., p.107.
2"Atlanta Mayor is Simmons' Counsel," Atlanta Constitution, June 24, 1923, p.8A.
3Greene, op.cit., pp.240-41.
families.

Atlanta Klansmen rarely participated in public demonstrations until after World War I. One of their first appearances came during a Confederate Reunion on October 10, 1919, when they paraded down Peachtree and Whitehall streets behind Civil War veterans, demanding greater police action against the criminal elements of the city. In fact, the Atlanta Klavern, in an effort to prove its benevolence, on October 1, 1919, contributed $100.00 to help defray the expenses of Confederate veterans in Atlanta to attend the annual reunion of the United Confederate Veterans.

On January 16, 1920, Atlanta prohibitionists had a great bonfire in the center of the city to celebrate the "dry amendment," which marked the death of "John Barleycorn." The Atlanta Klan took part in this public exhibition and showed their strong support for the prohibition law and the enforcement of all laws. It is interesting to note that there is a great deal of evidence to show that most of the leading Klansmen in the city of Atlanta and elsewhere were well-known as being heavy drinkers. In fact, Clarke, Simmons

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2 Jones, op.cit., p.126.


4 Fry, op.cit., p.229.

and The Reverend C. A. Ridley\(^1\) (the Imperial Kludd) were arrested at one time for another, in and out of the city of Atlanta, for either being drunk or for carrying liquor.

These activities, in the specific and general areas, were undoubtedly an outlet for the emotions of Klansmen and possibly lessened the incidence of violence in the city; however, it should not be thought that violence or threats of violence did not occur. It must be remembered that the local newspapers may not have published one half of the incidents reported to them; it could also be suggested that the police force, which was heavily infiltrated by Klansmen, did not report one half of the incidents called to its attention.

One of the first reported cases of Klan violence in Atlanta occurred in the Lakewod Amusement Park. This case involved four men (possibly all members of the Klan) who assaulted J. C. Thomas, a lunch-counter operator. Thomas had been associating with a certain woman named Myers and had received a number of anonymous letters advising him to leave her alone. Two of the Klan's stated purposes were to maintain high public morality and to protect "the American woman."

A Ku Klux is first of all a real man, and as such, believes in the chastity of woman and the sanctity of home. The times in which we live; the lowering of all moral standards following the world war; the styles of dress; the total absence of respect for American girls by the great majority of foreign-born men and the younger generation of Jews; these all combine to make it difficult for American women to maintain the high ideals of their sainted mothers.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Thomas Boyd, "Defying the Klan," Forum, LXXVI (July, 1926), 51.

These purposes possibly motivated the assault on Thomas because he chose to disregard these warnings. While traveling in a car one night, Thomas was stopped by four strangers who told him that the chief of police wanted to see him about some bad checks. Assuming this to be the truth, Thomas accompanied the four men in their car; instead of being taken to the police headquarters, he was taken to a park where the men ordered him to get out of the car. Thomas suddenly realized their intentions, pulled a knife and wounded one of the men and killed another -- Fred Thompson. The others ran away from the scene.

A Grand Jury refused to indict Thomas for the death of Thompson but indicted two of his abductors. They were both acquitted. Although the name of the Klan was not mentioned during the court hearings, Simmons admitted later that Thompson was a member of the Klan.¹

Numerous cases were reported in Atlanta in which threatening letters had been received. A young Scot was threatened for making improper remarks about social inequalities; a physician was threatened because of alleged neglect of his family. An Atlanta lawyer, J. H. Leavitt, himself threatened, said that Dr. C. B. Wilmer, an Episcopal clergyman, and ex-Senator Hoke Smith were marked for violence.²

Opposition to the Klan

In most cities in the United States, opposition to the Klan

¹Fry, op.cit., pp.183-84.
²Gillette and Tillinger, op.cit., p.53.
was strong. In 1924, various clerics from around the country met in Washington, D.C. with educators, businessmen, and political leaders. They formed the National Vigilance Association whose sole express purpose was to fight the Klan. In addition to the N.V.A., the Klan was opposed by purely religious organizations such as the National Catholic Welfare Conference and the Executive Committee of Orthodox Rabbis of America. Although the Klan was not mentioned by name, the Administrative Committee of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America denounced all groups whose attitudes "tend to set class against class or race against race."1

Public opposition to the Klan in Atlanta was much weaker and less organized than it was nationally. The local population was either sympathetic or not actively opposed to the philosophy of the hooded order.

In politics, during the campaigns of the early 1920's, the Klan was an issue in a number of races for important offices. Leading the opposition to the Klan in 1922 was incumbent Governor Thomas W. Hardwick who ran on an anti-Klan platform in his contest for governor. He also ran for the U. S. Senate on an anti-Klan ticket in 1924 but was defeated in both contests. He denounced the secret order as an "outlaw group,"2 and during the time he was Governor of Georgia (1920-1922), with the Mayor of Atlanta, James L. Key, prohibited the marching

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1_"Literary Digest, LXXIX (November 25, 1923), 33._

2_"Hardwick Calls KKK Chief Foes," _Atlanta Constitution_, September 7, 1922, p.7._
of masked individuals in public. Most of the politicians who were not Klan members criticized the Klan for entering politics; for instance, James L. Beavers, who was a candidate for the office of mayor, mentioned during his campaign, the KKK violence that had occurred in Lakewood; he also objected to the fraternal Klan acting as a political party or group. Most of the anti-Klan candidates were not diametrically opposed to the Klan philosophy but objected to the Klan's entry into the political arena. As a matter of fact, Governor Hardwick, on several occasions, had praised the fraternal and Reconstruction Klan but, at the same time, criticized the philosophy of the new Klan and its entry into politics. L. F. McClelland, an anti-Klan candidate running against Klansman Gus H. Howard for Fulton County Superior Court Judge, although he asserted that numbers of good men, who were 100 percent American, had joined the Klan as a fraternity, added that the order's "recent active entry into the political arena removes it from the realms of a fraternal organization to that of a political party."2

Although there appeared to be significant opposition from some politicians in the Atlanta area and throughout the state, it was not strong enough to elect the anti-Klan candidates during the political campaigns of the early 1920's.

In the field of religion, only a few Atlanta ministers were

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the Atlanta Baptist Association and the Reverend C. A. Ridley of the Central Baptist Church, who was the Imperial Kludd (national chaplain of the Klan). Ridley was well-known in Atlanta, and perhaps in other parts of the country, for his deep-rooted conviction of white supremacy; he also constantly attacked Catholics and Jews. The fact that he was a Klan chaplain also brought him public attention. On June 13, the Atlanta Baptist Association made public a resolution which criticized the actions and conduct of Ridley. The resolution had the support of all members who were present at the meeting except the Reverend M. L. Carswell. The resolution stated:

That because of his [Ridley's] conduct and reputation, we regard the continuance of Dr. C. A. Ridley in the Baptist ministry as an injury to the cause of Christ and a reflection upon the honor of Baptists.¹

Although the Baptist Association withdrew their fellowship from Ridley with charges of conduct unbecoming a minister and threatened to expel his church, Central Baptist, from the Association, the congregation of the Central Baptist Church voted to support Ridley and gave him a strong vote of confidence.² At a Lakewood Park barbecue, before a group of sympathetic listeners, Ridley charged that the Association had been motivated to censure him because he would not take orders from it and acted independently, adding that it was probably his affiliation with the Klan that was the real reason for the resolution. The Central Baptist Church was not expelled because at about this time,

¹"Offering to Quit, Ridley Accorded Confidence Vote," Atlanta Constitution, June 13, 1923, p.1.
²Ibid.
vigorously opposed to the Klan during the 1920's in the city; possibly they tolerated it because of the financial aid they received from the members of their congregation who were Klansmen or perhaps it was from fear that the Klan would investigate their backgrounds or commit acts of personal violence against them. Three Protestant ministers, at least, are known to have spoken out against the Klan. Dr. C. B. Wilmer, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Atlanta, and a member of the Board of Trustees of Atlanta University, was investigated and an effort was made to ruin his career. The Klan accused him of mistreating his sister, who was married to a Jew; they also uncovered the fact that Wilmer had taught some twenty years earlier at a Negro school in Lynchburg, Virginia. Dr. Wilmer was known to be a member of various integrated organizations and of one in particular -- the Inter-Racial Committee.1

Another target of criticism was Dr. Plato Durham, a Methodist minister and professor of theology at Emory University, Atlanta, who was labeled by the Klan as a "nigger lover." Although Durham was not a radical, he denounced the Klan as an evil force that tried to implement laws through illegal means.2 The Reverend Ashby Jones, a Baptist minister of Atlanta, was bitterly denounced by the Klan because of his criticism of it; he was also affiliated with the Inter-Racial Committee, which comprised progressive thinking Negroes and whites.3

During the early part of June, 1923, open hostility between

1Randall, op.cit., p.198.
2Ibid., p.199.
3Fry, op.cit., p.104.
Ridley turned over the church to his assistant minister in order to devote all his time to lecturing for the Klan throughout the country.\(^1\)

Up until 1924, two of the three white-owned Atlanta newspapers, the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Journal*, although they published articles about the Klan, appeared to be sympathetic toward the Klan influence in the city. They made no special effort to oppose the violence and political involvement of the Klan. Occasionally, the third white-owned newspaper, *The Georgian*, would snap at the Klan and nearly always opposed it politically; however, it did not carry on a vigorous crusade against the order.

The Negro-owned *Atlanta Independent* was anti-Klan in its editorials and also urged the white-owned newspapers to editorially expose and oppose the Klan and its activities; it also re-published anti-Klan articles that had been published in other newspapers in the state.

