

The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Decline of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in Alabama, 1964–1971

JOHN DRABBLE

ON SEPTEMBER 2, 1964, THE FBI LAUNCHED a highly secretive and extra-legal domestic covert action program called COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, which sought to “expose, disrupt and otherwise neutralize” Ku Klux Klan groups in the United States.¹ During 1965, as the FBI facilitated a crucial criminal prosecution of Alabama Klansmen and an effective House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) exposé, the bureau’s COINTELPRO operations exposed and discredited leaders of the Alabama-based United Klans of America (UKA). Beginning in 1966, an accelerated campaign of disruption involving “notional” (fake) communications, “snitch-jacketing” operations that framed effective Klan organizers as spies, and the use of informants further aggravated internal factionalism in Klan organizations. The result of these operations was increased frustration, resignation, and

John Drabble is an Assistant Professor in the American Culture and Literature Program at Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Republic of Turkey. In summers, he teaches in the International Area Studies Teaching Program at the University of California Berkeley. He would like to thank the editorial staff of the *Alabama Review*, as well as his father Dr. John E. Drabble, who read early drafts of this manuscript.

¹Director to Atlanta et al., Sept. 2, 1964 (section 1), in *COINTELPRO: The Counterintelligence Program of the FBI*, 30 reels (Wilmington, Del., 1978). Unless otherwise indicated, all FBI documents cited in this article are from this microfilm collection, the most complete record of COINTELPRO operations available. The White Hate records comprise reels eighteen through twenty. Unless otherwise indicated, communications between FBI executives are contained in section one, and communications between FBI headquarters and field offices are contained (in rough chronological order), in the respective field office files. Given a lack of historiography on Klan activity in Alabama after 1965, and redactions in COINTELPRO documents, the author used newspaper articles and Michael Newton and Judy Ann Newton, eds., *The Ku Klux Klan: An Encyclopedia* (New York, 1991), to provide narrative context and to identify COINTELPRO targets. The term COINTELPRO is an amalgam of “counterintelligence program.”

fear among rank and file members, leading to extensive membership losses during the next five years. Other COINTELPRO operations disrupted relations between the UKA national leadership and officers in other states, facilitating an overall reduction in Klan activity and membership, both in Alabama and throughout the South.

This story is not well known, because scholarship on COINTELPRO has been restricted to policy studies of institutional workings and of operations against civil rights, black nationalist, and New Left groups. Non-academic accounts are largely anecdotal.² Much of the scholarship on the civil rights movement focuses on the first half of the 1960s; consequently, the bureau's reluctance to suppress Klan violence before 1965 has received more attention than its efforts to undermine the Klan with COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE during the late 1960s.³

In particular, FBI performance regarding the 1963 Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham and the 1965 murder of Viola Liuzzo frames accounts of relationships between the FBI, southern law enforcement authorities, and the Alabama Klan.⁴ The problematic activities of FBI informant and Klan member Gary Thomas Rowe—who coordinated vigilante attacks on the Freedom Riders in 1961, was implicated by Alabama authorities in the Sixteenth Street church bombing, and who witnessed Liuzzo's murder—obscures the role COINTELPRO and the FBI played in weakening Klan influence and membership.⁵ Polemical accounts that use Rowe to frame

²John Drabble, "The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Decline of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in Mississippi, 1964–1971," *Journal of Mississippi History* 66 (Winter 2004): 353–56.

³Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233–63.

⁴Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York, 1987), 324–25; Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960–1972* (New York, 1989), 111–14; Michal R. Belknap, *Federal Law and Southern Order: Racial Violence and Constitutional Conflict in the Post-Brown South* (Athens, Ga., 1987), 121–22; Patsy Sims, *The Klan* (New York, 1978), 146–47; Frank Sikora, *Until Justice Rolls Down: The Birmingham Church Bombing Case* (Tuscaloosa, 1991), 63–73.

⁵Frank Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Political Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990), 308–11; William A. Nunnelle, *Bull Connor* (Tuscaloosa, 1991), 98–109; O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 87–89, 215–19; Glenn T. Eskew, *But For Birmingham: The*

analyses of the entire bureau effort against the Klan mischaracterize COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE as a police-state operation that used vigilantes to thwart progressive social change.⁶ In fact, relationships between the FBI and vigilantes changed greatly during the course of the twentieth century.⁷ Indeed, FBI operations facilitated alienation of the Klan from mainstream southern society, engendering a vehement antagonism against the FBI among Klan organizers.⁸

Between the overthrow of Reconstruction and World War II, Ku Klux Klan terror played an instrumental role in containing interracial movements opposed to white supremacy in Alabama.⁹ In the post-war period, white moderates were silenced and segregationist orthodoxy took hold as law enforcement authorities and elected officials sanctioned white supremacist terror, thus facilitating Klan

Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997), 153–64; J. Mills Thornton III, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa, 2002), 240–49, 643–44; Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York, 1995), 140–41, 186–94, 248; Gary Thomas Rowe Jr., *My Undercover Years with the Ku Klux Klan* (New York, 1976), 38–50, 55–66, 165–99; Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence (hereafter cited as “Church Committee”), *Final Report: Book Two*, 94th Congress, 1st and 2nd Sessions, 1975–1976, S. Rep. 94-755, p. 9, 12–13; Gary May, *The Informant: The FBI, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Murder of Viola Liuzzo* (New Haven, Conn., 2005), 26–48, 59–66, 182, 273–83, 293–94, 297–360, 368–71; Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama; the Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York, 2001), 436, 457, 484.

⁶Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars against Domestic Dissent* (Boston, 1990), 169–70, 335n30; Brian Glick, *War at Home: Covert Action against U.S. Activists and What We Can Do about It* (Boston, 1989), 12–13.

⁷John Drabble, “‘A Negative and Unwise Approach’: Private Detectives, Vigilantes and the FBI Counterintelligence, 1910–1972,” in Clive Emsley and Haia Shpayer-Makov, eds., *Police Detectives in History, 1750–1950* (Burlington, Vt., 2006), 219–50.

⁸John Drabble, “From White Supremacy to White Power: The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Nazification of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1970s,” *Journal of American Studies* (forthcoming).

⁹Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, 1979), 81–88; Brian Kelley, “Materialism and the Persistence of Race in the Jim Crow South,” *Historical Materialism* 12, no. 2 (2004): 3–19; Glenn Feldman, *Politics, Society, and the Klan in Alabama, 1915–1949* (Tuscaloosa, 1999); Robert P. Ingalls, “Anti-radical Violence in Birmingham During the 1930s,” *Journal of Southern History* 47 (November 1981): 521–44; Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 147–49; McWhorter, *Carry Me Home*, 44–45, 52–55, 72–73, 119.

organization.¹⁰ As direct action and voting registration campaigns by civil rights activists accelerated across the South after 1960, interstate Klan recruiters responded. Tuscaloosa resident Robert Shelton unified a number of Klan groups across the southeast in 1960 and 1961, creating the five hundred member-strong UKA and prompting an increase in Klan terror.¹¹

As U.S. Justice Department officials debated the extent of federal jurisdiction over civil rights violations in the American South after World War II, the White House accepted FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's reluctance to investigate cases of police brutality and vigilante violence. In response to an increase in Klan-type terrorism between 1957 and 1964, however, the U.S. Congress passed anti-bombing and civil rights legislation, forcing the FBI to change. Justice Department officials prodded a reluctant FBI into monitoring and infiltrating Klan-type groups and assisting local authorities that chose to launch criminal investigations of race-based violence.¹² National

¹⁰Michael J. Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement," *Virginia Law Review* 80 (February 1994): 7–150; Wade, *Fiery Cross*, 297–306; David Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (1981; repr., Durham, N.C. 1987), 343–65; Evelyn Rich, "Ku Klux Klan Ideology, 1954–1988" (PhD diss., Boston University, 1988), chapters 2–4; House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), *Report: The Present-Day Ku Klux Klan Movement*, 90th Congress, 1st sess., 1967, 9–16; Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 195, 199–200, 231, 251, 406–8; Andrew M. Manis, *A Fire You Can't Put Out: The Civil Rights Life of Birmingham's Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth* (Tuscaloosa, 1999), 168–73; Howell Raines ed., *My Soul Is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered* (New York, 1977), 167–70; McWhorter, *Carry Me Home*, 132–35, 141.

¹¹Rich, "Ku Klux Klan Ideology," 44–48; HUAC, *Present-Day KKK*, 21–22, 30–32, 48; Joseph Luders, "Countermovements, the State, and the Intensity of Racial Contention in the American South," in Jack A. Goldstone ed., *States, Parties and Social Movements* (New York, 2003), 27–44; Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 366–96; Wade, *Fiery Cross*, 305–32; McWhorter, *Carry Me Home*, 293–94, 303–4, and chapters 26–30; O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 111–14; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Justice: 1961 Commission on Civil Rights, Book 5* (Washington, D.C., 1961), 34; *New York Times*, March 27–28 and April 13, 1960; Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 113–14, 117, 227–28, 454–64. Klan organizing and activity in Alabama was centered in an area encompassing Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, Anniston, and Montgomery; David Chalmers, *Backfire: How the Ku Klux Klan Helped the Civil Rights Movement* (Lanham, Md., 2003), 28–29.

¹²O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 22–77; John T. Elliff, "Aspects of Federal Civil Rights Enforcement: The Justice Department and the FBI, 1939–1964," in Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, *Perspectives in American History: Law in American History* (New York, 1971), 605–73. The bureau compiled information on Klan groups and investigat-

outrage over the bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in September 1963 forced the bureau to launch an intensive criminal investigation of Klan activity. Agents questioned every known, former, or suspected Klansman in the area, which confirmed Klan suspicions that agents had infiltrated their ranks. Consequently, the UKA became extremely security conscious, fearing that agents had planted bugs in their meeting places and that the FBI would raid Klavern meetings; they even began accusing each other of informing. Yet FBI operations in Alabama remained limited to intelligence gathering, and a valuable intelligence resource was one man: Gary Thomas Rowe, who had infiltrated the UKA in 1960. He advanced into the UKA hierarchy in 1964 by continuing to participate in vigilante assaults, so as to refute charges from other Klansmen that he was working as a spy.¹³

Largely in response to Klan terror in Mississippi in the spring of 1964, Justice Department officials began to view violent segregationist counter-demonstrations and Klan terror as internal security matters, and proposed that a domestic security investigation of the Klan

ed Klan ties to police agencies and the state government; FBI File HQ 157-7, "Klan Type Organizations and Hate Groups," FBI File 157-28 Birmingham, "Klan Infiltration of Law Enforcement," and FBI File 157-822, "Volunteers for Alabama and Wallace," in private collection of Ernie Lazar, <http://ernie1241.googlepages.com/home>.

¹³Despite an FBI investigation to identify the perpetrators who bombed the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, no one was prosecuted until Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley took an interest in the case during the 1970s. The delay in prosecution occurred in part because Alabama law enforcement authorities scuttled the case but also because J. Edgar Hoover wanted to prevent exposure of a bureau informant. O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 22-77, 87-89, 111-14; Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 240-49, 345-47, 371, 643-44; Rowe, *My Undercover Years*, 100-101, 107-39; May, *The Informant*, 26-48, 59-66, 87-104, 106-14; McWhorter, *Carry Me Home*, 351-52, 425-26, 436, 457, 472-73, 477-78, 483-85, 509-65; Knoxville to Director, Oct. 15, 1964; Savannah to Director Oct. 14, 1964; Birmingham to Director, Dec. 13, 1966, and Jan. 5, 1967 (file 14, pp. 48 and 72), and unattributed article, "Family Man Complains of FBI Harassment" (file 8b, p. 57), in the FBI's Viola Liuzzo Murder files (BU File 44-28601), available online at <http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/liuzzo.htm> (hereafter cited as "Liuzzo file"); Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 167-94; Elizabeth H. Cobbs and Petric J. Smith, *Long Time Coming* (Birmingham, 1994), 58-59; Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 90, 248, 350, 411-12; Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, 355-60; Belknap, *Federal Law*, 121-22; David Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley, Calif., 2004), 188-89.

could provide intelligence for federal conspiracy prosecutions. In June, after police brutalized demonstrators in Tuscaloosa and black vigilantes launched an organized defense group to defend civil rights workers, Justice Department officials demanded that the FBI attempt to anticipate and prevent Klan violence.¹⁴

Bureau officials had already stepped up their efforts to predict and contain outbreaks of racial violence in response to civil disturbances in Jacksonville and St. Augustine, Florida, in May 1964—for example, informing Mobile police about a plot on the life of NAACP attorney Jack Greenberg. After minor incidents took place during June demonstrations in Montgomery, the bureau's leadership demanded that Alabama-based agents photograph and immediately alert headquarters of any outbreaks of violence; they also required Alabama agents to initiate informant coverage of all Klan meetings in order to anticipate violence. After Georgia Klansmen killed black soldier Lemuel Penn and Mississippi Klansmen killed three civil rights workers in Neshoba County that June, President Johnson ordered the FBI to suppress Klan activities. In response, the bureau launched an "internal security" investigation—an aggressive campaign of surveillance, harassment, infiltration, and intelligence collection that was the precursor to COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE.¹⁵

In cities such as Montgomery and Mobile, FBI and Justice Department officials worked with local police to thwart Klan activity.

¹⁴Drabble, "FBI in Mississippi," 364–65; John Drabble, "'To Ensure Domestic Tranquility': The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and Political Discourse, 1964–1971," *Journal of American Studies* 38 (August 2004): 307; Simon Wendt, "God, Gandhi and Guns: The African American Freedom Struggle in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1964–1965," *Journal of African American History* 89 (Winter 2004): 44–47. Rowe provided intelligence that thwarted a bomb plot and worked to ensure the election of a less militant Klan leader in his local unit during this period; May, *The Informant*, 106–11.

¹⁵Rosen to McGowan, May 30, 1964, and Belmont to Rosen, June 2, 1964 (reel 5), Director to Mobile, June 19, 1964, and teletype, Mobile to Director, June 23, 1964 (reel 7), and report, "Possible Racial Violence," Aug. 14, 1964 (reel 8) in David Garrow ed., *Centers of the Southern Struggle: FBI Files on Montgomery, Albany, St. Augustine, Selma, and Memphis*, 21 reels (Frederick, Md., 1988); William W. Keller, *The Liberals and J. Edgar Hoover: Rise and Fall of a Domestic Intelligence State* (Princeton, N.J., 1989), 86–87, 90, 207; Church Committee, *Hearings before the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence*, 94th Congress, 1st session, 6:213, 215, 231; Drabble, "The FBI in Mississippi," 365–67; Drabble, "'To Ensure Domestic Tranquility,'" 308.

When Klansmen made plans to interfere with the desegregation of movie theaters and restaurants in Montgomery, FBI agents alerted city police, who prevented interference with desegregation by dispersing Klansmen from the area. To deter night riding, FBI agents interviewed neighbors and employers of area Klansmen whom they considered violence prone, and conducted nighttime checks of their homes. Agents also created an impression that Klansmen were under virtually constant surveillance, so many began to worry that their telephones were tapped and that listening devices had been planted in their meeting places. Fearful of prosecution, Montgomery area Klansmen abstained from acts of violence or intimidation between July and October 1964. Demoralized, they even failed to appear at public anti-desegregation rallies, where FBI agents openly filmed segregationist demonstrators.¹⁶

After an African American self-defense group in Tuscaloosa returned fire at Klansmen during a mob assault on black teens testing the Civil Rights Act on July 8, 1964, police were forced to bring an end to a Klan harassment campaign there as well.¹⁷ That October, FBI informant Rowe helped thwart a Klan plot to bomb an integrated dance club by planting bootleg liquor and drugs provided by the Jefferson County sheriff's office, providing justification for an Alcohol Beverages Control Board raid that closed down the club without bloodshed.¹⁸

The federal campaign did not yet encompass the entire state. Klan organizing, vigilantism, and terrorism continued mostly unchallenged in many areas as the UKA gained influence in local elections and maintained hegemony in a number of union locals.¹⁹ According

¹⁶*New Orleans Times-Picayune*, Jan. 3, 1966; Mobile to Director, FBI, Oct. 12, 1964; FBI reports, "Possible Racial Violence," Aug. 14, 1964, and April 1, 1965, in Garrow, *Centers of the Southern Struggle*, reel 8; *New York Times*, Sept. 9, 1964; *Birmingham News*, Sept. 2, 6, 8, and 10, 1964; *Washington Post*, March 15, 1965.

¹⁷Wendt, "God, Gandhi, and Guns," 48.

¹⁸Rosen to Belmont, March 30, 1965 (part 5a, p. 18), Liuzzo file; Rowe, *My Undercover Years*, 140–57; May, *The Informant*, 115–17.

¹⁹*Saturday Evening Post*, Jan. 30, 1965; Michael Newton and Judy Ann Newton, *Racial and Religious Violence in America: A Chronology* (New York, 1991), 479–90; *New York Times*, Jan. 3 and April 20, 1965; HUAC, *Present-Day KKK*, 115; HUAC, *Activities of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in the United States*, 89th Congress, 1st sess., 1966, 3092–131; *Birmingham News*,

to one report, seven racially motivated slayings occurred in Alabama between January 1, 1965, and January 1, 1966, alone, and the first conviction in the South for a race-based murder did not occur until December 2, 1965.²⁰ (Alabama authorities convicted no one for the police killings of Jimmy Lee Jackson and Sammy Younge, or the vigilante killings of James Reeb, Jonathan Daniels, and Viola Liuzzo, all of which took place during 1965 and 1966. The 1965 conviction occurred when an Anniston jury found National States Rights Party employee Hubert Strange guilty of murdering Willie Lee Brewster, a black man who had not been involved in civil rights work. The first federal civil rights convictions since Reconstruction came on December 3, when FBI informant Gary Thomas Rowe testified that he had witnessed three Alabama Klansmen shoot and kill civil rights activist Viola Liuzzo.²¹)

Given the dismal prospect of obtaining criminal convictions of Klan vigilantes and the exponential increase in Klan violence that occurred during the 1964 Freedom Summer in Mississippi, bureau officials launched COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE in September 1964.²² As six hundred Klan leaders from across the South met openly in Birmingham's Tutwiler hotel that month, Birmingham

Feb. 7, 1966; George G. Kundahl, "Organized Labor in Alabama State Politics" (PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1967), 46–48, 68–69, 431–32; Robert J. Norrell, "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham," *Journal of American History* 73 (December 1986): 681, 689; Director to Burke Marshall, Oct. 26, 1964, in Garrow, *Centers of the Southern Struggle*, reel 8; press release, "NAACP Protests Bombing of Negro Home in Montgomery," Dec. 5, 1964, in John H. Bracey Jr. and August Meier, eds., *Papers of the NAACP: White Resistance and Reprisals, 1956–1965*, 1,292 reels (Bethesda, Md., 1995), part 20, reel 5, frame 835.

²⁰ *New York Times*, Jan. 31, 1966.

²¹ Belknap, *Federal Law*, chapter 1, 183, 187–204, 235; Mary Stanton, *From Selma to Sorrow: The Life and Death of Viola Liuzzo* (Athens, Ga., 1998), 46–49, 175–76; Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 71, 124, 151–52, 479–80; *London Times*, Dec. 4, 1965; Charles W. Eagles, *Outside Agitator: Jon Daniels and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993); *Birmingham News*, March 2, 1965; Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 486; HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 3822; *New York Times*, April 28, 1967. At this writing, Perry County authorities have charged a former state trooper in the Jackson killing; *Anniston Star*, May 25, 2007.

²² Gale to Tolson, July 30, 1964; Baumgardner to Sullivan, Aug. 27, 1964; Director to Atlanta, Sept. 2, 1964; Drabble, "FBI in Mississippi," 364–68. For analysis of the transition to covert action, see Keller, *Liberals and J. Edgar Hoover*, chapter 3.

FBI field office agents set out to disrupt relations between the UKA's Tuscaloosa-based Imperial Office and other Realms.²³ For example, some Klansmen had complained about inactivity during the past four months, so agents sent an anonymous letter to Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton. It claimed that Alabama Grand Dragon Robert Creel, who had long been loyal to Shelton, now coveted his position. As southern Alabama Klan officers began complaining that Creel favored northern Klaverns, informants reported that Shelton wanted Creel removed from office. The Alabama membership, however, re-elected him to another term in December.²⁴

Agents also searched for information that could be used to discredit Shelton, but found that the Imperial Wizard was "a man of good moral character" who did not drink or carouse, but instead spent most of his time on Klan work.²⁵ Ruling out vice, they searched for evidence that Shelton might have misappropriated Imperial Office funds (an effort that would bear fruit in hearings conducted by HUAC in late 1965).²⁶

During the winter of 1964–65 it became public knowledge that the FBI, the IRS, and other federal agencies were engaging in a Klan crackdown.²⁷ FBI investigators had determined the identities of UKA state officers and local unit leaders throughout Alabama; using that knowledge, they conducted a series of interviews with these officers, letting them know that the FBI was aware of their identities in the hopes of dissuading them from violence.²⁸ These infiltrations also en-

²³Director to Atlanta, Sept. 25, 1964, and attachment, "The Klan Today"; Atlanta to Director, Sept. 16, 1964; Baumgardner to Sullivan, Sept. 28, 1964; Director to Atlanta, Sept. 29, 1964. In the Klan lexicon, a Province encompassed a congressional district, a Realm a state, and the Invisible Empire the territory of the United States. For UKA nomenclature and organizational charts, see HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 1533, 1535, 1537–39, 1541–42; *New York Times Magazine*, July 5, 1964.

²⁴Birmingham to Director, Oct. 21, Nov. 7, Dec. 17, and Dec. 24, 1964; Director to Birmingham, Nov. 2, 1964.

²⁵Birmingham to Director, Oct. 29, 1964. See also, *New York Times Magazine*, July 5, 1964.

²⁶Birmingham to Director, Oct. 29, 1964; Director to Birmingham, Sept. 18 and Oct. 13, 1964.

²⁷*Birmingham News*, Dec. 6 and 19, 1964, and Feb. 25 and March 19, 1965.

²⁸Mobile to Director, Jan. 26, 1965; Sullivan to Belmont, March 17, 1965, in Garrow, *Centers of the Southern Struggle*, reel 8. Nevertheless, on April 1, someone bombed a black-owned

abled agents to arrest and charge an Anniston foundry worker with stealing a large quantity of dynamite, TNT, hand grenades, and ammunition from a bunker at Fort McClellan.²⁹

Although desegregation had begun in various quarters of Alabama by the mid-1960s, prevailing patterns of discrimination had not changed in rural areas. In Lowndes County, for example, there had been no effort to comply with *Brown v. Board of Education*, and no African American had voted or served on a jury for half a century.³⁰ In rural communities, landowners, their kin, and county sheriff's deputies were the principal architects of white violence; organizing Klan-type groups would have been redundant.³¹ Because COINTELPRO focused on preserving domestic security rather than on protecting the civil rights of African Americans, it did not attempt to target these informal networks of white supremacist vigilantes. Thus when leaders of the civil rights movement launched protests in winter 1965, they were met with police brutality and vigilantism, including the killings of Jimmy Jackson by a state trooper in Marion and seminarian James Reeb by two vigilantes in Selma.³²

home in north Birmingham. Birmingham report, Oct. 15, 1965, p. 17, in FBI file on Bobby Frank Cherry, available online at <http://www.thememoryhole.org>.

²⁹FBI informants provided additional information that led to the recovery of the arms cache that April. *Birmingham News*, Feb. 25 and April 22, 1965; *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 21, 1965; Attorney General to Director, FBI, Sept. 2, 1965, reprinted in Church Committee, *Hearings*, 6:513; Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 487.

³⁰*Birmingham News*, Dec. 17 and 29, 1964, Jan. 5 and 28, and April 8, 1965; *New York Times*, Jan. 8, 1965; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 157–58; Eagles, *Outside Agitator*, xii–xiii, 31–33, 62–63, 99–102, 120–21, 138; Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 380, 392–406, 438–39, 450–51.

³¹Hasan Jeffries, “The Ballot and the Bullet: Armed Self Defense in the Alabama Black Belt, 1965–1966” (paper, American Historical Association annual conference, Seattle, January 2005).

³²In December 1965, an all white jury would acquit three defendants of killing Reeb. The state's case against other suspects was severely impaired when a judge excused an important witness from testifying because he had also been indicted in federal court for the beating. Although Rowe later implied that the UKA had been involved in the assault, the defendants were not proven to have belonged to a formal Klan organization. Jack Mendelsohn, *The Martyrs: Sixteen Who Gave Their Lives for Racial Justice* (New York, 1966), 172–73; *Birmingham News*, Jan. 1, 6, 17–21, 26, and 29, Feb. 26, March 2, 7–8, and 10–12, April 14, and Dec. 8 and 10, 1965; Newton and Newton, *Racial and Religious Violence*, 479–81; Robert

Anticipating violence during the March 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery march, FBI officials ordered their field officers to maintain constant and effective checks with informants in civil rights groups, the Klan, and the local community. They conducted a “full investigation of all complaints of police brutality in and around Selma” and collected information on vigilante assaults during voter registration demonstrations in Dallas County. After U.S. District Court Judge Frank M. Johnson Jr. issued an injunction allowing the march to proceed, FBI inspector Joseph Sullivan coordinated protection of three thousand marchers by FBI agents, U.S. marshals, and two thousand Army personnel. Nevertheless, vigilantes set off tear gas grenades, and a black girl was hit in the lip during continuing demonstrations.³³ The bureau did not want to be publicly identified as supporting the civil rights movement in any way, so FBI officials kept their intelligence to themselves, pressuring agents on the scene not to cooperate with the Justice Department on the police brutality investigation.³⁴ Although three white men were charged with assaulting a FBI agent who was filming the march, none were charged with assaulting demonstrators; the Justice Department, realizing the public relations disaster that could ensue from a selective prosecution, quietly dropped the case.³⁵

J. Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (New York, 1985), 172; Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 468–70, 479–80, 486–89, 690n150; Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 509–10; *New York Times*, Jan. 19, 1965; Charles Fager, *Selma 1965: The March That Changed the South* (Boston, 1985), 107–11; *Washington Post*, May 5, 1965.