Outside the city, the *Enquirer-Sun*, edited by Julian Harris, a white-owned newspaper published in Columbus, Georgia, was violently opposed to the Klan and constantly urged white-owned newspapers in Atlanta to take the same line of opposition. In fact, included in the personal papers of Julian Harris, is a letter written to him when he was editor of the *Enquirer-Sun* by Kamelia which says:

> The Atlanta papers are ambitious, they are full of the "Atlanta spirit" that you hear so much about. Naturally they wish to see Atlanta the "Krown Kourt" of America. They feel that it is a distinction to have the seat of Invisible government in their city -- to have an "Emperor"

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\(^1\)"Dr. Caleb Ridley Defies Critics," *ibid.*, June 12, 1923, p.5.
with his imperial staff, and a "Wizard" with his staff and court attaches. And then too think of the many dollars that are being poured into Atlanta. I was reliably informed a few days ago, that Clarke was now one of the largest real estate owners in Atlanta.

I am sure that these are the things that have been whispered into the ears of the Atlanta newspapers, and that this is what is keeping them quiet.¹

There is no evidence, however, that this letter was ever published by his newspaper. Julian Harris was the first and most vigorous newspaper editor to take a stand against the Klan in Georgia; other editors in the state, e.g., of the papers in Macon and Athens, and later, others joined Harris.

The Enquirer-Sun in an article on November 12, 1923, entitled "Civilization Is Not on Trial but Atlanta and Georgia Are" criticized the three Atlanta dailies for treating the assassination of W. S. Coburn only as a crime in a large city, whereas it was: "... cold blooded assassination of Col. W. S. Coburn, the Ku Klux lawyer of the Simmons' faction, by Fox, publicity agent of the Evans' faction of the KKK."² The article also attacked "... innumerable legislators who desecrated the state capitol by using it for initiation ceremonies of the Klan."³

Perhaps the first nationwide newspaper to wage war against the Klan was the New York World. The World, copies of which were available

¹Letter from Kamelia, op.cit.
²"Civilization Is Not on Trial but Atlanta and Georgia Are," Enquirer-Sun (Columbus, Georgia), November 12, 1923, quoted in Atlanta Independent, November 15, 1923, p.4.
³Ibid.
on the streets of Atlanta, exposed the romantic affair of Clarke and Mrs. Tyler, wherein Mrs. Clarke identified her husband as the man found in bed with Mrs. Tyler at a notorious underworld nightspot owned by the latter. The World printed photographic copies of the Atlanta Police Department's record of the arrest—a these records mysteriously disappeared from the Department's files later. As this article was most embarrassing to Clarke and Mrs. Tyler, the former sent out his friends to buy all the copies they could find on the newsstands of the that particular issue.

By 1924, the Atlanta Constitution slightly changed its editorial policy toward the Klan and began publishing news stories about the order, often showing the Klan in an unfavorable light. It exposed a secret trip that Clifford Walker, the Governor of Georgia, had made to Kansas City in order to address a national Klan meeting on the topic of "Americanism." During his speech, according to the Constitution, Walker mentioned that:

...the threatened destruction of Americanism by the encroachment of Jews and Catholics and by the way in which a "gang of Roman Catholic Priests" had taken charge of the Democratic Convention.2

Educational opposition insofar as one aspect was concerned was apparently fairly strong because the Atlanta Public School System was not intimidated by threats from the Klan and did not discharge all the Roman Catholic teachers in their employ.

1Witcher, op.cit., p.514.
2Chalmers, op.cit., pp.73-74.
Opposition to the Klan from the business community was moderate, possibly due to the fact that most businessmen were members of the Klan, whether active or not. The members of the Atlanta Kiwanis Club supported a resolution that denounced any group that promoted religious intolerance which would result in the firing of certain individuals, but did not mention the Klan specifically in the resolution.

According to the Constitution, several members of the Committee of the Atlanta Federation of Trades objected to Klansmen wearing their masks participating in parades.¹

There was little opposition to the Klan from the members of the legal profession for the simple reason that many of the attorneys in Atlanta were Klansmen. However, the appointment of Gus H. Howard, a Klansman from Columbus and a political ally of Governor Walker to fill a judgeship, left vacant by death, drew some opposition from the Atlanta Bar Association.²

It would appear from the evidence that there was very little opposition to the Klan from external forces. Right from the very beginning of the reactivation of the Klan there was internal strife within the order and this conflict, in its many forms, probably hurt the Klan more that the outside opposition did. The earliest sign of strife was when J. B. Frost embezzled Klan funds and when found out, left the Klan and organized a rival organization. There were other


²"Klan Made Issue...," ibid., September 2, 1924, p.6.
minor bickerings from 1916 to 1922 but somehow or other, Simmons managed to smooth them over; however, one public criticism, which occurred in June, 1922, Simmons could not handle. His old friend, Lewis D. Wade, accused the organization of a number of misdemeanors and brought suit against it. At the same time, he passed out letters and pamphlets that were highly critical of the Klan. Although he was affiliated with the national Knights of the Ku Klux Klan as secretary, it was alleged that he was "about to organize and preparing to organize, a society or association under the name and style of 'National Ku Klux Klan Incorporated,' in Atlanta, which, of course, would have been a rival organization. The news of the conflict between Wade and top officials of the Klan (Simmons, Clarke and Mrs. Tyler) spread among the members of the organization in Fulton County and, in fact, through the country.

Perhaps the most serious battle was between Simmons and Hiram W. Evans during the latter part of 1922 and the early part of 1923. At the National Klanvocation held in Atlanta, Evans tricked Simmons into accepting the title of Emperor, which was to be a temporary arrangement until such time as the criticism of Simmons (due to his behavior) blew over. Simmons accepted the title of "Emperor" believing that it carried with it a great deal of power; this was not so because Evans had been working behind the scenes and usurping Simmons' power piece

1Klan v. Wade, op.cit.

2The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan v. W. B. Coburn, No.53972, Fulton Superior Court, September, 1922.
by piece until he (Evans) was virtually the most powerful Klansman
in the order.

When Simmons found out that he had been hoodwinked and was, in
fact, without power, he attempted to organize the Kamelia - a female
auxiliary of the Klan. At the same time, he tried to enlist the help
of dissatisfied Klansmen in forming the women's group. Evans opposed
in public the formation of a women's auxiliary\(^1\) and, in this manner,
the conflict between the two men -- Simmons and Evans -- became public
knowledge. The battle worsened, both men accusing each other of
various misdemeanors.

Simmons said that: "... under the Evans' administration, the
Invisible Empire has become a government by blackmail (gross mismanage-
ment and waste of funds had been the order of the day under Evans).\(^2\)
He also said that Evans ruled the organization by a system of espion-
age.

Simmons, in his book, *American Menace or the Enemy Within*,
said that "Evans' election to the office was unholy in concept, under-
headed in method, illegal in fact and destructive in results."\(^3\) These
were bitter words for, in the first eighty-two pages of the book, he
spoke of the manner in which he had raised the Klan as his first and
only child and recounted how he had protected the Klan from the common

\(^1\)"Simmons to Form...," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 6, 1923, p.1.
\(^2\)"Nathan Bedford Forrest Klan Backs Simmons...," *Atlanta
Constitution*, April 6, 1923, p.11.
\(^3\)Simmons, *American Menace...*, p.84.
enemy, i.e., the newspapers, Congress, Catholics, Jews, money-hungry people, etc. His hatred of Evans spilled over as he wrote:

Either by force or flattery, or promise of pay, it seemed everybody concerned had been harmonized with Evans' infamous intrigue. The "common enemy" had at last succeeded; the reign of ruthless ruin had been established; the dream of the Destroyer was approaching realization; all my long years of relentless labor and arduous toil; serious sacrifice and soul suffering; anxious anticipations and direful dangers, through debauchery of destruction, all were to go for naught, and perchance to go forever.¹

On the other hand, Evans accused Simmons of attempting to use the Klan for personal gain, of looting Klan funds and of being of unbecoming character and reputation.

Evans finally won the battle against Simmons; he won the legal battles, he completely usurped Simmons' power and purchased from the latter the registration and copyright, property and name of the Klan. However, he was still not free of criticism and minor conflicts; he had banished Clarke from the Klan, and Clarke, to retaliate, began to publish a paper, Fiery Summons, which was highly critical of Evans' administration, but which appeared to have had only temporary popularity in the city. Clarke instigated a letter, which was made public, to President Calvin Coolidge calling for a presidential dissolution of the Klan.² It is significant that Simmons showed his approval of Clarke's letter by jointly signing it with Clarke.

It was about this time that the major Atlanta newspapers

¹Ibid., pp.83-84.
²Chalmers, op.cit., p.107.
became more critical of the Klan and its influence in the city. Members of the Klan became non-active or left the Klan altogether. From this point on, membership in the Klan began to decline. Through the early 1930's, no doubt due to the Depression, Klan membership and activities increased somewhat and there were rumors that the Klan and the Black Shirts were working together against the Negroes in the city, that is in job discrimination, "keeping Negroes in their place," and maintaining segregation.¹

In 1939, it was reported by Colonel Winfield Jones, considered to be sympathetic toward the Klan, that there were only fifteen Klansmen in the city of Atlanta.²

¹Community Life, "Community Life," Atlanta, Georgia, 1932, p.3. (Mimeographed.)