³³*Birmingham News*, March 17, 1965; *Washington Post*, March 22, 1965; May, *The Informant*, 121, 146; Bland to Sullivan, March 9, 1965, and Sullivan to Belmont, March 17, 1965, in Garrow, *Centers of the Southern Struggle*, reel 8 (see also reel 11 *passim*); Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965–1968* (New York, 2006), 90; John Doar, Acting Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division, to Sen. Clifford P. Chase, March 22, 1965, reprinted in Michal Belknap ed., *Civil Rights, the White House, and the Justice Department, 1945–1968* (New York, 1991), vol. 15, doc. 46; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 9, 1965. For context, see Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 1990), 136–49.

³⁴A “wish to minimize public exposure” reinforced the bureau’s “selective perception of duty”; Branch, *Canaan's Edge*, 90–91. Since it was highly secret, COINTELPRO allowed the bureau to act without interference from Justice Department lawyers and to avoid direct clashes with local law enforcement. O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 201; Keller, *Liberals and J. Edgar Hoover*, 90.

³⁵*Birmingham News*, March 8, 1965; Branch, *Canaan's Edge*, 58–59.

Four days later, Montgomery police escorted Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton, Grand Dragon Robert Creel, and about 240 Klansmen participating in a fifty-car United Klans motorcade. FBI agents took down license plate numbers. Birmingham police, meanwhile, found bombs composed of three hundred sticks of dynamite which were set to go off at various times near two churches in African American neighborhoods as well as a school, a business firm, the former parsonage of A. D. King (brother of Martin Luther King Jr.), and the home of attorney Arthur Shores.³⁶ On March 25, the fifth day of the march, civil rights activist Viola Liuzzo was shot from another automobile and killed while driving on Highway 80 near Lowndesboro. The FBI quickly arrested four Klansmen from Bessemer and Fairfield, including Gary Thomas Rowe Jr., who had warned his handlers that the group would travel to the march and informed them about the crime immediately afterwards. Assured by Assistant Attorney General John Doar that Rowe would receive immunity from prosecution in return for truthful testimony about the killing, FBI investigators searched for evidence to support Rowe's version of events, discounting or ignoring any evidence that he might also have been one of the shooters.³⁷

President Johnson declared that Mrs. Liuzzo had been murdered by "enemies of justice [whose] . . . loyalty is not to the United States but to a hooded society of bigots"; he warned Klansmen to "get out of the Klan now and return to decent society before it is too late." Robert Shelton denied that the Klan used violence, called the president "a damn liar," and charged that the slayings of James Reeb and Viola Liuzzo were part of a communist plot.³⁸ Some Alabama politicians had already begun to employ rhetoric similar to the president's against the Klan, however. Alabama congressman and HUAC member John Buchanan Jr. stated that the Klan, like the Communist Party,

³⁶FBI agents counted eighty-three automobiles. Mobile to Director, March 21, 1965, in Garrow, *Centers of the Southern Struggle*, reel 8; *Birmingham News*, March 22 and April 4, 1965; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 22, 1965; May, *The Informant*, 123–24.

³⁷Tinsley E. Yarbrough, *Judge Frank Johnson and Human Rights in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1981), 126–28; *Birmingham News*, March 26 and April 17, 1965; May, *The Informant*, 124, 149–66, 170–74.

³⁸*Birmingham News*, March 26, 1965; *Washington Post*, April 5, 1965.

should be forced to register with the federal government.³⁹ Georgia congressman Charles Weltner recommended that police and local legislatures “expose the Klan,” and suggested that Congress investigate it.⁴⁰ In response, Robert Shelton charged that Welter was supported by “some of the most registered [*sic*] communists” in Atlanta.⁴¹

In the wake of the Liuzzo murder, the House of Representatives authorized fifty thousand dollars for a HUAC investigation of the Klan—an investigation facilitated by FBI intelligence.⁴² Although public hearings did not take place until October, major press coverage of the investigation throughout 1965 exposed the UKA’s inner workings to the public. The *Birmingham News*, for example, published in late March an assessment of Klan membership numbers and details about titles, robe costs, and other internal matters.⁴³ The newspaper reported the committee’s assertion that “certain Klans have ‘terror’ units very similar to those of the Communist party. In fact, at least one of these ‘knockoff’ units has been infiltrated by Communists.” The Klan had become fair game for red baiting; something which, no doubt, infuriated Klansmen.⁴⁴

In the first of two trials on state murder charges related to the Liuzzo killing, however, attorneys for the three defendants obtained a mistrial by portraying Rowe as an agent-provocateur and peddling anti-Semitic and racist rhetoric to a jury composed of segregationists.⁴⁵ Jubilant, the three accused Klansmen paraded with 950 other Klansmen before one thousand applauding whites in Anniston. This rally was merely one in a series of UKA fundraising and recruitment

³⁹ *Selma Times Journal*, March 14, 1965; *Birmingham News*, March 28, 1965.

⁴⁰ *Birmingham News*, Feb. 3, 1965.

⁴¹ *New York Times*, March 28, 1965.

⁴² *New York Times*, Feb. 16, March 31, and April 15, 1965; *Birmingham News*, March 30, 1965; Belknap, *Civil Rights*, vol. 14, doc. 25, 57–69; Belknap, *Federal Law*, 205–28; O’Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 43; Stanton, *From Selma to Sorrow*, 218.

⁴³ *Birmingham News*, March 24 and 30, 1965.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, April 9, 1965. For an analysis of anticommunism and anti-Klan discourses, see Drabble, “To Ensure Domestic Tranquility,” 297–328.

⁴⁵ Castigating Rowe was effective, but the extremist rhetoric seems to have offended the intelligence of some jurors. Frank T. Read and Lucy S. McGough, *Let Them Be Judged: The Judicial Integration of the Deep South* (Metuchen, N.J., 1978), 392–94; May, *The Informant*, 188–228. For the court rhetoric, see “My Kountry-Klonsul’s Creed,” *America*, May 17, 1965, 41.

drives featuring the trio that would be held in Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas in summer and fall 1965.⁴⁶ Before the Selma-to-Montgomery march, Alabama Klan membership had remained relatively limited; the state was home to less than a dozen Klaverns as of March 1965. According to the Justice Department, however, UKA recruiters in the Carolinas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Tennessee had had greater success. In total, the UKA controlled 111 Klaverns across five states, and had mobilized 4,514 Klansmen. Despite unanimous condemnation from the press, politicians, and civic leaders after Birmingham police found two huge dynamite bombs placed at the homes of Mayor Albert Boutwell and City Councilwoman Nina Miglionico, and the revelation that Rowe had given explicit details of the Liuzzo killing to FBI investigators, UKA membership rose. According to newspaper accounts and HUAC, nationwide UKA membership estimates rose to between 4,600 and 6,000 by April. By October, Alabama membership estimates had risen to 2,000.⁴⁷

In response to this Klan growth, the FBI escalated disruptive COINTELPRO operations. In June 1965, the bureau produced cartoon postcards lampooning National States Rights Party Director Edward Fields and an Alabama UKA officer, and agents mailed them to nineteen individuals deemed interested in these groups, or who were in a position to prevent cooperation between them. Deciding not to seek re-election, the UKA officer left town.⁴⁸ To demoralize rank and file Klan members, agents mailed postcards depicting FBI infiltration to sixty Klansmen.⁴⁹ The bureau also provided material to

⁴⁶*New York Times*, May 10, 1965; *Birmingham News*, May 9 and 20, 1965; Stanton, *From Selma to Sorrow*, 122. For a list of Alabama rallies, see Supplemental Correlation Summary, Dec. 19, 1966, in FBI File HQ 157-552, "Robert M. Shelton," private collection of Ernie Lazar.

⁴⁷A third bomb exploded at the newly completed home of Samuel Mathews, a black man who had moved into a formerly all-white neighborhood. *Birmingham News*, April 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 21, and 22, June 7 and 25, and Oct. 17, 1965; Belknap, *Civil Rights*, vol. 14, doc. 25; HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 1575-580, 3274, 3281; HUAC, *Present-Day KKK*, 25-26, 37, 149-62; Mobile to Director, March 21, 1965, in Garrow, *Centers of the Southern Struggle*, reel 8; *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1965; *New York Times*, April 20, 1965.

⁴⁸Birmingham to Director, June 15 and July 1, 1965; Director to Birmingham, June 24, 1965; Drabble, "Negative and Unwise," 238. On the National States Rights Party, see Drabble, "White Supremacy to White Power."

⁴⁹Director to Miami and thirteen other offices, April 15, 1965 (section 1); Baumgardner to

the media about UKA leaders, so that they could be publicly identified and even ridiculed in articles, cartoons, and caricatures.⁵⁰ Such operations served, according to one FBI memorandum, to disrupt the UKA and discredit its leaders. The publicity and postcards “in many instances exposed their activities resulting in their neutralization.”⁵¹ FBI alerts to the Anti-Defamation League, the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, and the Philadelphia County Police in late 1965, for example, caused Shelton to remove a UKA official.⁵²

Non-violent civil rights demonstrations seeking immediate remedy for racial injustice targeted new localities during summer and fall 1965, and UKA recruiting campaigns claimed that law enforcement officials, businessmen, and local authorities were cooperating with the demands of federal judges and bureaucrats who supported voting rights, equal protection, and school integration.⁵³ The UKA also recruited new members after some civil rights leaders began publicly criticizing the tactics of non-violence, the war in Vietnam, and American capitalism.⁵⁴ Moreover, the Watts Riot in August heightened fears that African Americans would begin to fight back among whites who had long used violence against blacks with impunity.⁵⁵ Soon it was apparent that unrestrained vigilante violence and terrorism—

Sullivan, Jan. 19 and Oct. 19, 1965; Birmingham to Director, July 19 and 25, Oct. 1 and 26, and Nov. 3, 1965, and Jan. 3, 1966; Director to Birmingham, Jan. 13, May 11, July 2, 19, and July 26, and Nov. 15, 1965; *Chicago Tribune*, August 16, 1975.

⁵⁰Baumgardner to Sullivan, Jan. 19 and Oct. 1, 1965, and Oct. 19, 1965; Sullivan to Moore, May 5, 1969 (Miami file); Tampa to Director, Sept. 29, 1965, and Oct. 6, 1965; Director to Tampa, Nov. 1, 1965.

⁵¹Baumgardner to Sullivan, Oct. 1, 1965, and Jan. 6, 1966.

⁵²A private detective and would-be double agent, UKA security chief Eugene Tabbutt had offered to sell tape recordings of Klan meetings to Jewish organizations, which could have interfered with COINTELPRO operations. Drabble, “Negative and Unwise,” 243–44.

⁵³*Washington Post*, Oct. 19, 1965; Eagles, *Outside Agitator*, 127–30, 132, 163–64; *New York Times*, Aug. 2, 8, and 10, 1965; Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 490; *Birmingham News*, April 11, 13, 17, 18, and 25, May 14, 16, 26 and 31, June 4, 13, and 24, July 11, and Aug. 11, 1965; Steven F. Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement,” *American Historical Review* 96 (April 1991): 464–66, 471; Dick J. Reavis, *If White Kids Die: Memories of a Civil Rights Movement Volunteer* (Denton, Texas, 2001), 17, 38–39, 46–49, 58–59, 61–64, 73–75.

⁵⁴Carson, *In Struggle*, 158–61, 186–87; *Birmingham News*, May 1, 3, and June 25, 1965.

⁵⁵Eagles, *Outside Agitator*, 165.

including the killing of the New Hampshire-born seminary student and activist Jonathan Daniels during August protests against Lowndes County stores that excluded blacks—accompanied Klan growth.⁵⁶ Amid FBI warnings of death threats against Viola Liuzzo's widower and prosecution witness Gary Thomas Rowe—as well as a bomb threat against the home of prosecutor Richmond Flowers—Collie Wilkins received an acquittal in his retrial for the murder of Liuzzo.⁵⁷ Klan activity continued to increase in the wake of the acquittal. On election day in Lowndes County, Klansmen (along with the man acquitted of murdering Daniels) intimidated voters, and civil-rights worker Andrew Jones was hit over the head and hospitalized.⁵⁸

In summer 1965, Montgomery police estimated that 1,500 to 2,000 UKA members were active in Alabama. Local rallies had attracted 150 to 300 people, on average, during the previous year.⁵⁹ Klansmen prepared to withdraw their children from Jefferson County schools, which were scheduled to desegregate in October. The Klan held at

⁵⁶ *Birmingham News*, May 13, July 16, 17, 20, 26, 29, and 30, 1965; Debra L. Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 2001), 100–101; Eagles, *Outside Agitator*, 143–44, 165, 173–74, 177–80, 192–201; Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now,” 464–66, 471; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 27, 1965; Reavis, *If White Kids Die*, 59, 73–75, 95–97; *New York Times*, May 14, Aug. 2 and 22, 1965; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 173–75, 177; *Birmingham Post Herald*, Sept. 3, 1965; Fager, *Selma 1965*, 205–6; Newton and Newton, *Racial and Religious Violence*, 485, 487.

⁵⁷ White Citizen's Council member Tom Coleman was charged with assault with intent to murder in the Daniels case. When the state's assault and battery charge against Coleman came up in May 1966, the judge dismissed it “with prejudice,” which meant Coleman could never be tried in the circuit court for shooting Daniels's companion, Richard F. Morrisroe. A few weeks later, a group of whites attacked Flowers at a football game. Eagles, *Outside Agitator*, 200–243, 252; Branch, *Canaan's Edge*, 346, 534–35; May, *The Informant*, 231–50; *Birmingham News*, May 8 and 27, July 6 and 8, Sept. 30, and Oct. 30, 1965; *New York Times*, May 27, 1965; Robert M. Reed, *Night of the Klan, A Reporter's Story* (LaVergne, Tenn., 2000), 62–63; Director to Detroit, Oct. 22, 1965, Detroit to Director, Oct. 22, 1965, Mobile to Director, Oct. 23, 1965, Chicago to Director and Mobile, Oct. 22, 1965 (all in part 10, pp. 62, 66–68, 75, 78), Liuzzo file; Alexander Charns Papers (#4866), Folder 137, Southern Historical Collection at the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Yarbrough, *Judge Frank Johnson*, 129.

⁵⁸ Branch, *Canaan's Edge*, 546–47.

⁵⁹ Richmond M. Flowers, “Preliminary Results of Investigation: Alabama, United Klans of America, Incorporated, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and Other Klan Organizations,” Oct. 18, 1965, Police Reports, Box 2, Paul J. Dumas Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University (hereafter referred to as Dumas Papers).

least thirty-eight rallies in seventy-five days, some attracting as many as two thousand people, where Wilkins, now the UKA's number one celebrity, received standing ovations.⁶⁰

Although on the surface it appeared that the FBI was not having much success against the Klan, Rowe's testimony in the Liuzzo trials had demonstrated that FBI informants had infiltrated the organization. Newspaper reports also alleged that the Anti-Defamation League had provided intelligence to the FBI, enabling agents to block some Klan assassination plots.⁶¹ After Grand Dragon Robert Creel vowed to picket public schools, FBI spokesmen announced publicly that the bureau would act instantly and forcefully to cope with emergencies, and that it had intensified scrutiny and penetration of Klan-type organizations, placing informants in positions where they would have access to plans and policies.⁶² Creel denounced "FBI pimps" and alleged that FBI agents offered thousands of dollars to informants for false testimony.⁶³ To capitalize on this, FBI agents sent Alabama Klan officers multiple copies of cartoon postcards depicting government infiltration, satirizing the idea that the Klan was a secret society.⁶⁴

The bureau, meanwhile, sent HUAC investigators information about UKA activity and individual Klansmen that it had compiled from media reports, photographs, and film footage taken by bureau agents. The FBI also sent a list of possible questions HUAC committee members could ask in public hearings along with the names of people willing to testify.⁶⁵ HUAC investigators also collected thou-

⁶⁰HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 3128; *Birmingham News*, Oct. 16, 1965; *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 3, 1965.

⁶¹*Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 3, 1965; *Birmingham News*, May 8, 1965.

⁶²*Birmingham News*, Sept. 3 and 6 and Oct. 16, 1965.

⁶³"To File," Dec. 16, 1965, in "Supplementary Police Reports, Police Department, Montgomery Alabama," Police Reports, Box 1, Dumas Papers.

⁶⁴Birmingham to Director, June 15, July 1 and 25, and Oct. 1, 1965, and Jan. 1, 1966; Director to Birmingham, May 11, June 24, and July 2 and 19, 1965; *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 16, 1975.

⁶⁵DeLoach to Mohr, March 22, 1965, Director to Birmingham, June 25, 1965, Director to Atlanta, July 8, 1965, Director to Dallas et al., July 14, 1965, Mobile to Director, July 13, 1965, Baumgardner to Sullivan, March 12, June 3, Aug. 3, Aug. 5, Aug. 19, Oct. 1, and Oct. 7, 1965, and Jan. 5, 1966 (all on reel 9), in Kenneth O'Reilly, comp., *FBI File on the House Committee on Un-American Activities*, nine reels (Wilmington, Del., 1986). The FBI thus made



FBI agents sent postcards such as this to remove “one of the Klan’s most potent weapons—its veil of secrecy” (Baumgardner to Sullivan, April 20, 1966 [section 1], in *COINTELPRO: The Counterintelligence Program of the FBI* [Wilmington, Del., 1978]).

sands of documents, photographs, canceled checks, membership lists, and police records on their own. The committee scrutinized the seven largest and most active Klan organizations in the United States, questioning 187 witnesses at hearings conducted between October 1965 and February 1966.⁶⁶

At these hearings, HUAC exposed the locations of Alabama Klaverns, the identities of Klan officers, and ties between the Klan and state government. Congressmen publicly discussed statements culled from Klan meeting minutes that they had obtained.⁶⁷ The locations of twenty Alabama Klan units were publicized; residents in a number of southern communities were alerted to the existence of local Klan units for the first time.⁶⁸ Ralph Roton, an employee of the Alabama legislature's Commission to Preserve the Peace, testified that he had been an informant for Robert Shelton while on the state payroll.⁶⁹ HUAC also revealed extensive evidence that Klansmen engaged in violence, and that Klan leaders were either aware of these acts or ordered them.⁷⁰ HUAC also heard evidence that a Klan official had been granted a citizens band radio license by the Federal Communications Commission and then used it to dispatch cars of Klansmen to intimidate civil rights activists who entered places of public accommodation.⁷¹

Individual HUAC members also took on the Klan. Republican John Buchanan of Alabama charged that the Klan's activities provoked federal interference in southern affairs.⁷² Fellow committee member Charles Weltner, a Democrat from Georgia, bluntly told Klan leaders that their "leadership and ability and energy have been

sure HUAC investigators would not interfere with ongoing FBI investigations. O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 204.

⁶⁶Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 275.

⁶⁷HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 1542–3925 passim; HUAC, *Present-Day KKK*, 149–62; *Washington Post*, Oct. 18 and 19, 1965.

⁶⁸*Birmingham News*, Oct. 19, 1965; *New York Times*, Oct. 31, 1965.

⁶⁹*Birmingham News*, Feb. 8, 1966.

⁷⁰HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 1800–3673 passim; *Birmingham News*, Feb. 5, 1966.

⁷¹*Birmingham News*, Feb. 9, 1966.

⁷²*Ibid.*, Nov. 9, 1965.

given over to dividing Southern people rather than uniting them.”⁷³ Acting committee chairman Joe Pool, a Democrat from Texas, called Klansmen “dirty rats” and concluded that the “organization is made up largely of sneaky, cowardly men, taking advantage of the cover of night and superiority in numbers to intimidate and do physical violence to young and old, male and female.” He asked, “isn’t it a fact that according to the tenets of your Klan organization, that your primary obligation, your true allegiance, is to the Klan, above allegiance to your Government or anything else?”⁷⁴ HUAC interrogators also portrayed Klan leaders as con artists who exploited the anxiety, despair, and ignorance of poor whites, lining their own pockets by fleecing the ignorant.⁷⁵ Discussing scrambles for money and power within the Klan, Weltner opined that “poor deluded folks” who have given donations, dues, and various campaign donations “are going to be interested in what’s happening to that money.”⁷⁶ A September 1965 CBS television special report made similar allegations.⁷⁷

As a direct outgrowth of this investigation and under authority granted by the president, HUAC agents compared Klan officials’ tax returns with information from other sources and turned the results over to the IRS, which led to the tax agency launching a probe of its own. IRS agents scrutinized the tax returns of Klan officials in four southern states.⁷⁸ These security-related inter-agency tax investigations continued through at least 1970.⁷⁹

⁷³HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 1688.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 1616.

⁷⁵HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 2050–58, 3172–87, 3315–17, 3332, 3339, 3879; HUAC, *Present-Day KKK*, 38–43; *Birmingham News*, Oct. 22, 1965.

⁷⁶*Birmingham News*, Sept. 23, 1965.

⁷⁷A transcript of the CBS report is available in the Charles Kuralt Collection (#4882), Folder 155, Southern Historical Collection at the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Parts of the transcript were also published in David Lowe, *Ku Klux Klan: The Invisible Empire* (New York, 1967). See also, HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 2329–32.

⁷⁸*Birmingham News*, June 25, 1965.

⁷⁹The FBI and the IRS established a formal relationship in 1968. Church Committee, *Final Report: Book Three*, 93; Birmingham to Director, April 3, 1967, and Feb. 12, 1970; Director to Birmingham, March 3, 1970; Moore to Sullivan, June 15, 1970. In January 1968, the IRS, which maintained “a policy of responding to any statement that is seriously inaccurate,” did not dispute Shelton’s claim that a corporation labeled a Klan front organization “got a clean bill of health, and I got back more than \$400”; *Washington Post*, Jan. 18, 1968.

In February 1965 the IRS provided copies of UKA corporate tax returns and Robert Shelton's personal tax returns to the FBI. Bureau agents examined the returns of individuals and firms reported by Shelton as sources of income, to determine if they were associated with the Klan. They looked into Shelton's purchases and investigated his income, business ventures, and real estate holdings to acquire information that could be passed on. The IRS, in turn, conducted an investigation to determine whether Shelton was converting Klan funds for personal use. They also gathered information on UKA defense funds that had been set up for Klansmen indicted in the courts or subpoenaed to appear before HUAC. The scope of Klan-related tax investigations was never as wide as those of civil rights groups, but almost anyone close to Shelton—business contacts, close friends, and his accountant, as well as an undisclosed UKA Imperial officer (probably the treasurer)—was investigated. Similar investigations targeted Georgia Grand Dragon Calvin Craig and South Carolina Grand Dragon Robert Scoggin.⁸⁰

HUAC interrogated Robert Shelton in October 1965, and then publicized discrepancies in UKA tax, incorporation, and bank records. HUAC investigators produced a number of checks that Shelton had cashed at gasoline stations and cafes rather than depositing them in the UKA bank account and, in what may have been a subtle attempt to discredit him, implied that Shelton had never filed an individual income tax return. They presented evidence that Shelton received commissions on sales of Klan robes, and that he and his wife had drawn money from a UKA account to pay personal bills, buy gasoline, and purchase a Cadillac and a diamond ring.⁸¹

⁸⁰Birmingham to Director, Nov. 7 and Dec. 24, 1964, April 6 and 29, 1965, Feb. 22, May 20, Dec. 14 and 28, 1966, Jan. 5 and 13, and April 3, 1967, and Feb. 12, 1970; Baumgardner to Sullivan, Nov. 18, 1964, May 10, June 28, and July 19, 1965 (Birmingham file); Director to Birmingham, Feb. 23 and May 12, 1965, and Dec. 28, 1966; Mobile to Director, May 27, 1965; Memphis to Director, June 5, 1965; Director to Memphis, June 18, 1965 (Birmingham file); Director to Atlanta, Aug. 23, 1965; Church Committee, *Final Report: Book Three*, 847–48; HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 2066.

⁸¹HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 1600–1691, 1698–99, 1730, 1779, 1838–41, 2172–76, 3172–73, 4010–12; HUAC, *Present-Day KKK*, 37–43; *Washington Post*, Oct. 21, 1965; *Newsweek*, Nov. 1, 1965.