²Jones, op.cit., p.112.
CHAPTER III

THE ORDER OF THE BLACK SHIRTS

History of the Organization

On June 10, 1930, about four hundred angry and concerned white citizens of Atlanta met at the Junior Order of United Mechanics' Hall on Flat Shoals Avenue to form a secret order. The individuals had gathered to express their desire to form an organization that would combat communism and foster white supremacy. Holt J. Gewinner, Dewey Smith and J. O. Wood were named as members of a committee formed to perfect permanent plans for the organization,¹ which was to be supported by voluntary contributions and which was to be called the "American Facisti Association and Order of Black Shirts."² The official paper of the Ku Klux Klan (The Kourier Magazine) stated that the Black Shirt Order originated or developed as early as February 7, 1930, from the Fascistic League called "Great Federation of Lictors," and that it was headed by a man named Trombetta, a former leader of the Fascisti, who was alleged to be Mussolini's personal representative


²Petition for Charter, No. 12246, Fulton Superior Court, August 8, 1930 (hereinafter cited as Petition for Black Shirts).
in the United States.¹

The Black Shirt Order developed from the climate of insecurity brought about by the Depression of 1929. Immediately following the Depression, Atlanta witnessed limited activities of a few dozen communists who were protesting unemployment at rallies -- for Atlantans had already begun to feel the effects of unemployment and threats to their jobs. By the time the Black Shirts was organized, most of the communist leaders had either been indicted or jailed, or were under the close scrutiny of the Atlanta Police Department and civil authorities. Since there were few, if any, communists in the entire state of Georgia and since those few were not organized to the point of holding meetings, "the American Fascists or Black Shirts, have as their sole reason for existence the running of Negroes out of jobs."²

The Black Shirts drew into its ranks many disillusioned Klansmen and a number of white, restless or jobless, young men. At the time of its formation, the Black Shirts was, in a sense, a rival organization to the Klan, whose reputation was suffering from an overdose of scandals, court suits and legal battles. One of the initial members of the Black Shirts, J. T. Lee, alleged that the Black Shirts was a front for the Klan, because Klan application forms were handed out to Black Shirt members.³

¹"Fascist League Reviving under New Name," The Nourier Magazine, VI (April, 1930), 19.
²Edwin Tribble, "Black Shirts in Georgia," New Republic, CCLII (October 8, 1930), 204.
³Lee Injunction, op.cit.
To illustrate the close affiliation between the Klan and the Black Shirts, the latter was organized at the hall of the Junior Order of United Mechanics, a fraternity which had been helpful to the Klan and which had allowed the Klan to hold its meetings in the same hall. Several members of the Klan were also members of the Junior Order of United Mechanics, and it would appear natural to assume that members of these three organizations met quite frequently in the hall. Two of the leading organizers of the Black Shirts—J. O. Wood and Holt J. Gewinner—were Klansmen or former Klansmen. J. O. Wood was editor of the Searchlight (the Klan official organ) and was extremely well-known for his activities in the Klan; Gewinner, who was lesser known for his Klan affiliation, had been suspended indefinitely from the Atlanta Jno. B. Gordon No 91 Klan Klavern in 1927.¹ R. A. Gordon, a former City Councilman from the Fourth Ward and a defeated candidate for mayor in the elections in 1926, was one of three original petitioners for the charter, with Gewinner and R. S. Gulledge; he was also a member of the Klan.

When the Black Shirts applied initially for their charter on August 8, 1930, the attorney filing the application was the former mayor of Atlanta from 1923 to 1927, Walter A. Sims, a well-known Klansman. Significantly, this charter was not granted to the Black Shirts; in turning the petition down, the judge, Gus H. Howard (a one-time Klansman) said that:

...the proposed rules and by laws with reference to promoting "White Supremacy" are not stated with such

definiteness and certainty, . . . as to show that the granting of all such powers would be within the purview of the Constitution and laws of the State.¹

On October 18, 1930, the day after the petition for a charter had been denied, another application for a charter was filed by Gewinner and Gordon only, stating that one of the petitioners named in the original application for charter, R. S. Gulledge, "has resigned from the organization." The two petitioners asked that the original petition be amended by striking the name of Gulledge as a petitioner for the charter.²

At the same time, Jack White, who was formerly Clerk of City Hall and who was also sentenced for fraud in Fulton Superior Court in connection with graft at City Hall, was named as one of the original organizers of the order and that he had been given Alabama and Louisiana to organize. On October 19, 1930, however, Jack White was quoted as saying that:

I am not a member of the Order of Black Shirts. My only connection with the organization was in August, prior to any fight being made on the organization. My contract called for creation of organization and incorporation as separate of the Alabama and Louisiana orders. . . . I have never paid a membership fee and am not now a member. I cancelled my contract to organize those two states in August.³

The application for the charter filed on October 18, 1930,


²"New Order Formed by 'Black Shirts,'" Atlanta Constitution, October 18, 1930, p.8.

was not granted. On that day, the Atlanta Constitution printed an article called "New Order Formed by 'Black Shirts,'" which said that:

Members of the American Fascists or Order of Black Shirts have reorganized into the Order of Patriots it was announced Friday night by Holt J. Gewinner, leader of the enjoined group after his election at a meeting. . . . "Organization of the Order of Patriots will not affect the name of American Fascist groups outside of Georgia," Gewinner said, adding that the "Black Shirts plan to carry their right for a charter to the Supreme Court."¹

Although it never has been definitely established that the Black Shirts was involved in the murder of Dennis Hubert and the bombing of his father's home, and the throwing of a tear-gas bomb into Wheat Street Baptist Church,² these incidents did occur within a period of a little over three weeks after the formation of the organization. These acts of violence created racial tension in the city and there is no doubt that the Black Shirts capitalized on the fears of the citizens to enlist more members.

Various figures have been given as to the number of persons who joined the Black Shirts. An article in the Macon Telegraph said that within a period of three weeks after its formation, i.e., August 24, 1930, after the above-mentioned incidents had occurred, there were 21,830 members of the order.³ Another source, the New Republic, said that:

¹"New Order Formed...," Atlanta Constitution, October 18, 1930, p.8.


This movement of discrimination against color and religion is rapidly spreading through Georgia. The same hoodlums who kept the Ku Klux Klan alive are joining. The Black Shirt, in its issue of August 29, declared that there are now more than 27,000 members in Georgia.1

According to one of the order's leaders, Travis Lamar, the organization claimed 50,000 members.2 Another source said that the group exceeded 21,000 members.3 Although the Black Shirts witnessed an unusual period of growth immediately after its formation, its activity appeared to be confined to the Atlanta area only. The organization's first office was located at 218 Peters Street Building, but after approximately three weeks, as the membership increased so rapidly, these premises became too congested and a new office was found at 63 North Broad Street. If a figure of 30,000 is taken, which is the average of the highest figure quoted for membership and the lowest figure given, it could be safely said that one out of every three white males in the city was a member of the Black Shirts. In 1930, Atlanta had a population of 300,000, one third of which was Negro. Taking a figure of 200,000 whites and estimating that about 80,000 of these would be male, the figure of one out of every three white males being a Black Shirt can be supported.

 Apparently the Black Shirts enjoyed the tacit approval of the city and the city's power structure -- the mayor, the councilmen, elected officials, etc. Judging from some of the Black Shirts' acti-

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1Tribble, op.cit., p.205.
3"Crack the Head of this Newest Nasty Thing," ibid., August 26, 1930, p.1.
vities — marching through the streets, using the steps of the State Capitol, and holding meetings in the city auditorium, Taft Hall, public school buildings, Grant Park (a city park) and other public places, either free of charge or by paying for them with fraudulent checks, the citizens of Atlanta did not actively oppose the organization. It is possible that some of the city fathers agreed with the philosophy and principles of the fascist organization; it is also possible that the mayor, councilmen and elected officials allowed a certain amount of publicity to be given to the order so that attention would be diverted from the alleged graft in City Hall.

In some instances, the organization had the actual support of the city leaders: the Mayor, I. N. Ragsdale, gave his permission to the Black Shirts to march down Peachtree and Baker Streets to the State Capitol. 2

Advertisements for the Black Shirts often appeared in the white-owned Atlanta newspapers, the Constitution and the Journal. The Journal called attention to meetings, e.g., "Fascist Body Plans East Point Meeting," wherein the readers were told to gather at Russell High School at 8:00 p.m. to hear speeches involving their welfare. 3 The Journal also carried a paid advertisement for Allen M. Pierce,

1 "Mayson to Collect on Gewinner Check," Atlanta Constitution, September 16, 1939, p.5; "Fraud Charges Faced by Holt Gewinner," ibid., September 3, 1930, p.4.


9, Edgewood Avenue, which read as follows:

Black Shirts
American Fascists: we have just what you want! Why
not wear one at the meeting Monday night at Lakewood
Heights. The price is very reasonable, but immediate
supply is limited. Better get yours now.1

The American Fascist group had reached the peak of its power
in Atlanta during the latter part of August, but shortly thereafter
the first signs of trouble and dissension began to appear. Instead
of the support the order had previously received from the city power
structure, there was criticism by the city fathers and withdrawal of
support. This criticism and withdrawal of support was probably due
to the fact that the newspapers had begun to oppose the order in
editorials and religious and civic organizations were beginning to
express their disapproval publicly.

In early September the organization and its leaders came under
the scrutiny of both the Federal and the Fulton County Grand Jury, and
an investigation was ordered. The Fulton County Grand Jury recom-
mended to Mayor I. N. Ragsdale not to approve a parade permit, which
was lying on his desk, for the Black Shirts.2

Hate organizations have a way of fighting among themselves --
and the Black Shirts were no exception. One of the first internal
fights developed between J. O. Wood and Holt Gewinner. Wood was a
candidate for the Fulton County seat in the Legislature in the 1930

1Atlanta Journal, August 3, 1930, p.68.

2"Fulton County Grand Jury Urges Mayor to Deny Black Shirt
elections, a position he had held formerly from 1923 to 1927; he was well-known in city and state politics and was one of the initial organizers of the Black Shirts. In fact, it was alleged by J. T. Lee, who was among the four hundred persons who met on June 10 to form the organization, that Wood had planned the Black Shirt order about one year before it was formally organized. Lee also alleged that it was Wood who had invented the name, "American Fascistic Order of Black Shirts," for the group.1 Gewinner, who was one of the original petitioners and organizers, had quietly seized control of the organization and made himself adjunct general.2 He had instituted a $1.00 charge for membership although at the second meeting of the group it had been voted that the organization would not charge membership dues but would be supported voluntarily3 as had been recommended at the first meeting.

Wood began to take exception to some of the remarks being made by Gewinner about the organization and its direction and possible purpose; he also did not agree with membership dues being charged. These disagreements reached a climax about August 22, when The Black Shirt, the official organ of the Fascist group, repudiated Wood and took a stand with Gewinner. On August 29, The Black Shirt condemned Wood for allegedly making efforts to organize a Black Skirt movement among the white women of Atlanta as an auxiliary of the Black Shirts.

1Lee Injunction, op.cit.