Other UKA state administrators faced similar charges. HUAC chairman Edwin Willis, a Louisiana Democrat, implied that Klan leaders had misappropriated “dues collected from these poor members” of the Klan.⁸² HUAC’s final report concluded that, “it is apparent to the committee that Shelton not only disbursed funds as he saw fit, but also disbursed most of them to his personal advantage.”⁸³ Congressman Pool tied the committee’s findings together succinctly, lambasting the UKA’s “phony claims about 100 percent Americanism, patriotism and being law abiding” and assailing a “record of double dealing, quarreling and fighting over spoils, or leaders deceiving followers.”⁸⁴

The HUAC hearings received extensive publicity.⁸⁵ Some Klansman became “fearful and uncertain and many . . . dropped away because of the hearings.”⁸⁶ State law enforcement officials reported membership losses and a decline in Klan activity in parts of Mississippi, South Carolina, eastern North Carolina, southern Louisiana, and Clayton County, Georgia.⁸⁷ The Texas Grand Dragon, along with two Klan recruiters and four hundred members, resigned due to UKA advocacy of violence.⁸⁸ Others became disappointed that Shelton, like accused Communists before him, had used the protection of the Fifth Amendment to avoid answering the committee’s questions.⁸⁹ According to former Grand Dragon Robert Creel (who cooperated with HUAC in February 1966 by providing an account of UKA finances and identifying the officers of Alabama Klaverns), the committee’s accusations had raised concern among UKA members. The hearings, he admitted, were hurting the Klan because, by taking the Fifth, Klan leaders implicitly acknowledged their guilt. Citing a “smear cam-

⁸²HUAC, *Present-Day KKK*, 127–29; HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 1699.

⁸³HUAC, *Present-Day KKK*, 39.

⁸⁴*Richmond Times Dispatch*, March 30, 1966, attached to Richmond to Director, April 1, 1966.

⁸⁵*Birmingham News*, Oct. 21, 22, and 24, and Nov. 6, 1965.

⁸⁶*Birmingham News*, March 12, 1966.

⁸⁷Only Virginia reported an increase; *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 27, 1966.

⁸⁸*Richmond Times Dispatch*, March 30, 1966; Casey Edward Greene, “Apostles of Hate: The Ku Klux Klan in and near Houston, Texas, 1920–1982” (master’s thesis, University of Houston Clear Lake, 1995), 56–59.

⁸⁹Birmingham to Director, Feb. 22, 1966.

paign” by HUAC, Creel announced that he would give up the Grand Dragon position in November 1965, but Robert Shelton ousted him just before Creel was arrested for drunken driving and weapons violations.⁹⁰

HUAC’s investigations and hearings forced the UKA to spend \$25,000 on legal fees and related expenses.⁹¹ The most disruptive outcome of the hearings, however, was HUAC’s citation of Shelton and six other UKA leaders for contempt of Congress for refusing to produce Klan records. Despite vocal opposition from the American Civil Liberties Union and 119 prominent law professors, a federal court convicted Shelton and three other UKA officers of contempt of Congress in September 1966. Shelton drew the maximum penalty of one year and a \$1,000 fine (he eventually served six months in federal prison before his parole in November 1969).⁹² Klan publicists responded by accusing federal authorities of “intimidation, harassment, name-calling and threats” and urged Klansmen to continue rallies and continue their activities unabated.⁹³

The HUAC investigation was not the only government action taken against the UKA in the fall of 1965. In addition to launching COINTELPRO operations, Alabama-based FBI agents continued to collect information on the seventeen-member Eastview #13 Klavern for the federal conspiracy trial of Viola Liuzzo’s killers, and, as the trial approached, investigated the background of potential jury members.⁹⁴ At the trial, Gary Thomas Rowe implicated Shelton and

⁹⁰William Brassel replaced Creel in January 1966, but Creel remained a member of the UKA. HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 2112, 3240–96; Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 70, 143; *Birmingham News*, Nov. 4, 1965, and Feb. 10, 1966; *Baton Rouge State Times*, Jan. 7, 1966.

⁹¹Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Charlotte Report,” May 2, 1966, p. 29, FBI File 157-HQ-370, subfile 8, section 23, acquired by the author through a Freedom of Information Act request.

⁹²Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 513–14; Rich, “Ku Klux Klan Ideology,” 133–34; *New York Times*, Feb. 7, Sept. 13 and 16, and Oct. 14, 1966; *Birmingham News*, Sept. 16, 1966; *Robert M. Shelton v. United States of America*, 131 U.S.App.D.C. 315 (D.C. Cir. 1968), *cert. denied*, 393 U.S. 1024 (U.S., Jan. 13, 1969).

⁹³HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 2900.

⁹⁴Birmingham to Director, Oct. 5, 1965 (file 10, p. 32), Mobile to Director, Nov. 23, and Director to Mobile, Nov. 24, 1965 (file 11, pp. 36–38), and Rosen to Belmont, Nov. 29, 1965 (file 12, p. 15), all in Liuzzo file.

Creel in the violence, and, once again, the defense portrayed Rowe as a provocateur who stirred up trouble for cash.⁹⁵ After the closing arguments, the judge directed the jurors to deliberate until they reached a verdict; once the verdict was handed down he imposed the maximum sentence of ten years. Collie Leroy Wilkins and Eugene Thomas exhausted their appeals in November 1967 and entered federal prison.⁹⁶

After the original arrests, the FBI had continued to provide information to the Justice Department and to the Treasury Department's Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Division in hopes of building an illegal firearms possession case against Thomas.⁹⁷ In February 1966, he was convicted on federal charges of possession of a sawed-off shotgun on which no taxes had been paid; Thomas received a two-year sentence, to be served consecutively with the conspiracy conviction.⁹⁸

The federal convictions, along with the upholding of a second-degree murder verdict in the Willie Lee Brewster killing, spurred numerous expressions of hope by observers of southern justice.⁹⁹ The Brewster verdict was the first conviction for a racially motivated mur-

⁹⁵ *Birmingham News*, Nov. 30 and Dec. 2, 1965; *Washington Post*, Dec. 1, 1965; Mobile to Director, Nov. 30, 1965, and Rosen to Belmont, Nov. 30, 1965 (file 12, pp. 13, 26), Liuzzo file.

⁹⁶ Yarbrough, *Judge Frank Johnson*, 134–37; FBI Memorandum, Nov. 30, 1967 (file 14, p. 87), Liuzzo file. For an account of the trial, see May, *The Informant*, 251–64. Wilkins received an additional one-year sentence on a firearm conviction from 1964, since he had violated the terms of his probation sentence by traveling to Lowndes County in pursuit of Liuzzo; Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 613. The FBI was not involved in this prosecution; Birmingham to Director, June 22, 1965; Director to Birmingham, June 25, 1965 (file 9, pp. 64, 66), Liuzzo file.

⁹⁷ John Doar, Acting Assistant Attorney General, to Director, FBI, March 30, 1965, and Director to Doar, April 1, 1965 (file 4, pp. 42–45), Liuzzo file; Putnam to D. J. Brennan Jr., May 4, 1965, Birmingham to Director, April 29, 1965, Rosen to Belmont, May 11, 1965, and Director to Birmingham, May 13, 1965 (all in file 8b, pp 16–17, 25, 27), Liuzzo file.

⁹⁸ *Birmingham News*, Dec. 21, 1965, and Feb. 24 and 25, 1966. In September 1966 a jury of eight blacks and four whites acquitted Eugene Thomas of murder. Flowers decided not to use Rowe in that trial, because he might hurt the state's case more than help it. W. O. Eaton died before he could be imprisoned on federal charges or be tried on state murder charges. See *New York Times*, Sept. 28, 1966; *Birmingham News*, Sept. 28, 1966; Mobile to Director, March 2, 1966, and Rosen to DeLoach, March 10, 1966 (file 13, pp. 30, 34), Rosen to DeLoach, Sept. 26, 1966, and Jevon to Conrad, Sept. 29, 1966 (file 14, pp. 22, 24), and Mobile to Director, Sept. 27, 1966 (file 14, p. 21), all in Liuzzo file.

⁹⁹ Belknap, *Federal Law*, 249; *Birmingham News*, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 4, and 11, 1965, and Sept. 18, 1966; *New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1965.

der in the South, while the Liuzzo trial was the first federal civil rights conviction.¹⁰⁰ FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover declared the convictions “a turning point” in the anti-Klan effort, and he congratulated his agents on their success in coaching the temperamental Rowe through the trial.¹⁰¹ In the wake of the convictions, meeting attendance at one Birmingham Klavern declined from an average of over sixty to less than fifteen.¹⁰² Klan leaders expressed outrage. A sympathetic biography of Robert Shelton published in 1966 alleged that agent-provocateurs were attempting to destroy the Klan, characterizing Rowe as a “pimp who entices and entraps individuals” into acts of violence. “Sincere” FBI agents, Shelton averred, were welcome into the Klan because “we don’t advocate the overthrow of the government.”¹⁰³

Shelton continued to express such conciliatory sentiments, despite the HUAC exposé and convictions, because the membership declines were transitory, offset by an influx of new members during 1966, largely in response to enforcement of the Voting Rights Act.¹⁰⁴ HUAC’s investigators estimated that at least nineteen Klaverns operated in Alabama in early 1966. The Alabama Klan began to regain members, reaching 1,200 in January 1967; according to the FBI, national UKA membership reached ten thousand at the same time. By March, the UKA had grown, according to HUAC to 15,075 Klansmen nationwide.¹⁰⁵ Police and vigilante violence also continued, despite

¹⁰⁰Belknap, *Federal Law*, 183, 187–204, 235; Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 71, 352–53.

¹⁰¹Hoover to Tolson et al., Dec. 3, 1965 (file 12, p. 34), Liuzzo file.

¹⁰²*Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 27, 1966.

¹⁰³Robert M. Mikell, *They Say Blood on My Hands: The Story of Robert M. Shelton, Imperial Wizard of the United Klans of America* (Huntsville, 1966), 3–4, 54, 73–76, 94–105.

¹⁰⁴Birmingham also employed its first black policeman in March. Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 178–79, 187; *New York Times*, April 7, 1966; *Birmingham News*, March 11 and 30, April 26, May 2, 6, and 25, July 21, and Dec. 1, 2, and 21, 1966; *Washington Post*, July 5, 1966.

¹⁰⁵Forty Klaverns operated in Alabama, and 556 nationwide, at one time or another between 1964 and 1966. HUAC, *Activities of KKK*, 1575–80, 3274, 3281; HUAC, *Present-Day KKK*, 25–26, 37, 62, 149–62; Belknap, *Civil Rights*, vol. 14, doc. 25. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B’nai B’rith issued much higher figures; *Washington Post*, Sept. 22, 1966. For FBI criticism of ADL figures, see Laird M. Wilcox, *The Watchdogs: A Close Look at Antiracist “Watchdog” Groups* (Olathe, Kans., 1999), 40. Total membership in all Klan groups was estimated at fourteen thousand. However, HUAC figures for Klan membership often exceeded those of the FBI, which only counted “active” members who regularly attended

Justice Department warnings that the FBI would investigate any “hint of Ku Klux Klan terrorism aimed at intimidation of . . . voters.”¹⁰⁶ In response, COINTELPRO operations intended to “disrupt and neutralize” the UKA were accelerated.

The UKA had been effectively exposed in 1965 through FBI infiltration and intelligence collection. The FBI’s information facilitated the HUAC investigation, leaks to the media, and the convictions of Liuzzo’s killers and other UKA members for bombings in Mississippi and North Carolina.¹⁰⁷ By 1966, perhaps three hundred Klan members were providing information to the bureau.¹⁰⁸ Yet much remained to be done. According to one FBI headquarters report, of 152 Klaverns whose existence the FBI had confirmed, the FBI had “informant coverage” of only eighty-one. Of an estimated fourteen thousand members of various Klan organizations operating in the United States, the bureau had resources to investigate “only 1,500” officers and “only 300 violence prone” members, “of whom there are many more.”¹⁰⁹ As of March 1966, the Birmingham office had identified five hundred Alabama Klansmen by name and address. Agents in Mobile had identified one hundred, most of whom had joined before the 1966 membership surge.¹¹⁰

To develop informants without raising suspicion or jeopardizing federal prosecutions, most COINTELPRO operations of 1964 and 1965 had disrupted the UKA from without; informants had not initi-

Klavern meetings; Director, FBI, to Attorney General, Dec. 19, 1967, reprinted in Church Committee, *Hearings*, 6:518.

¹⁰⁶ *Shreveport Times*, Jan. 14, 1966; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 179–84; *New York Times*, Jan. 3, 1966; *Birmingham News*, Feb. 23–25, March 11, April 1, 3, and 26, and May 2 and 8, 1966; Mobile Report, May 23, 1966, Garrow, *Centers of the Southern Struggle*, reel nine; *Washington Post*, April 25, 1966.

¹⁰⁷ Agents also thwarted a North Carolina UKA kickback scheme by alerting an insurance company, resulting in cancellation of insurance policies to Klansmen. Drabble, “FBI in Mississippi,” 383–87; John Drabble, “The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina” (lecture, John Hope Franklin Center Public Lecture Series, Duke University, Sept. 24, 2003).

¹⁰⁸ Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here*, 131–32; FBI Letter to Hon. Marvin Watson, Special Assistant to the President, Sept. 2, 1965 (section 1).

¹⁰⁹ Church Committee, *Final Report: Book Three*, 474.

¹¹⁰ Birmingham to Director, March 10, 1966; Mobile to Director, March 11, 1966.

ated much internal disruption.¹¹¹ Field office agents based in Mobile had even resisted directives from FBI headquarters to launch extra-legal COINTELPRO operations in Montgomery, and continued to employ aggressive but legal law enforcement techniques against the Klan; the willingness of Montgomery police to suppress Klan violence within their jurisdiction had contributed to the control of Klan activity in the area in 1964 and FBI agents had continued to deter Klan violence by conducting frequent interviews in 1965.¹¹² The media in Montgomery, they reported, had a “firm policy to completely ignore . . . Klan groups,” frustrating the Klan’s search for publicity and advertising. COINTELPRO-facilitated media exposés, agents argued, might only serve “to rally more persons to the Klan cause.”¹¹³ Reasoning that notional communications “might cause the Klan to tighten security measures and thus adversely affect the informant development program,” Mobile agents did not participate in the cartoon-postcard operation.¹¹⁴

The Mobile office abandoned its hands-off tactics in 1966 when membership in the Montgomery area began to increase. In March, FBI headquarters ordered the Mobile office to target Montgomery-area Klansmen with covert action.¹¹⁵ FBI spokesmen subsequently announced that they were working to “break” the UKA.¹¹⁶ Operations in Montgomery were part of a larger escalation of the bureau’s COINTELPRO and general intelligence gathering efforts that continued for the next two years.¹¹⁷ These new operations soon took their toll on the Klan. Shelton ousted the new Alabama Grand Dragon, William P. Brassel, amid arguments over financial problems and after

¹¹¹John Drabble, “FBI Covert Operations and the Suppression of Ku Klux Klan Violence, 1964–1971” (working paper—all of John Drabble’s working papers are available online at <http://www.geocities.com/drabbs/workingpapers>); New Orleans to Director, July 7, 1965.

¹¹²Mobile to Director, Jan. 26, April 1, June 30, and Oct. 4, 1965, and Jan. 5, 1966; Director to Mobile, Jan. 22, 1965.

¹¹³Mobile to Director, Oct. 12, 1964.

¹¹⁴Mobile to Director, Aug. 30, 1965.

¹¹⁵Director to Mobile, March 8, 1966.

¹¹⁶*Birmingham News*, March 29, 1966.

¹¹⁷O’Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 223; Church Committee, *Hearings*, 6:408. For a breakdown of successful operations by type, see Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here*, 154–55.

agents sent Shelton an anonymous poison-pen letter declaring that Brassel was a poor speaker and could not handle Klan meetings. After the Mobile field office distributed information to the *Montgomery Advertiser-Journal* to publicize the shakeup, Klan informants reported a drop in meeting attendance. Decatur resident James Spears was elected to replace Brassel in June, thus becoming the third man to hold the office of Alabama Grand Dragon in six months and he became COINTELPRO's next target.¹¹⁸

In September, Shelton expressed disgust with Alabama's state Klan leadership, given lackluster recruiting and continuing dissension over allegations that officers were pocketing money meant for the UKA defense fund. As most of Alabama's Klaverns were in financial arrears, he threatened to revoke the charters of some chapters.¹¹⁹ Six months later, in March 1967, the FBI sent a letter to Spears, purportedly from a Klansman, reporting that another Klansman had mocked the manner in which Spears conducted Klan meetings. At the end of the month, an FBI agent left a message for Spears on Shelton's answering machine. The agent pretended that he was a stockbroker confirming a "large common stock transaction" in connection with a pending home purchase to make it appear that Spears was skimming UKA funds.¹²⁰

In the months before Brassel was targeted, new COINTELPRO operations also targeted lower-level Klan officers. For example, militant Klansman Uriel Miles was targeted after an informant reported to agents that Miles was carrying on an affair and that Klansmen were accusing him of drinking and family neglect. Agents sent a threatening letter, purporting to come from other Klansmen, to Miles and to Robert Shelton. Angered, Shelton criticized "immorality, drinking . . .

¹¹⁸Birmingham to Director, June 24 and July 1, 1966; Director to Birmingham, March 8, 1967; Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 70, 535; Mobile to Director, May 20, 23, and 25, and June 23, 1966; Director to Mobile, May 20 and 25, 1966; *Montgomery Advertiser Journal*, May 23, 1966; *Birmingham News*, July 9, 1966; HUAC, *Present-Day KKK*, 26, 149.

¹¹⁹"SAC [Special Agent in Charge] Report," Sept. 29, 1966, pp. 2, 9-10, in FBI File HQ 157-552, "Robert M. Shelton," private collection of Ernie Lazar.

¹²⁰Birmingham to Director, Aug. 25 and Oct. 1, 1966, and Jan. 5, March 29, April 3, and Aug. 3, 1967; Director to Birmingham, Sept. 2, 1966, and Jan. 16, March 29, and April 20, 1967.

and the public image of the Klan in Alabama” at a subsequent state meeting.¹²¹ They also made anonymous phone calls to members and officers of Miles’s Birmingham Klavern, “insinuating that there is a good possibility that Miles . . . is a fink,” because he “sure acts and talks a lot like Gary Thomas Rowe.”¹²² One recipient of the calls “expressed great concern . . . that Miles might be an informant for the FBI.”¹²³ Soon afterward, the UKA expelled Miles for drinking, adultery, and providing information on Klan operations to the FBI.¹²⁴

The use of such anonymous notional communications became a central COINTEPRO tactic. Birmingham-based FBI agents mailed small batches of new cartoon postcards to Alabama Klansmen in spring and summer 1966, a hundred in 1967, and another hundred in 1968 and 1969.¹²⁵ Nationwide, agents mailed thousands of cards alluding to covert infiltration by government agents and alleging that Klan leaders fleeced Klansmen of their hard-earned money to indulge private vices.¹²⁶ The postcards targeted more than their recipients—high-level FBI agents reasoned that other people “would

¹²¹ Birmingham to Director, April 28, Aug. 25 and Oct. 1, 1966; Director to Birmingham, Sept. 9, 1966; “SAC Report,” 7.

¹²² Birmingham to Director, Aug. 25 and Nov. 3, 1966. See also Director to Birmingham, Sept. 2, 1966, and Birmingham to Director, Oct. 1, 1966.

¹²³ Birmingham to Director, Jan. 5, 1967.

¹²⁴ Birmingham to Director, April 3, 1967. In May 1977, Uriel Miles and his wife filed a \$250,000 suit against the FBI, charging that their marriage and sex lives had been adversely affected by “dirty tricks” conducted against them. Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 390; Sims, *The Klan*, 121–22. The suit failed; author correspondence with Michael Newton. A UKA suit launched three months later also failed. *United Klans of America v. McGovern*, 453 F. Supp. 836 (N. D. Ala., 1978), *aff’d*, 621 F.2d 152 (5th Cir. 1980).

¹²⁵ Birmingham to Director, April 1 and 5, May 17, July 1, and Aug. 29, 1966, July 1 and Dec. 29, 1967, April 3, July 6, and Oct. 1, 1968, Jan. 3, April 2, and July 1, 1969; Director to Birmingham, May 2 and 19, 1966, April 14, 1967, and Feb. 23, 1968. Concerned about jeopardizing informants, Mobile-based agents sent out few communications; Mobile to Director, June 6 and Sept. 15, 1966.

¹²⁶ In total, the bureau produced thirteen thousand postcards. Birmingham to Director, April 1 and 5, and May 19, 1966; Baumgardner to Sullivan, Jan. 19 and Oct. 1, 1965, and Feb. 24, 1966; Griffith to Tolson, April 3 and 20, 1966; Director to 21 Field Offices, March 7 and April 28, 1966 (section 1). For analysis of cartoon content, see John Drabble, “‘Fidelity, Integrity, Bravery’: An Analysis of the FBI’s Campaign to Discredit the ‘Cowardly Jackals’ of the Ku Klux Klan, 1964–1971,” in Mathew Sweney and Michal Peprník eds., *America: Home of the Brave* (Olomouc, Czech Republic, 2005), 103–36.

read them during delivery, removing one of the Klan's most potent weapons—its veil of secrecy.”¹²⁷ Across the country, reactions to the postcards ranged from puzzlement and concern to anger and fear, and they spurred dissent within and between Klan organizations. Some Mississippi Klansmen quit, having been convinced that secrecy had been compromised.¹²⁸ In Alabama, informants reported that several UKA recipients became “exceedingly disturbed.” They speculated as to whether the Anti-Defamation League or the FBI might be responsible for the mailings. Shelton surmised that the League had sent them after receiving Klan membership lists from HUAC.¹²⁹ The postcards had similar effects in the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Virginia, and two northern states.¹³⁰ They provoked discussions among North Carolina Klansmen about their Grand Dragon's faults, which exacerbated a COINTELPRO-facilitated split in that state. Loyalists blamed a veteran organizer from the splinter Klan, as well as another prominent COINTELPRO target, Virginia Grand Dragon Marshall Kornegay.¹³¹

Even more disruptive was a fake, bureau-created organization dubbed the National Committee for Domestic Tranquility (NCDT), which circulated communications to foment factionalism, heighten internal disputes, discredit Klan officers, diminish violence, and fa-

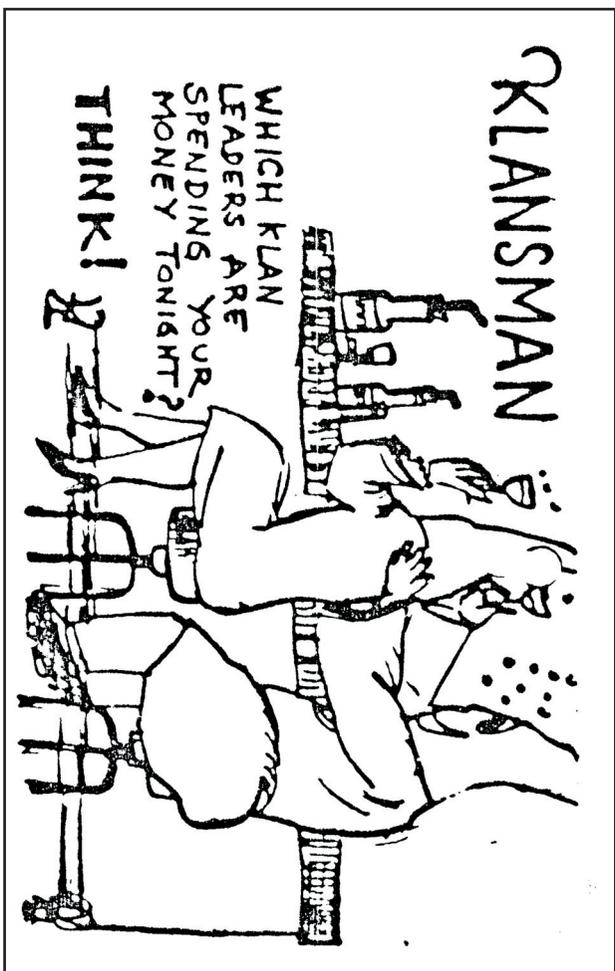
¹²⁷Baumgardner to Sullivan, April 20, 1966.

¹²⁸Director to Birmingham, Sept. 19, 1968; Drabble, “FBI in Mississippi,” 387; Drabble, “Fidelity, Integrity, Bravery,” 107, 114, 130n33, 131n50.

¹²⁹Birmingham to Director, July 1 and Oct. 1, 1966.

¹³⁰Cincinnati to Director, May 24, 1966 (section 1); Director to Atlanta et al., June 8, 1966 (section 1); Baumgardner to Sullivan, May 31, 1966, and Jan. 19, 1967; Director to Atlanta et al., Dec. 10, 1964 (in Miami file); Jackson to Director, Aug. 16, 1966; Charlotte to Director, May 31 and July 19, 1966; Columbia to Director, June 17 and July 25, 1966; Director to Columbia, Aug. 1, 1966; Atlanta to Director, July 19, 1966; Savannah to Director, June 27, Aug. 27, Sept. 30, and Dec. 30, 1966; Director to Savannah, Dec. 30, 1966, and Jan. 9 and Feb. 14, 1967; Director to Jacksonville, Miami, and Tampa, May 20 and June 7, 1966; Miami to Director, June 17, 1966; Jacksonville to Director, May 25, 1966; Memphis to Director, July 1, Aug. 8, and Sept. 2 and 30, 1966; Richmond to Director, June 7, July 1 and 5, and Aug. 11, 1966; Cincinnati to Director, March 10, June 2, July 5, and Aug. 4, 1966; Cleveland to Director, Oct. 25 and Dec. 29, 1966, and Jan. 18, March 24, June 30, and Aug. 24, 1967; Director to Cleveland, Jan. 11 and 27, 1967.