2"Injunction Halts Local Activities..., Atlanta Constitution, September 2, 1930, p.1.

3Lee Injunction, op.cit.
The second rift appeared in September when J. T. Lee filed an injunction against the order, temporarily blocking the charter. About ten days following this, R. S. Gulledge, one of the organization's original petitioners for the charter, resigned from the group and bitterly denounced Gewinner, not only for his disorderly conduct but for what Gulledge felt were Gewinner's ultimate goals for the Black Shirts.

By September 18, it appeared that the Black Shirts' office on the second floor of 202 Whitehall Street was functioning at an absolute minimum of staff; there was only one female secretary and, of the original leaders, only Gewinner put in appearances at the headquarters. 1

The order was bound to lose strength and power under such a leader; the adjunct general had a record of disorderly conduct, of drinking, and of reckless driving in Greenville, North Carolina, and Greenville, South Carolina. He owed the United States government back income tax for he had not paid taxes in full since 1926; he was up on a number of charges for trying to pass fraudulent checks. 2

On September 26, Wood, James A. Venable, Henry J. Norton, Raymond V. Berger and Thomas B. West, all of Atlanta, arrived in the city saying that the Black Shirt Order had been granted a charter in Orlando, Florida. 3 But the Secretary of State for the State of Florida denied

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1 "Gewinner Case Goes to Federal Judge," Atlanta Constitution, September 19, 1930, p.5.


3 "Rumors of New Black Shirt Order in Florida," Ibid., September 10, 1930, p.10.
that a charter had been granted to the Black Shirt Order.\(^1\)

On November 5, 1930, Gewinner was jailed with a six-month sentence, for non-payment of income tax, passing of fraudulent checks and sundry other charges.

Obviously, the Black Shirts could no longer function -- there was a Black Shirt group allegedly being formed in Florida; the charter had been denied to the Atlanta group on October 18; and the single survivor of the original leadership (Gewinner) was in jail. These were the internal factors which led to the decline of the order: there were outside forces, of course, which also contributed to its downfall. Gewinner had formed the American Fraternal Order of Patriots in October and this organization had been granted a charter. William Joseph Simmons, the former leader of the modern Klan, had organized a hate group which called itself "The White Band"\(^2\) and the Klan itself was witnessing somewhat of a revival as Evans had moved the national headquarters of the Klan back from Washington, D.C. to Atlanta. Three rival hate groups in the city vying for members obviously drew strength from a leaderless Black Shirt Order. Within approximately 150 days from its inception, the "American Facisti Association and Order of Black Shirts" was defunct.

There were rumors of a Black Shirt revival in 1934, but the waning fear of communism, the tarnished image of the fascist movement, the rise of Naziism in Germany (1933), the adoption of some of the

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\(^1\) *Atlanta Georgian*, September 28, 1930, p.1.

Black Shirt policies (firing of Negroes and replacing them with white labor, and the movement of urban Negro families back to the farms), and the New Deal programs being instigated by Franklin Delano Roosevelt combined to defeat any strong comeback of the Black Shirts.

The Purposes of the Black Shirts

In the original petition for the Charter of the American Facisti Association and Order of Black Shirts, the purposes of the organization were stated to be:

... assist its members in securing employment; ... to inculcate and foster in the minds of its members and the public generally, white supremacy, charity among its members, and fellowship; the obedience to law and order; the upholding of the Constitution and laws of the United States and the several States thereof; the instruction of its members in the fundamental principles of free government; the combating of all influence that seeks to undermine and overthrow the principles of Democracy and the Republic form of government. ... and do any other act of charity and benevolence which its governing board or the members of its different lodges and subdivisions may decide to do.¹

The petition also specified that "any white male native born citizen of the United States over the age of eighteen years shall be eligible to membership in said organization and society, regardless of religion or creed."²

In spite of these stated purposes, Lee, in his injunction against the Black Shirts, charged that the original purpose of the organization, formulated at the first meeting of the group on June 10, was "to combat the communist party and the doctrine of communism and to discourage the

¹Petition for Black Shirts, op.cit.
²Ibid.
teaching of communism and to foster white supremacy." It will be seen that there was no mention of the word "communism" in the original purposes as spelled out in the petition for a charter. The original petition stated that the corporation "desires the right to charge initiation fees and dues," but at the June 10 meeting, it was clearly stated that the organization would be supported by voluntary contributions. Also in the petition, membership was stated as being "regardless of religion or creed"; however, the Macon Telegraph stated that the organization was solely anti-Negro and that the Fascistic Order "wouldn't take in Jews, Catholics and citizens born of foreign extraction."

Edwin Tribble and Leo Sheridan accused the Black Shirts of putting pressure on businessmen in the community to discharge Negroes working for them and replacing them with white Black Shirts. The Federal and Fulton County Grand Juries also made the same charge. Although the petition stated that it would "assist its members in

1Lee Injunction, op.cit.


3Tribble, op.cit., p.204.

4"Order Condemned by Macon Civitans," Atlanta Constitution, August 30, 1930, pp.1, 5.


securing employment," the rather dubious ways in which they would perform this service were not spelled out.

In an article entitled "'Black Shirt' Fascism Not Needed in Free Georgia," the Journal said:

The Journal can think of no organization more vigilant for the rights of working people than the Atlanta Federation of Trades, and none more keenly concerned with lessening unemployment. Does it suggest turning laborers out of their jobs because of race or color? Instead, it recognizes the right to work is inherently human. That is the real Americanism, that is real democracy, that is common sense. But the doctrine of arbitrary force known as Fascism, however it may work in the land of Mussolini, is not suited to free Georgia."

Regarding the "upholding of the Constitution and laws of the United States and the several States thereof" as specified in the petition for the charter, the Journal commented:

They Black Shirts are contrary not only to economic law, but also to the Constitution of our State. . . . If the proposals of the "American Fascisti" or Black Shirts are in keeping with the basic law of our commonwealth, they have been sadly misrepresented. 2

Even Judge Gus H. Howard's order of October 17, 1930, denying the charter, expressed the view that "all the powers sought to be conferred . . . are not consistent with the Constitution and laws of the State." 3

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2 Ibid.
The Activities of the Black Shirts

During its short span of life, the Black Shirts were not able to develop into a political force, such as the Klan had done in the early 1920's. During the political campaign of 1930, the Black Shirts were not a serious issue in the elections, in spite of the fact that the order endorsed two of the candidates. It endorsed John W. Holder for Governor of the State of Georgia and Ezra B. Phillips, who was a candidate for the Fulton County Legislature. Holder was not successful; Richard B. Russell, Jr. won the governorship. Phillips withdrew from the legislature race, in which J. O. Wood was also a candidate. The Black Shirts, however, did not support Wood for, by this time, Gewinner had taken over leadership of the organization. In fact, the Order worked against Wood to the extent that Gewinner said that "the Black Shirts accomplished Wood's defeat."¹ The Fulton County Legislature race was won by W. G. McRae, who, according to the Journal, was brutally attacked by intruders who invaded his office.² The New Republic stated that a young Atlanta lawyer and legislator had been beaten up in his office by members of the Black Shirt Order.³ McRae was a young attorney and a legislator and it could be safely inferred from these two news items that he was the person to whom the New Republic referred to as having been attacked by members of the Black Shirts.

¹"Gewinner Case Goes...," Atlanta Constitution, September 19, 1930, p. 5.
³Tribble, op. cit., p. 206.
Shirts.

In the early summer, six communists, Julius and Lizette Klarin, Mary Dalton and Ann Burlock (all of whom were white) and Gilmer Brody and Henry Story (who were Negroes), were arrested and charged with insurrection, for which the prosecution was asking the death sentence. The New Republic charged that the Black Shirts were backing the prosecution and was intimidating citizens who were fighting for a fair trial for the accused persons.

In an article, "The Black Shirts' Face Indictment by U.S.," which appeared in the Constitution on August 30, 1930, the newspaper stated that:

... The charge is made that quite a number of Atlanta business firms employing negro labor have been called upon by committees from the "Black Shirt" organization with the demand that negro labor be discharged. ..." According to the Journal, a prominent author (who was not named) had received a number of death threats in the form of letters and telephone calls for his opposition to the order. The author reported to the Journal that these messages purportedly came from members of the Black Shirts who threatened to blow him and his family into eternity with dynamite if he refused to "lay off."

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1"Communists in Georgia," The Kourier Magazine, XXI (October, 1932), 23.

2Tribble, loc.cit.

3"The Black Shirts' Face...," Atlanta Constitution, August 30, 1930, p.1.

It is possible that many of the activities accredited to the Black Shirts were not the entire responsibility of the Order. It should be remembered that the Klan was still in operation in Atlanta at this time and Simmons's anti-Negro group, "The White Band," was also active. As a matter of fact, any incident creating racial tension in the city could not be pinpointed to be the direct activity of any one particular hate organization; it seems more likely that all groups were involved, particularly insofar as many people were members of one or more of these organizations.

However, one activity can be accorded safely to the Black Shirts -- that is the publication of The Black Shirt, a weekly newspaper, which first made its appearance in Atlanta on Friday, August 22. Its motto was "America for Americans." Its masthead read "Edited by the editorial committee"; the editorship was anonymous.\(^1\) On September 2, 1930, the Constitution stated that Dewey E. Smith, one of the original organizers of the group, was the editor.\(^2\) A copy of the paper cost five cents and issues appeared for about four weeks without interruption. On September 19, the Macon Telegraph reported that the Black Shirt paper "had failed to appear on Thursday as usual."\(^3\)

During the time the organization was active, a total of

\(^1\)Tribble, op.cit., p.205.