¹³¹Charlotte to Director, July 19, 1966, and March 10, 1967; *Raleigh News and Observer*, May 24, 1967.



Agents sent this postcard to infer "that Klan leaders [were] using Klan money for high living" (Baumgardner to Sullivan, April 20, 1966, [section 1] in *COINTEL-PRO: The Counterintelligence Program of the FBI* [Wilmington, Del., 1978]).

cilitate the development of informants.¹³² FBI agents in seventeen field offices sent approximately 350 copies of the first NCDT letter to Klansmen across the nation, denouncing their leaders as covetous, cowardly, and irresponsible un-American men who unconsciously aided an international Communist conspiracy.¹³³ The letter also upset Klansmen in three Georgia Klaverns and, in combination with two poison-pen letters, fostered a drop in meeting attendance, and the splintering of a Klavern in Waynesboro, Georgia.¹³⁴

A second NCDT letter invoked evangelical Protestantism by beseeching “misdirected souls” to “disavow the path of the Anti-Christ . . . delivered . . . on the sugary forked tongues of deceitful Klan leaders.”¹³⁵ This provoked a Virginia Klan officer to resign. Two Louisiana Klansmen who had not received this letter were accused of informing.¹³⁶ In North Carolina, where Klansmen tried to figure out whether the FBI or the state bureau of investigation was responsible, a Warren County Klansman published a newsletter responding to NCDT charges.¹³⁷

Birmingham and Mobile agents sent copies of the first two NCDT letters to between thirty and fifty Alabama Klansmen within a week of Brassel’s ouster. Birmingham-area Klansmen were shaken up by the mailings. Since Klansmen in the two UKA Klaverns near Montgomery already suspected that a number of fellow Klansmen were informants, receipt of NCDT letters and postcards at their home addresses, in combination with local publicity about Brassel’s departure, provoked “great concern” that a local Klansman was informing. A member of

¹³²Baumgardner to Sullivan, March 10, 1966. For analysis of NCDT rhetoric, see Drabble, “To Ensure Domestic Tranquility”; Drabble, “Fidelity, Integrity, Bravery.”

¹³³Director to Atlanta et al., April 20, 1966 (section 1).

¹³⁴Atlanta to Director, July 19, 1966; Savannah to Director, June 27 and 30, Aug. 27, and Dec. 30, 1966; John Drabble, “The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia, 1964–1971” (working paper).

¹³⁵Baumgardner to Sullivan, May 4, 1966. Most field offices mailed fifty copies of the bulletin, save Chicago and New York, which mailed none. Jacksonville sent twenty-five and Richmond, two hundred. Director to Richmond, May 27, 1966.

¹³⁶Richmond to Director, June 7 and July 1, 1966; New Orleans to Director, Oct. 24, 1966.

¹³⁷Charlotte to Director, Aug. 29, 1966.

Lawrence Klavern #610 in Montgomery fell under suspicion. Another Klansman, who had recently fallen into disfavor and dropped out of that Klavern, was suspected of “having embezzled substantial sums of money.” But given the fact that Klansmen all over the nation also received these communications, some Klansmen suspected that the FBI or a Jewish group was targeting them. As they tightened security measures in response, weekly Klavern meeting attendance fell slightly.¹³⁸

The UKA responded in the July 1966 issue of the *Fiery Cross*, calling upon Klansmen to “pay no attention to the snoopers of the SO called Justice Department” and asked:

Since the F.B.I. is guilty of taking pictures and getting license numbers from cars that are in attendance at the Klan speakings and then days later these people start receiving the hate literature on the Klan, we ask this question. If it is not the F.B.I. who could in turn be receiving this information to harass the WHITE CHRISTIAN CITIZENS? ARE THEY ALLOWING OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TO USE THIS INFORMATION?¹³⁹

The UKA leadership, which just months before had hoped to find potential FBI allies in the wake of the Liuzzo convictions and the HUAC hearings, now expressed vehement outrage with the agency. This anger arose from the alienation, frustration, discouragement, divisiveness, and fear sparked by COINTELPRO operations that disrupted the UKA’s ability to function effectively.¹⁴⁰

In response to the article, FBI agents in Mississippi, Virginia, Texas, and South Carolina sent various types of postcards and letters

¹³⁸Birmingham to Director, July 1, 1966, and Jan. 5, 1967; Mobile to Director, May 20 and 23, June 6, 23, and 30, and Oct. 21, 1966; Mobile to Director, June 6, 1966.

¹³⁹“Is the Justice Department & Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Conspiring Against White Patriots?,” *Fiery Cross*, July 1966, attached to Atlanta to Director, July 18, 1966, and retyped in Birmingham to Director, Aug. 6, 1966.

¹⁴⁰See Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here*, 163–66.

to the UKA headquarters—letters ostensibly signed by prominent UKA Klansmen—which questioned UKA attacks and supported the NCDT, further aggravating factionalism and spurring resignations.¹⁴¹ A third NCDT letter accused Shelton of misusing funds, berated him for alienating Klansmen in Mississippi, and compared the undemocratic UKA leadership style with Nazism.¹⁴² In Louisiana, agents combined this letter with two poison-pen communications to frame a “most energetic, devoted and competent” assistant Grand Dragon as a police informant cooperating with the NCDT. This caused him to resign, creating a major split in the ranks and a membership drop in that state.¹⁴³ Yet another NCDT letter sent to Klaverns in Dothan and Montgomery sometime later in the year criticized Shelton’s plea for funds to appeal his contempt of Congress conviction, and urged Klansmen not to contribute to his defense.¹⁴⁴

According to informants, the NCDT letters were the “predominate topic of conversation at various Klan gatherings” in the fall months of 1966. Informants in Alabama, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Virginia reported resignations and suspicion about informants.¹⁴⁵ These letters, in combination with the loss of two grand dragons in five months, the exposure of rank and file Klan members, the snitch-jacket operations, and the postcard campaign, intensified paranoia within the Alabama UKA.¹⁴⁶ The bureau escalated its “smear campaign” against Shelton in late 1966, using, according to one memo-

¹⁴¹Jackson to Director, July 28 and Aug. 16, 1966; Director to Jackson et al., Aug. 10, 1966; Charlotte to Director, Aug. 19, 1966; Norfolk to Director, Sept. 8, 1966; Dallas to Director, Aug. 17 and Oct. 18, 1966; Mobile to Director, Sept. 29, 1966; Columbia to Director, Aug. 26 and Sept. 26, 1966.

¹⁴²Brennan to Sullivan, Jan. 24, 1967.

¹⁴³New Orleans to Director, Aug. 26, Sept. 16, and Oct. 4 and 7, 1966; Director to New Orleans, July 19, Sept. 7, and Oct. 24, 1966; Baumgardner to Sullivan, Oct. 11, 1966 (New Orleans file); Baumgardner to Sullivan, Sept. 21, 1966.

¹⁴⁴Director to New Orleans, Nov. 25, 1966; Director to Birmingham, Dec. 6, 1966; Mobile to Director, Dec. 13 and 29, 1966.

¹⁴⁵Director to Jackson et al., Aug. 10, 1966; Dallas to Director, Aug. 17 and Oct. 27, 1966; Miami to Director, Oct. 26, 1966; Atlanta to Director, July 19, 1966; Tampa to Director, June 20, 1966.

¹⁴⁶As a result of these disruptions, a rival Klan organization, James A. Venable’s Georgia-based National Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, contacted an alienated UKA officer and offered him a position. Mobile to Director, Oct. 26, 1966.

randum, “informants, established news sources, anonymous communications, the National Committee for Domestic Tranquility, chain letters, cartoons, compromise of Klansmen and other means too numerous to mention.” Across the country, reactions of Klan members ranged from bewilderment and concern to anger and fear; the result was dissention within and between competing Klan organizations and resignations from the UKA.¹⁴⁷

Yet the UKA continued to recruit new members during 1966, taking advantage of protests over integration, the hiring of black city employees, the rise of Black Power spokesmen, and incidents of interracial violence.¹⁴⁸ According to the *New York Times*, nationwide Klan membership increased during 1966. Although the HUAC hearings had caused thousands to drop out, some returned, and the Alabama Klan benefited from an influx of new recruits.¹⁴⁹ This represented a peak, however. The Alabama UKA rapidly declined after January 1967, as the state’s third consecutive Grand Dragon came under fire by COINTELPRO.

By then, UKA officers were openly expressing concern that the FBI continued to know so much about their activities, officers, and members. They suspected that their own acquaintances, associates, and friends were informing. “Quite a number” of UKA members began withdrawing from the organization or simply ceased participating in its activities, and Shelton was becoming obsessed with FBI informant activity. By April 1967, according to informant reports, Shelton believed that he was under constant surveillance by FBI agents.¹⁵⁰ A few months later informants reported that Grand Dragon James Spears was “talking crazier and crazier” all the time and acting “like a mental

¹⁴⁷Director to Birmingham et al., Sept. 27, 1966 (section 1); Birmingham to Director, Oct. 1, 1966. See also Birmingham to Director, Nov. 3, 1966, and Tampa to Director, Oct. 11, 1966.

¹⁴⁸*Birmingham News*, Jan. 13 and 14, Sept. 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 18, and 25, Nov. 12, and Dec. 9 and 10, 1966, Jan. 28, March 13–15 and 20, June 12, Aug. 4, 12, 14, 15, 18, and 25, Sept. 2, and Oct. 13, 1967; *New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1967; Carson, *In Struggle*, 254; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 191–96; *Washington Post*, April 8, 1968; Keith Nicholls, “Politics and Civil Rights in Post–World War II Mobile,” in Michael V. R. Thomason ed., *Mobile: The New History of Alabama’s First City* (Tuscaloosa, 2001), 264–66.

¹⁴⁹*New York Times*, Dec. 11, 1967.

¹⁵⁰Birmingham to Director, April 3, 1967.

case.” He was “going crazy” trying to identify the FBI informers within the organization, and his suspects changed from week to week.¹⁵¹

The situation was even grimmer in other UKA realms; covert operations had undermined top leaders in Pennsylvania and Florida. Shelton dismissed the assistant Grand Dragon in Louisiana, enabling FBI informants to take the reins of power. Similar efforts neutralized Klan groups in Tennessee.¹⁵² Counterintelligence and informants had created great dissention in South Carolina and Mississippi, while an intense series of COINTELPRO operations caused the splintering of the North Carolina realm in late spring, resulting in significant drops in rally attendance and membership numbers.¹⁵³

At the UKA national meeting in September 1967, Shelton threatened to administer the so-called truth serum sodium pentothal to members of the Imperial Board, as well as any Klansman who criticized his administration, and subject them all to polygraph tests. Anyone refusing to take the test, he warned, would be banished.¹⁵⁴ FBI agents worried that their “whole Klan informant program could be jeopardized” by such tests.¹⁵⁵ Shelton shelved the plan however, when Klan officers insisted that he submit to the tests first.¹⁵⁶ Between

¹⁵¹ Birmingham to Director, Aug. 3, 1967. See also Birmingham to Director, Jan. 5, March 29, and April 3, 1967; Director to Birmingham, April 20, 1967.

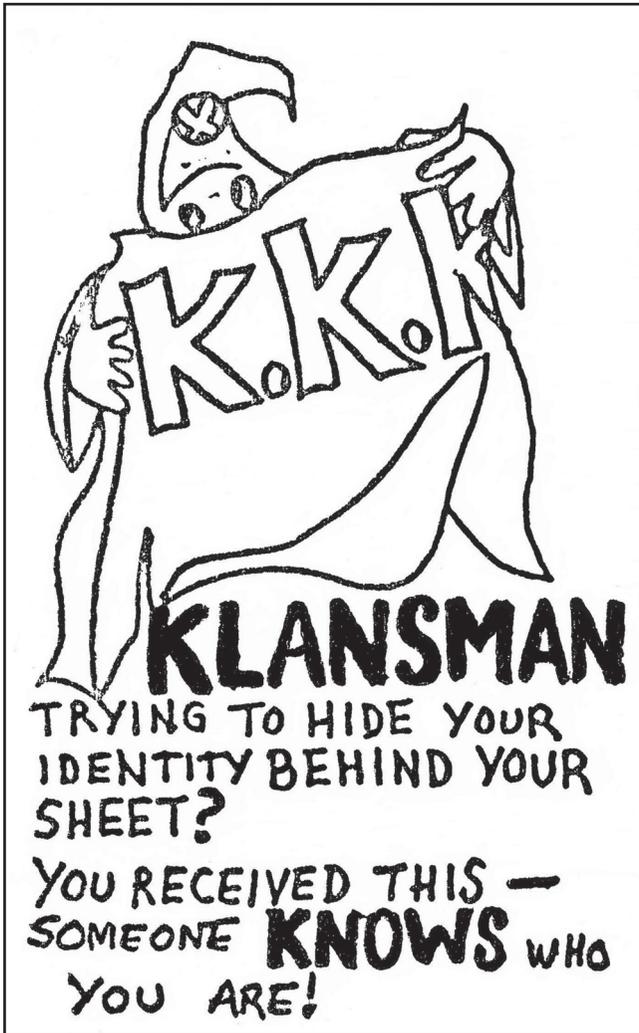
¹⁵² Brennan to Sullivan, Jan. 19, 1967; John Drabble, “The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Decline of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in Florida, 1964–1971,” “The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Decline of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in Louisiana, 1964–1971,” and “The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Decline of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in Tennessee, 1964–1971” (working papers). In Pennsylvania, bitter dissention due to paranoia over FBI informers and suspicion that Shelton was hoarding income led three hundred Klansmen to quit, reducing membership to twenty by May 1971. A few die-hard racists created a neo-Nazi group called the White Christian Crusaders; *New York Times*, May 30, 1971.