\(^3\) Macon Telegraph, September 7, 1930, p.2.
fourteen meetings was held in Atlanta. The main topics discussed at the meetings were the communist threat and mass unemployment in the city. At a meeting at English Avenue Public School in July, the speakers urged the city council to pass a resolution that asked for the substitution of white bellhops and hotel attendants for Negroes already employed by the hotels in Atlanta. One of the speakers at this meeting was City Councilman Ellis B. Barrett.¹

At a meeting held in Macon, Gulledge, one of the organizers of the group, made several statements about law and order, and communism, and stressed that the Black Shirts "would make it possible for every white man to have a job."²

The Black Shirts also held several parades for which permission had been granted by the Mayor's office. During the parades, the Black Shirts carried banners with slogans such as "Down with the Commies," "City Jobs are for White Folk," "Niggers, Go Back to the Cotton Fields."³

Toward the end of August, the Black Shirt leaders claimed to have found over six hundred jobs for the members. About two weeks later, Lamar Travis stated that the Black Shirts had found one thousand jobs. With a membership ranging from 21,000 to 40,000 members, many of whom were expecting the organization to find them jobs, there is somewhat of a discrepancy between the promise of the organization and

¹"Black Shirt Meeting," Atlanta Constitution, July 24, 1930, p.12.
³Tindall, op.cit., p.373.
its performance. Although there was no fee required for an application for membership, the actual membership card cost one dollar. Each member had to pay the required dollar in order that his name be placed on an employment list at the Fascisti Employment Bureau. This dollar fee was supposed to be a charge that would be required only until the organization reached a certain size. It was also stipulated at one of the later meetings that after the organization had been in existence for one year, each member would be required to pay "monthly dues" of ten cents, ostensibly to bear the expenses of the central office.

Upon paying the dollar fee, the member's name was placed upon the employment list and he was given a promise that employment would be found for him "as quickly as possible," or within a period of ninety days.

There were reports of Black Shirt members making demands on the Atlanta trucking companies to fire all Negro drivers and replace them with white men; they also made demands on the Atlanta hotels to fire Negro employees and replace them with whites. Around this time, a Black Shirt member, according to the Macon Telegraph said that:

Negroes could expect a hard winter. . . . Before Christmas there isn't going to be a black bell boy or a black truck driver in Atlanta and before the middle of next year, there won't be one in a job in Georgia. . . . This is a white man's country and there are too many Negroes in jobs and too many white men out of jobs.¹

Perhaps the Black Shirts' efforts in "assisting" their members to get jobs limited to some extent any other activities during the short

period the organization was in existence. On the other hand, according to the figures mentioned above, the organization did not carry out its promises to its members to any great extent, which could possibly be one reason why the organization petered out in such a short period of time.

**Opposition to the Black Shirts**

There was some opposition to the Black Shirts -- from the Fulton County Grand Jury and from the city and out-of-town newspapers. There was no organized opposition, neither was there any public denouncement of the group from the business community. However, the Atlanta business community did not give in to the demands of the Black Shirts to fire Negroes and replace them with whites during the time the organization operated.¹ But it is significant to mention that, during the next two years, when the effects of the Depression were being sorely felt in the city, the business community, wittingly or unwittingly, adopted some of the employment policies of the Black Shirts and did hire white people to replace Negroes who had been fired, allegedly for attempted rape or selling liquor illegally.²

Perhaps the strongest opposition facing the Black Shirt order came from outside the city of Atlanta, particularly from the out-of-town newspapers. One of the first newspapers to attack the Black

²Tindall, loc.cit.
Shirts was the Macon Telegraph. This paper not only criticized the organization and its leaders, but Atlanta and the Atlanta newspapers as well. In an editorial on August 26, W. T. Anderson, the editor, stated that:

The Black Shirts rely upon the discontent and unrest incident to unemployment. ... [The leaders] Holt Gewinner, get together and dope it out that money can be obtained from the unemployed at a dollar a head to make up an Order of Fascisti of Black Shirts. There isn't one in the organization that knows what the name means, that's all the better. ... 1

The same article criticized the Atlanta newspapers for remaining silent during much of the Black Shirt activity:

What have the Atlanta newspapers been doing that they have permitted a thing like this to blossom and flourish in the capital of Georgia, and never a line about it? They are bound to have known of it, with the stores there making special window displays of black shirts at bargain prices and advertising them in the Atlanta papers. Surely it was not the advertising of the black shirts that made them mum and apparently hopeful that the organization would be a great success. ... A newspaper's job is to look after the public interest and take the public into confidence. ... We have Atlanta and her newspapers to thank for this, as publicity in the beginning would have prevented their getting 2,100 members, instead of 21,000. 2

Another newspaper which attacked the group, on August 28, was the Negro-owned Savannah Tribune. In an editorial entitled "An Organization of Hate," it was stated that: "The main purpose of this one is the putting of a white man in every job a Negro holds. Deeper laid than this is their purpose because in their very soul they are imbued with intense hatred for the Negroes." 3

1"Crack the Head..." Macon Telegraph, August 26, 1930, p.1.

2Ibid.

About ten days after this article was published, Holt Gewinner, according to the Associated Press, said that: "We [Black Shirts] are the best friend the Negro has ever had, and all we ask is that he stay in his place." Other Georgia newspapers, such as the Athens Herald and the Post Bainbridge Searchlight, condemned the policies and the activities of the Black Shirts.

Although the Atlanta newspapers were silent at the beginning of the Black Shirts' activities during the month of August, the Journal and Constitution editorials began to attack bitterly the order commencing in early September. The Constitution, on September 2, made the statement that: "the Black Shirt movement is un-American, unjust, un-Christian and uncivilized." On the same day, the Journal said that: "its 'Black Shirts' policies were unsound and unworkable."

On September 19, the Constitution wrote an editorial called "End of the Black Shirts;"

The fact seems to be that the "Black Shirts," who recently threatened to fascisticize the city and state have petered out. The founders have floundered upon the impregnable rocks of law and public opinion. Misguided men who endeavor to organize prejudice, hatred and intimidation for any purpose, whether of mass terrorism or private profit, must be met by the stern opposition of every citizen who is loyal to the fundamental principles of freedom, humanity and justice.

3 "Black Shirt Fascism Not Needed...," Atlanta Journal, September 2, 1930, p.10.
The passing out of the "Black Shirts" relieves Atlanta from the stigma of being its birthplace, removes a menace to the public order, and should be a warning to other misguided persons not to start here again any such unholy and intolerable movement.¹

On September 26, the Constitution hit out again at the Black Shirts with an editorial which said that Americans have no objection to Black Shirts in Italy or even to Red Shirts in Russia, but that they insist that this type of order is not at home in America and that Americans could do better than to imitate the reactionary institutions of Europe.²

Religious leaders in Atlanta put forth very little opposition to the hate organization -- obviously Negro ministers would, of necessity, need to keep silent, because of fear of physical harm. The white ministers of all denominations seemed to be indifferent to the purposes and philosophy of the Black Shirts; they felt secure in the knowledge that they were a part of the thought and conscience of the public and did not question whether that public conscience was good or bad.³

Some Atlanta ministers, however, did support Acting Mayor Everett Millican, who, following the murder of Hubert, called for racial harmony and peace in the city and condemned un-named "irresponsible factions" for creating racial tension in the city."⁴

¹"End of the Black Shirts, Atlanta Constitution, September 19, 1930, p.10.
²"Democratic America," ibid., September 26, 1930, p.10.
Two out-of-town ministers were reported to have criticized the Black Shirts. The Reverend Cecil A. Jarman of the First Christian Church of Decatur (DeKalb County) had denounced the organization in a sermon and called the movement a menace to the future welfare of Georgia and the South.¹ The Reverend E. F. Cook of Vineville Methodist Church in Macon said that the trouble with movements such as the Black Shirts is that they are essentially selfish and violate the spirit and law of love.²

The existence of the Black Shirts was of such short duration that there was little time for internal strife. Wood, one of the original organizers, had differences of opinion with Gewinner, who had taken over the organization within a very short space of time. These differences were not publicized to any great extent, but The Black Shirt criticized Wood for his efforts to set up a Black Skirt auxiliary.³

Much more publicity was given to the argument between Gewinner and Lee, due to the fact that Lee obtained an injunction to temporarily block the granting of the charter to the organization.⁴ Both the white Atlanta newspapers wrote about this injunction in detail.

During the investigation of the Black Shirts by the Fulton

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¹"Decatur Minister Attacks Black Shirts in Sermon, Atlanta Journal, September 1, 1930, p.3.
²"Order Condemned by Macon Civitans, Atlanta Constitution, August 30, pp. 1, 5.
³Tribble, loc.cit.
⁴Lee Injunction, op.cit.
County Grand Jury, R. S. Gulledge, one of the original petitioners (who later resigned), gave testimony that was extremely harmful to the organization, for example, possible military implications. Gulledge's testimony was given in detail by the Journal.  

After the investigation of the group by the Fulton County Grand Jury was closed, the Journal reported that the Grand Jury had urged the mayor (I. N. Ragsdale) to deny permission to the Black Shirts to parade, saying that: "We have sufficient evidence to convince us that the Black Shirt organization has no place in the life of the city, for the reason that it has created a spirit of unrest throughout the city." The Solicitor-General of Fulton County, John A. Boykin, a one-time Klansman, after hearing all the testimony presented at the investigation, assailed the Order as an organization formed to create racial prejudice, and regarded it as a menace.  

Ironically, opposition to the Black Shirts came from a rival hate organization -- the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan -- in the form of criticism of the Order as being led by a personal friend of Mussolini, adding that its members were un-American and untrustworthy for supporting a foreign despot.  

2"Fulton County Grand Jury...," ibid., September 25, 1930, p.2.  
4"Fascist League Reviving...," The Kourier Magazine, op.cit.
There were many factors contributing to the disintegration of the Black Shirts; lack of a charter; its leading organizer was serving a jail sentence and the organization, therefore, was leaderless; there was external pressure from the local and out-of-town press and from federal and local grand juries; rival hate organizations were active and being formed; and the organization was not carrying out its promises to its members to find jobs for them.

The Black Shirts were short-lived; some of the organization's policies and principles remained in the minds of many individuals in the city, including businessmen. During the next decade, the Klan witnessed a weak revival and although some hate organizations were formed, none of them became strong enough to influence the city to any great extent.
CHAPTER IV

THE COLUMBIANS INCORPORATED

A Brief History

Within less than one year after the end of World War II, Atlanta witnessed the formation of another self-styled benevolent and patriotic order called "The Columbians Incorporated." Members of the organization usually wore khaki shirts and black ties.

On August 16, 1946, the Fulton County Superior Court granted a charter to the petitioners: Emory Burke, 1486 Marbut Avenue, S.E., Atlanta (DeKalb County); and Homer L. Loomis, Jr. and John H. Zimmerlee, Jr., both of 82 Bartow Street, N.W., Atlanta (Fulton County). 1

The petition for the charter stated that the organization:

...desired to be incorporated and made a body politic as a patriotic, and political group for the purpose of perpetuating the American National Spirit as manifested by the noble lives and heroic actions of our forefathers and the great leaders of our past. ...

...is not organized for the purpose of pecuniary gain but is charitable, benevolent and patriotic in character.

...is to encourage our people to think in terms of race, nation and faith, and to work for a national moral reawakening, in order to build a progressive white community

1Records of the Fulton Superior Court, Petition for Charter, No. 18598, August 16, 1946.
that is bound together by a deep spiritual consciousness of a common past and determination to share a common future.¹

Judge Frank Hooper, who granted the charter, was quoted later as saying, with a certain amount of surprise that: "he did not read the document."²

It was reported that the thirty-two-year-old Homer Loomis, Jr., who was secretary of the order, had spent a great deal of time in New York, where he had "learned to hate Jews and Negroes and decided to come South and start something."³

On November 13, the Atlanta Journal carried an article that linked Emory C. Burke with a number of important fascist leaders and notorious German Bundists, whom he had met in New York. The article also stated that Burke, since November 14, 1936, had been in contact with Captain Hamilton Beamish, head of the Imperial Fascist League of England, and Dean of the International Anti-Semitic Movement, and Ernest Elmhurst, American Nazi and important Bundist. In addition, the same source alleged that Homer Maertz and Ernest Elmhurst, immediately following the end of the war, had traveled to a number of large cities in the United States, including Atlanta, with large sums of money to be used in organizing fascist groups throughout the country. These two men enlisted the militant die-hard Klansmen and other

¹Ibid.


fascist elements to carry on the fascist cause in the United States. There is a possibility that Elmhurst, Maertz, Burke and Loomis had met previously either in Atlanta or another city, to make arrangements for the formation of the Columbians Incorporated in Atlanta. The Journal also said that their information had been given to them by a staff investigator for the House Un-American Activities Committee of the Scripps-Howard newspapers, who was withholding his identity from the public.1

Vester Ownby, who was the attorney who filed the petition for the charter for the Columbians, in an interview with the author, denied that he joined the Black Shirts,2 although several Atlanta citizens, who wished to remain anonymous, alleged that he was a member of the group. He was a member of and the attorney for the Columbians and was a frequent speaker at their meetings.3 He was also a close friend of Holt Gewinner, the one-time leader of the Black Shirts.4 In addition to his association with the Columbians, Ownby was an Exalted


2 Attorney Vester Ownby, private interview in his office, Standard Federal Building, on July 18, 1968 (hereinafter cited as Interview with Ownby).


4 Interview with Ownby, July 18, 1968.
Cyclops of Riverdale Klavern (No.207) in North East Atlanta.\(^1\)

Another member of the Columbians was James L. Shipp, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, the founder of the Commoner Party and head of the Gentile Army;\(^2\) he made several financial contributions to the khaki-shirted group.

The Columbians Incorporated developed in a climate of insecurity and fear manifested by the aftermath of World War II. Before the war had ended, many whites were beginning to fear the possibility of a "new Negro" and the need to find a way of "keeping Negroes in their place." In Atlanta, Klansmen were reported to be bragging in private about murdering a Negro taxi driver.\(^3\) Racial feelings were running high and the Columbians coasted along on the tension; they not only accepted the role of "keeping the Negroes in their place" but attempted to keep Atlanta Negroes in their own neighborhoods by patrolling the streets in the white residential areas, thus usurping police power. According to Homer Loomis, Jr., many Atlanta white people called his office for protection because the Atlanta police were too busy dealing with Negro disturbances in the city.\(^4\)

\(^1\)Judge Dan Duke, private interview held in his Chambers in the Criminal Court, Fulton County Court House, July 11, 1968 (hereinafter cited as Interview with Judge Dan Duke); "No Race Cops in Atlanta Is Aim," Pittsburgh Courier, December 27, 1946, pp.1,4.

\(^2\)Georgia v. The Columbians.

\(^3\)"Racial Tensions Rock the South," Christian Century, LXIII (September 18, 1946), 1216.

The requirements for membership in the khaki-shirted organization were fairly simple for a white, Protestant male or female. Usually prospective members were asked three questions: "Do you hate Negroes?" "Do you hate Jews?" and "Do you have $3.00?" In order to be personally identified with the organization, prospective members were then asked to pay two extra dollars for the Columbian "red flash insignia." 

Perhaps one of the strangest requirements for a member was that of living a strictly ascetic life until the terrorist order had gained control — members were not supposed to drink or smoke, and were to abstain from a normal sex life. Although the Order was open to women, only two or three women were members; according to a membership, there was a total of 178 members. Only a handful of the members were war veterans and some of them were drawing GI unemployment compensation; others were still on terminal leave. Loomis, and Zimmerlee, who was a student at the Georgia Institute of Technology, were said to be war veterans, but Burke had not served in the armed forces. The group encouraged younger men to join so they could participate vigorously in military drills and marches which were held

1"Georgia Fascists," Life, XXI (December 23, 1946), 28.
3Ibid.
4Interview with Judge Dan Duke, July 11, 1968.
5"Terror Inc.," New Republic, CXV (November 18, 1946), 657.
at the group's headquarters, but older men were allowed to join in order to give support and numerical strength.

There is little doubt that the Columbians appealed to individuals who had or still associated with "benevolent and patriotic orders." For instance, Holt Gewinner, the leader of the American Fascisti Association and Order of Black Shirts in the 1930's was not only a member of the Columbians,¹ but actively aided the organization from September 2 to October 2 by renting them his automobile.²

There was internal strife in the Columbians; the leaders discovered spies and informants among the members. During November, 1946, they discovered that Mario Buzzi and Renee Forrest were investigators for the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League of New York. These two persons had been able to get photostatic copies of important Columbian documents and later turned them over to Eugene Cook, the Attorney-General.³ Stetson Kennedy, who wrote Southern Exposure and many anti-Klan and anti-Columbian articles and who was, at one time, a member of the Klan and of the Columbians,⁴ was also a spy in the latter group and turned over information he had obtained while a member to Assistant Attorney-General Dan Duke. The information consisted of a membership

¹Georgia v. The Columbians.
³"Negroes Are Being Shoved Fast Up 'Fascist Creek,'" Pittsburgh Courier, December 13, 1946, p.20.
list, a map of the city (divided into black and white sections) and a book giving telephone numbers of the members.¹

On December 10, the *Atlanta Journal* reported that two of the trusted leaders of the Columbians, Ralph Childers and Lanier Waller, had revealed the plans and policies of the organization, i.e., to create racial tension in the city, to take over Atlanta within a period of six months, to take over Georgia within a period of two years, to take over the South within four years and the United States within ten years.² They also informed the Fulton County Grand Jury that the order had purchased dynamite illegally to be used to create chaos in the city by damaging the Atlanta Police Station, the Journal-Constitution Building, City Hall and the City Auditorium.³

In December, Assistant Attorney-General Dan Duke charged that the Columbians were losing members rapidly (it should be remembered that the highest figure for membership was, at the most, two hundred);⁴ Jim Akin, assistant secretary, countered this by saying that only twelve members had resigned.⁵

At the beginning of 1947, it was obvious that the Columbians

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²"Two Columbians Bare Aims of Terrorism," *Atlanta Journal*, December 10, 1946, pp.1,8.


⁴Carter, *loc.cit.*

were doomed to fall apart. There was no active leadership; the order was being investigated by the Fulton County Grand Jury, and was about to be investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee; there was strong opposition from the city, state and national authorities; and the newspapers were carrying on an extremely strong campaign against the organization.

In April, Solicitor-General Paul Webb of Fulton County was reported to have said that "the back of the Columbians has been broken"; although it was not until June 27, 1947, that the Charter of The Columbians Incorporated was revoked.

At the time the charter was revoked, Emory Burke and Homer Loomis, Jr. were free on bond. Up until 1949, it appeared that neither of these men had served any time in prison for crimes for which they had been indicted and sentenced. Apparently, some time during the 1950's, they were put in jail, because Vester Ownby said that "he got the boys out on parole."

About two years after the Columbians' Charter had been canceled, Attorney-General Eugene Cook launched an investigation of the American Bilbo Club. It was found that Loomis and Ira Jett (two Columbians)

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4Interview with Ownby, July 18, 1968.
were trying to reorganize the Columbians under the name of the American Bilbo Club.¹ There is no evidence that this latter organization was ever chartered in Fulton County. In connection with the reorganization, Clarence H. Knight, who was a brother-in-law of Homer Loomis, Jr., stated that Loomis was behind this move and that the aims of the Bilbo Club were identical with those of the Columbians and that the Bilbo Club was being financed by foreign and subversive interests.²

Activities of the Columbians Incorporated

The meetings of the Columbians, which were held spasmodically, usually opened with prayer and patriotic, martial music, such as "The Stars and Stripes Forever" and Sousa's "Washington Post March."³ After the prayers, the speakers would make bitter and vigorous attacks on minority groups -- against Negroes, Jews, communists, the rich, the newspapers, labor unions and, in fact, anyone who opposed the Columbians. To quote just two examples: On November 8, the Journal reported that Emory Burke, the president, told his audience that Negroes were the shock troops of the future Jewish-communist revolution and declared that the Americans who had died in Europe had not given their lives to give "niggers" the right to marry white American women. Loomis,


secretary of the organization, who although a Northerner, usually attempted to speak with a Southern accent, would tell his audiences that the idea of little white children having to go to school with black little devils was a move toward integration and the end of the white race.¹ Sometimes as much as $75.00 was collected from the persons attending these meetings.

The speakers also told their audiences that if the country were rid of its thirteen million Negroes and its four and one half million Jews, all its problems would be solved. They also said that when they came into power, they would pass laws that would kill Jews and bury Negroes in the sand.² At one point, Loomis suggested that the Union of South Africa should be bought from Great Britain and American Negroes should be sent there, or that the Negroes should be given the former German territory of Southwest Africa and set up as the forty-ninth state with a minimum standard of living with a promise of independence later. He also proposed that all Jews be sent to live somewhere in the area of the Mediterranean Sea.³

The Columbians practiced military marches and drills in and around their headquarters;⁴ the membership was divided into companies

²"Terror, Inc.," New Republic, CXV (November 18, 1946), 657.
³Tom Ham, "Columbians Leaders Eloquent on Ideals," Atlanta Journal, November 3, 1946, p.12A.
⁴Interview with Judge Dan Duke, July 11, 1968.
and each company was responsible to a captain.\footnote{Georgia v. The Columbians.} It was also reported that Colombians unlawfully patrolled the streets of Atlanta and questioned Negroes traveling through and in the white southside area.\footnote{"Two Colombians Indicted as Students Assail Third," Atlanta Constitution, November 19, 1946, p.5.}

About two months after the Colombians had obtained their charter, the first of the terrorist activities of the group against Negroes took place. On October 28, Clifford Hines, a twenty-three-year-old Negro man, was beaten with a blackjack by three white men. One of the three attackers, James Ralph Childers, was arrested because he was carrying the Columbian insignia in his pocket. The other two men were not carrying evidence of being members of the organization and were not arrested. The Negro man who was beaten was arrested also, although white bystanders reported that the attack against him was unprovoked.\footnote{"Toy Hitlers," Newsweek, XXVIII (November 11, 1946), 31.} At a meeting held shortly after this incident, Childers was honored by the Colombians with a Medal of Honor.\footnote{"Columbians Pledge Anti-Negro...," Atlanta Journal, November 1, 1946, p.9.}

The night after Childers was honored, Negroes reported that their homes had been bombed, shot at and stoned. The next morning, October 31, a house at 333 Ashby Street, S.W. was bombed by the occupants of a passing car. The house was occupied by Minnie Sibley and

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her family; it was located in a former white neighborhood but the
Sibley family was Negro.\(^1\)

The Atlanta police averted violence at a meeting of over five
hundred persons, two hundred of whom were Jewish War Veterans;\(^2\) and
they also managed to keep the peace when a group of Columbians attempt-
ed to block Frank Jones and his family, who were Negroes, from moving
into 727 Garibaldi Street, which had formerly been occupied by a white
family. In this instance, police came and arrested four of the white
troublemakers (Homer Loomis, Jim Akin, Jack Price and R. I. Whitman)
who were actually wearing armbands with the Columbian insignia and
carrying signs which read "White Community Only," "Zoned for Whites."\(^3\)
There were various bombing and rock-throwing incidents,\(^4\) to which the
Atlanta newspapers gave a great deal of publicity, charging the
Columbians with being the ringleaders.

Many citizens of Atlanta, especially those who actively op-
posed the Columbians, received threats from the members. One of the
best known persons to be threatened was Ralph McGill, editor of the
Atlanta Constitution, who wrote hostile editorials toward the group.
Two Columbians called on him and threatened to "fix him" if he did

\(^1\)"Bomb Rips a House in Atlanta Tension," New York Times,
November 1, 1946, p.2.

\(^2\)"Four Members Jailed in New Racial Disorders as Hornsby
Asks Columbians Be Outlawed," Atlanta Constitution, November 3, 1946,
p.14-A.

\(^3\)Ibid.

\(^4\)"Seize Four in Atlanta Group," New York Times, November 1,
1946, p.2.
not stop his criticism. The chairman of the Atlanta Christian Council's Committee on Racial Relations reported that Negroes living on the fringes of white areas were constantly threatened by Columbians.

The Columbians ventured into politics on November 8, 1946. Homer Loomis announced that the Columbians were forming a "White Working Man's Party," which would work for the interest of the white working men only and pledge to work for race separation, and higher pay checks (presumably, for white workers only). They also believed that if they created enough racial disturbances in the city, the people of Atlanta would want complete separation of the races, and when this point was reached, that the Columbians could vote in one of their members as mayor. It should be mentioned that after the mayor, they had hopes of higher official positions -- in city, county, state and then national.

It is believed that the Columbians did publish an official organ; on November 5, Emory Burke reported that the Columbians were planning to publish a weekly and eventually a daily newspaper.

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1 Folliard, op. cit., pp. 734-35.
5 Ham, loc. cit.
Although Franklin M. Garrett, who wrote *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, says that he cannot recall any mention of a Columbian newspaper,\(^1\) in the court suit between Holt Gewinner and the Columbians, Incorporated, mention was made of *The Thunderbolt* as being the official organ of the organization.\(^2\)

In the month of November, Loomis and Burke were indicted on charges of inciting riots, illegal possession of explosives and usurping police power.\(^3\) These two men were two of the original petitioners. R. I. Whitman, a war veteran, and a member of the Columbians, was also charged with similar misdemeanors.\(^4\) Also in November, the group was experiencing difficulties in finding a meeting place; the group had previously used the Labor Hall, but on November 15, this location had been tear-gas bombed. After this incident, the Plumbers and Steam Fitters Local would no longer rent the hall to the Columbians,\(^5\) and it appeared obvious that other persons were reluctant to rent meeting places to the group in case their property was damaged also.

Also in November, two court suits were entered against the

\(^1\)Conversation with Franklin M. Garrett, January 6, 1969.

\(^2\)Gewinner v. The Columbians.


\(^4\)"Two Columbians Indicted...," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 19, 1946, p.5.

Columbians: Holt Gewinner sued them for money\(^1\) and the State of Georgia sought to revoke the charter.\(^2\) The Fulton County Grand Jury began an investigation of the Columbians under the direction of Solicitor-General E. E. Andrews during the month.\(^3\)

**Opposition to the Columbians**

There was a great deal of local, state and national opposition to the Columbians, which commenced immediately after the first incident of violence was reported. There was an extremely unfavorable reaction from people in Atlanta, as well as in the rest of the country, as national, state and local newspapers began to write highly critical articles about the racial tensions being created in the city by members of the Columbians.

Nationally, the group was attacked by journals and newspapers,\(^4\) the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League of New York, under the chairmanship of Dr. James H. Sheldon, investigated the organization and turned over its affidavits to state and local officials;\(^5\) Representative J.

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\(^1\)Gewinner v. The Columbians.

\(^2\)Georgia v. The Columbians.

\(^3\)"Two Columbians Indicted...," Atlanta Constitution, November 19, 1946, p.5.

\(^4\)"Miserable Columbians," New Republic, CXV (December 23, 1946); ibid., CXVI (February 24, 1947); Newsweek, XXVII (November 11, December 23, 1946); Time, VIII (November 11, 25, 1946); Nation, CLXIV (March 1, 1947); Christian Century, LXIII (September 18, November 20, 1946); New York Times, November 1, 3, 4, 5, 1946; Pittsburgh Courier, November 8, 13, December 13, 27, 1946.

Parnell Thomas from New Jersey, incoming chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee, on November 26, said the first order of business in 1947 would be the investigation of the Columbians, the American Veterans Committee charged that "the actions and ideas of the Columbians are those of Hitler's party in Germany" and asked the State of Georgia to revoke the organization's charter, and the Jewish War Veterans, with over 1,200 delegates in a meeting in Atlantic City, adopted a resolution commending Governor Ellis Arnall and Ralph McGill for their efforts against the Klan and the Columbians of Atlanta, and denouncing both organizations.

Statewide, opposition came from the newspapers and various civic and religious groups, including the Georgia Veterans of World War II, who went on record as being strongly condemning such un-American organizations as those masquerading under the style of Columbians Inc. and the Georgia Association of Women Lawyers.

Locally, the press led the attack. The two white-owned news-

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5"Georgia Amvets Hit at Columbians, Inc.," Atlanta Journal, November 11, 1946, p.17.

papers in Atlanta, the Constitution\(^1\) and the Journal\(^2\) wrote almost daily articles and editorials attacking the Columbians.

Ralph McGill, in an editorial on November 13, commenting on the leadership and members, said:

... Nazis are all alike, whether they are in Germany or parading in Mussolini's Black Shirts. The Nazi type mind is cracked and lends itself to all sorts of aberrations, including those of sex. ... So, to find wife deserters, a rapist, and wife beaters as leaders of this "noble" order is quite what one might expect. Without exception, all members of this group, who have come to public eye, are failures who have never managed to hold a job, but who blame someone else for their own laziness and their own failures.\(^3\)

The Constitution, in an article entitled "Two Columbians Indicted as Students Assail Third," wrote that the order:

... followed the Nazi pattern.

This sort of thing cannot be tolerated. People are calling them instead of the police and it appears they ultimately intend to take over the government. They patrol streets and make criminal investigations like Nazi Storm Troopers.\(^4\)

At various times, the Constitution referred to the Columbians as chronic soreheads, white trash, the punks, the hoodlums and the toughs who have no faith in themselves and hate their own country and

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\(^1\)Atlanta Constitution, October 30, 31; November 2, 3, 5, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 27, 29; December 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 1946.

\(^2\)Atlanta Journal, October 31; November 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 29, 30; December 10, 11, 12, 15, 1946; January 5, 1947.

\(^3\)Ralph McGill, Atlanta Constitution, November 13, 1946, p.4.

\(^4\)Atlanta Constitution, November 19, 1946, p.5.
its people.

The Journal, also, criticized the Columbians at every opportunity; it wrote up every violent incident and every charge made against the leaders.

The Negro-owned newspaper, the Atlanta Daily World, was just as vehement in its reporting of the various incidents of violence and of the purposes and ideals of the Columbians. In an editorial on November 5, 1946, the World reported that:

... The Columbians don't like the Negroes. They don't like the Jews. ... It is not enough to revoke the license of such a crowd, as some are suggesting. Atlanta must go further, and insist, as Assistant Attorney Dan Duke has pointed out, on seeing that they are uprooted from our soil. ... The action of Police Chief W. A. Hornsby saved Atlanta from the disgraceful results of a race riot, from which all upstanding and responsible citizens would have been the sufferers, simply because of the rabid mouthings of a handful of irresponsible people, who know nothing and care less, about mutual progress and interracial understanding. The marvel is that such pogroms have been permitted to run so long unchecked, in the capital of Georgia, ... .

The Daily World also reprinted an editorial entitled "The Common Defense," which appeared in the Birmingham World, which accused the Columbians of not being able to accept the American creed and felt that the members of the organization could not conscientiously pledge allegiance to the American flag which is an expansion of the American creed, when they had pledged themselves to ridding the country of the

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1 Atlanta Daily World, November 5, 6, 8, 9, 15, 18, 19, 1946; February 15, 1947.

2 Atlanta's Hate Peddlers, ibid., November 5, 1946, p.6.
Negroes and the Jews as well as others.¹

One other Atlanta newspaper consistently attacked the
Columbians, a weekly newspaper, The Southern Israelite, edited by
Adolph Rosenberg. It reported all incidents connected with the Columbians
in an extremely unfavorable light and wrote editorials saying that the
order was a menace to the peace, security and goodwill of the community,
and that it was patterned after the Hitler brown-shirted youth move-
ment.²

The quantity and the fierceness of the attacks from the local
newspapers encouraged public opposition from other groups and individ¬
uals. The Atlanta business community knew the Columbians were not
an asset to the city because the Atlanta Junior Chamber of Commerce
denounced the group and pledged its full support, with city and state
officials, to combat the Columbians. The Jaycees declared that:
"Many of our families, our members and friends have given their lives
and limbs in the world conflagration to stamp out such bigotry and
chicanery" and went on record as "wholly and unalterably opposed to
the Columbians."³

The police department waged a vigorous fight against the
Columbians, under the active leadership of Police Chief Hornsby. At
least on two occasions when violence between Columbians and non-

²The Southern Israelite, November 1, 8, 15, 1946.
³"Jaycees Pledge Aid in Fight on Columbians," Atlanta Journal,
November 18, 1946, pp. 1,5.
Columbians could have broken out, the police moved in swiftly to avert bloodshed by arresting the Columbians.\(^1\) On one occasion, Chief Hornsby told the Columbians that the Atlanta Police Department could patrol Atlanta's streets adequately and that it was not necessary for the Columbians to do so.\(^2\) Chief Hornsby was one of the most strident voices asking for the revocation of the Columbians' charter.\(^3\)

The religious groups in Atlanta also joined in the protest against and condemnation of the organization. The religious leaders in the city denounced the members of the order as "Hitlerites" or Nazi-patterned, un-Christian, un-American, undemocratic, and branded them as racial and religious hate peddlers. On November 3, the Constitution carried a list of names of ministers who signed the denunciation.\(^4\) Meanwhile the Atlanta Christian Council and the Atlanta Baptist Ministers Conference adopted a resolution denouncing the Columbian movement as anarchy and asking the Fulton County Grand Jury to investigate the order. The resolution stated that: "It is inconceivable that the Christian people of our beloved city and country would remain complacent when sinister movements, such as the Columbians appear to represent, are unleashed on our people."\(^5\) The resolution

\(^{1}\)"Four Members Jailed...," Atlanta Constitution, November 3, 1946, p.14-A.

\(^{2}\)"Two Columbians Indicted...," Atlanta Constitution, November 19, 1946, p.5.

\(^{3}\)"Four Members Jailed...," Atlanta Constitution, November 3, 1946, p.14-A.

\(^{4}\)Ibid.

was approved by more than sixty ministers.

During the latter part of November, the North Georgia Methodist Conference adopted a resolution condemning both the Klan and the Columbians as Hitleristic in nature and denouncing the activities and attitudes of both groups as "contrary to the Constitution, the Atlantic Charter, and the Christian religion." The American Legion Post No. 508 bitterly criticized the organization's hate campaign; and the Atlanta Council of Church Women came out publicly against the Columbians.

Leading the opposition from the political leaders was Ellis Arnall, the Governor of Georgia, who gave orders to revoke the charter obtained by the Columbians on the grounds that they were "peddling hate and intolerance among our people." Attorney-General Eugene Cook and Assistant Attorney-General Dan Duke of the State of Georgia most frequently and very bitterly denounced the organization and were in charge of the investigation of its activities made by the State.

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3"Four Members Jailed...," Atlanta Constitution, November 3, 1946, p.1h-A.


The Mayor of Atlanta, William B. Hartsfield, showed no hesitation in expressing strong opposition to the Colombians, saying that the city would not tolerate any form of violence from them or anybody else.1

The acts of violence, threats of terrorism and the boasted take-over of the city, state and nation, which were given such wide publicity throughout the country, caused bitter opposition to the Colombians. This opposition was expressed in articles and editorials in city, state and national newspapers and journals; in resolutions passed by professional, military, civic and women's organizations; and in investigations by the State of Georgia and the Fulton County Grand Jury.

The Colombians and their activities proved to the citizens of Atlanta, and to the rest of the country, that their real purpose was not to perpetuate the American national spirit as manifested by the noble lives of the great leaders of the past, but to take over the city, state and finally the nation with a form of totalitarianism government based on Naziism and Hitlerism.

In its case against the Colombians, the State of Georgia found that, although purporting to be charitable, benevolent and patriotic, the organization was:

... a secret membership group, constituting a secret political organization, having as its chief aims, the repression of the exercise of political and legal rights of

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1"Church Council Backs Drive...," Atlanta Constitution, November 27, 1946, p.9.
Negroes, Jews, and persons not of Anglo-Saxon extraction -- rights guaranteed to all persons who are citizens under the Constitution and laws of the United States and the Constitution and laws of the State of Georgia.¹

Insofar as encouraging people to think in terms of race, nation and faith, and to work for a national moral reawakening, the State said that:

... [The Columbians] engages in and carries on its affairs for the purpose of and the object of inculcating and disseminating racial and religious prejudice, intolerance, and hatred. That by means of propaganda and violent activities, it seeks to enforce its concepts and principles upon the people of the State of Georgia by violence, terrorism, and hate.²

These rebuttals by the State of Georgia, and the discrepancies between the stated purposes and the activities of the organization led to the Charter of the Columbians being revoked on June 27, 1947.

Significantly, The Columbians, Incorporated is still listed as a subversive organization by the House Un-American Activities Committee.

¹Georgia v. The Columbians.

²Ibid.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study of the three groups -- the Ku Klux Klan, the Black Shirts and the Columbians, Incorporated -- show that these hate organizations had more similarities than they had dissimilarities.

All three groups were fascist in nature and extremely nationalistic; each group had "the common enemy," but this common enemy took different shapes and forms depending on the period in which the particular group flourished; however, to all the three organizations the dominant common enemy was the Negro. All three groups accepted the idea of white supremacy but at some time during their existence, the idea of white supremacy was enlarged to include hatred of Jews, Catholics, communists, persons of foreign extraction and, in some instances, white people who opposed the activities and principles of these organizations.

The three organizations, in their petitions for charters, described themselves as "benevolent and patriotic" organizations; but this study reveals that they were violent in nature and un-American in character. According to the evidence, two of the organizations did not conform to the purposes as set forth in their charters -- the Ku Klux Klan and the Columbians. The third, the Black Shirts, never reached the point of being granted a charter, for their activities

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had demonstrated discrepancies in their stated purposes and these activities.

All three groups drew opposition sooner or later. Opposition to the Klan was slight at first but increased gradually, although the longer period of existence of the Klan of 1915 should be borne in mind. The Black Shirts experienced public opposition within the first two months of its existence; the Columbians were watched carefully right from the beginning of their formation by the police and newspaper reporters, but it took about three months for the group to be publicly denounced. Opposition, in all instances, came from newspapers, political leaders, church leaders and civic organizations.

The main difference between the three hate organization is the length of time each of them existed. The Klan of 1915 was a revival of the Reconstruction Klan and, as such, had historical significance. Although membership in the Klan decreased in some periods and increased in others and experienced a third revival following World War II, the Klan, following basically the same tenets and principles, still survives today. The other two organizations -- the Black Shirts and the Columbians -- were active for a period of less than one year. The author believes that the main reason for the survival of the Klan is its ability to become a part of the political and social structure of the community and to maintain an image unspoiled by foreign influence. The Black Shirts were identified with Mussolini's Black Shirts in Italy and the Columbians, in the minds of many people, were synonymous with Hitler's Storm Troopers and Nazi Germany.
Another difference revealed by this study is that all three organizations used various terms to interpret their meaning of the term "white supremacy," and held different views on the methods to be used to maintain a segregated society, i.e., "keep the Negro in his place," "send the Negroes from the cities back to the rural areas from which they came," "send the Negroes back to Africa and the Jews back to Palestine," and "kill the Jews and bury Negroes in the sand."

The study also reveals a certain amount of continuity in membership. Members of the Reconstruction Klan became members of the Klan of 1915. Some of the members of the Klan of 1915 became leaders and members of the Black Shirts (the Black Shirts were reported to have handed out to their members Klan application forms). Names of members of the Klan and of members of the Black Shirts were found in the membership list of The Columbians, Incorporated. Continuity is also found in the stated purposes and philosophy of the three organizations -- the Black Shirts and Columbians including in their petitions for charters the creed and precepts of the Klan.

The reader has been shown that hate groups have been able to form, function and flourish in Atlanta for certain periods of time; but Atlanta is in no way different from other urban areas of the United States, for chapters or branches of these three organizations, and other organizations similar in nature, have been formed throughout the country.
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