¹⁵³ Columbia to Director, Dec. 9 and 21, 1966; *Birmingham News*, June 5, Sept. 18, and Nov. 1, 1967; Drabble, “FBI in Mississippi,” 388–99, and “FBI in North Carolina”; William Vincent Moore, “A Sheet and a Cross: A Symbolic Analysis of the Ku Klux Klan” (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1975), 163–67.

¹⁵⁴ Mobile to Director, Sept. 15, 1967; Sullivan to Brennan, Sept. 29, 1967 (Birmingham file); Birmingham to Director, Oct. 2 and 29, 1967, and March 13, 1968; Director to Birmingham, March 19, 1968; Charlotte to Director, March 15, 1968; Director to Tampa, Sept. 11, 1967, and attached memorandum, in “UKA-FL Tampa File section five” (Bureau file 157-370-64—acquired by the author through the Freedom of Information Act [FOIA]).

¹⁵⁵ Director to Birmingham, March 7, 1968.

¹⁵⁶ Mobile to Director, Sept. 15, 1967; Birmingham to Director, March 11 and 13, 1968; Sul-



Receipt of this postcard “caused severe consternation among Klan leaders and . . . had a most disruptive effect” on the Klan (Baumgardner to Sullivan, June 7, 1966 [section 1], in *COINTELPRO: The Counterintelligence Program of the FBI* [Wilmington, Del., 1978]).

October and December, field office agents in Mobile “intensified” their interviews of Klan members’ associates in order to “disrupt the normal and daily activity of the Klans” and develop new informants. The new round of interviews “materially disrupted” recruiting activity in all four northern Alabama UKA Klaverns. Existing members became more reluctant to attend meetings, where the issue of informants was a common topic. This situation continued, according to quarterly progress reports from the Mobile FBI field office, into 1970.¹⁵⁷

In December of 1967, FBI agents advised Montgomery police about plans to burn crosses, resulting in arrests. Despite COINTELPRO’s successes, however, harassment, bombings, and arson continued to occur across the state. The national UKA meeting came off without a hitch in May 1968, when over 3,500 Klansmen met at the Tuscaloosa Ramada Inn.¹⁵⁸ Racial violence peaked in September and October, as whites attacked black teachers to prevent them from entering a rural white school, and interracial fights broke out at Mobile area high schools.¹⁵⁹ The Klan was nowhere to be seen during these events, although five months later, someone shot into a social club owned by activist Noble Beasley.¹⁶⁰

At various times throughout 1968, Atlanta FBI agents sent copies of long letters from the “Pure Klan” to UKA officers, to Klansmen who

livan to Brennan, Sept. 29, 1967 (Birmingham file); Birmingham to Director, Oct. 2 and Dec. 29, 1967, and March 13, 1968; Director to Birmingham, March 19, 1968; Charlotte to Director, March 15, 1968; Director to Tampa, Sept. 11, 1967, and attached memorandum, in “UKA-FL Tampa File section five,” author’s FOIA request; *Atlanta Journal*, Oct. 23, 1967. See also, William Sullivan with Bill Brown, *The Bureau: My Thirty Years in Hoover’s FBI* (New York, 1979), 130–31.

¹⁵⁷ Director to Attorney General, Dec. 19, 1967, in Church Committee, *Hearings*, 6:516–27; Mobile to Director, Dec. 29, 1967, April 2, June 3, and Oct. 1, 1968, Jan. 3, March 28, June 27, and Dec. 22, 1969, and March 30, June 30, Sept. 30, and Dec. 30, 1970.

¹⁵⁸ Director to Tampa, May 23, 1968, and attached memorandum, in “UKA-FL Tampa File section eight,” author’s FOIA request.

¹⁵⁹ *Birmingham News*, April 9, 11, 13, and 14, May 7, 8, 10, 17, and 29, Sept. 7, 8, 10, and 17, and Oct. 17, 1968, and March 6, 1969; Mobile report, Oct. 7, 1968, and attached teletype, CO, 111th MI Group, Ft. McPherson, Ga., to CG, USAINTC, “Ft Ho Bird [*sic*, likely “Fort Holabird],” Md., Oct. 11, 1968, and Reel 11 *passim*, in Garrow, *Centers of the Southern Struggle*.

¹⁶⁰ *Birmingham News*, May 19, 1969. Beasley headed a militant Mobile community action program called Neighborhood Organized Workers, which used “demonstrations, picket-

had expressed dissatisfaction with Shelton's leadership or who could be expected to inform Shelton about the letter, and to members with low incomes. The letters attacked Shelton and other Imperial Officers for misusing UKA income. It alleged that they were using UKA money to buy "fine homes, automobiles, a private airplane, and paid vacations to Florida." It pointed out that Shelton's home Klavern in Tuscaloosa was "almost inactive" and asked, "Did you know that many of the Klaverns in Alabama have folded up and are inactive?" It declared that "many of [the UKA's] most valuable leaders . . . have resigned in disgust."¹⁶¹

A few months later the FBI scored a major victory in Crenshaw County, when a federal judge issued an injunction against the local UKA Klavern, forty of its members compiled from a UKA membership list, and six other individuals; the injunction ordered them to desist interfering with school desegregation. In response, grand jury witnesses were threatened and the barn of a witness was burned.¹⁶² Six months later, however, five Klansmen who had threatened two men in Decatur were apprehended and charged with assault with intent to murder.¹⁶³ In fact, vigilante violence declined somewhat in late 1969 and was limited to a "night-rider shooting" that seriously wounded a man in Calhoun County and a five-month campaign of shootings and cow-poisonings against a Nation of Islam-owned farm near Ashville in St. Clair County.¹⁶⁴

ing, and the threat of violence" to win concessions from white establishment politicians seeking black votes; Nicholls, "Politics and Civil Rights," 264–66.

¹⁶¹Director to Birmingham et al., March 28, 1968; Birmingham to Director, April 3, 1968; Charlotte to Director, April 11, 1968; Richmond to Director, April 4, 1968; Atlanta to Director, May 16, 1969.

¹⁶²*Birmingham News*, July 12, Aug. 1, 2, and 14, 1968; *United States v. Crenshaw County Unit of the United Klans of America*, 290 F. Supp. 181 (M.D. Ala. 1968); Sims, *The Klan*, 134–35.

¹⁶³One of the five was also charged with possession of an unlicensed gun; *Birmingham News*, March 16, 1969.

¹⁶⁴Although Robert Shelton alluded to Klan surveillance, the author found no direct evidence that Klansmen were involved in either of these cases. *Newsweek*, Dec. 8, 1968; *Birmingham News*, Oct. 20 and 21, 1969, and Aug. 27, 1970; *New York Times*, Nov. 25 and 29, 1969, and March 19, 1970; *Washington Post*, March 19, 1970; Mobile to Director, Nov. 30 and Dec. 4, 1970, and Director to Mobile, Dec. 11, 1970, in *COINTELPRO: The Counterintelligence Program of the FBI*, reel 4 (Black Nationalist Hate Groups), section 22. The author found no evidence that Klansmen targeted the Tarrant City-based Alabama Black Liberation front either.

UKA national officers remained very concerned about informants during 1969 and 1970. In February 1969 Robert Shelton was incarcerated in federal prison for his contempt of Congress conviction; he turned over leadership of the UKA to James Spears and Imperial officer Melvin Sexton.¹⁶⁵ The FBI began an attempt to “create strife” between the two men by sending a letter to Sexton from one “Y. B. T.” claiming that Spears did not trust him.¹⁶⁶ In June, when informants reported that Sexton was displaying signs of stress, they sent a letter from “an interested member” to Shelton alleging that Sexton “acts like a wild man . . . openly urges violent acts and . . . is drinking himself to death.”¹⁶⁷ Soon after, Sexton refused to reimburse a group of North Carolina Klansmen for trial expenses from a fund to which they had contributed. COINTELPRO used the incident as material for poison-pen letters, and informants accused Sexton of embezzling from the fund, causing a second major splintering in that state.¹⁶⁸

Although these operations failed to drive either Sexton or Spears out of the UKA, Shelton’s incarceration severely hurt the organization’s leadership. It was beset by bickering and lacked direction. Informants and notional communications split the Virginia UKA into competing factions and further splintered the organization in North Carolina, facilitating a subsequent break with headquarters. Membership in the state, at one time the largest UKA Realm in the nation, dwindled to a few hundred.¹⁶⁹ FBI informants gained significant power in South Carolina after poison-pen letters and informant disruption ensured the banishment of Grand Dragon Robert Scoggin.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵Birmingham to Director, Jan. 3 and 10 and April 2, 1969; *Birmingham News*, Jan. 14 and Feb. 14, 1969.

¹⁶⁶Director to Birmingham, March 5, 1969; Birmingham to Director, Feb. 25, 1969; Imperial Office Newsletters, Feb. 15 and March 1, 1969, State Bureau of Investigation files, Box 1, Folder IA: 2, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; *New York Times*, Feb. 4 and March 2, 1969.

¹⁶⁷Birmingham to Director, May 23, 1969; Director to Birmingham, June 3, 1969.

¹⁶⁸Birmingham to Director, July 28 and Sept. 30, 1969; Director to Birmingham, Aug. 8 and 12, 1969; Drabble, “FBI in North Carolina”; *FBI and KKK* (provisional title), DVD, directed by Michael Frierson (2008).

¹⁶⁹Atlanta to Director, July 29, 1969; *New York Times*, Sept. 8, 1969; John Drabble, “The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in Virginia” (working paper); Drabble, “FBI in North Carolina.”

¹⁷⁰Columbia to Director, Sept. 26 and Dec. 9, 1966, Jan. 17, April 3, and June 9, 1967, June

Shelton was released from prison on November 17, 1969, after serving nine months of his one-year sentence.¹⁷¹ Within a few weeks a prominent UKA officer was removed from his position, shortly after he underwent an extensive FBI interview. Birmingham agents then used a “high placed” informant to “urge and convince” Shelton to take steps that would enable the FBI to “neutralize and destroy the Klan.”¹⁷² In 1970, the FBI even came to control Shelton’s speechwriter through its informants, resulting in speeches that were, according to one FBI official, “less racist and more anticommunist.”¹⁷³

To disrupt the UKA’s 1969 annual meeting (which was not held until June 1970 because of Shelton’s incarceration) at Catawba College in North Carolina, FBI agents canceled room reservations and contacted members of the college’s board of trustees with anonymous letters and phone calls. Alerts to newspaper sources resulted in critical articles and provided a pretext for agents to make anonymous calls to Klansmen. Conflict erupted over financial issues and nominations for elective office, further aggravating relations between Shelton and the North Carolina Grand Dragon.¹⁷⁴ Agents also alerted media sources to the 1970 annual meeting, which was held in Tuscaloosa in late November. Several politicians who attended the meeting—including a spokesman for George Wallace—were criticized in media reports. Other invited politicians declined to attend, resulting in, according to one FBI report, “damaging effects upon the UKA and all persons involved.”¹⁷⁵

30, Sept. 30, and Nov. 4, 1970, and March 31, 1971; Director to Columbia, Oct. 7 and Dec. 22, 1966; *Washington Post*, Sept. 18, 1970; Sims, *The Klan*, 61–62; Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 438–39, 506–07.

¹⁷¹ *New York Times*, Nov. 18, 1969.

¹⁷² Birmingham to Director, Dec. 24, 1969. Bureau redactions of extensive portions of this document prevent identification of the officer, determination of the degree to which this interview facilitated his ouster or who ousted him, and verification as to what “steps” the informant took and whether the informant took over his position.

¹⁷³ Moore to Sullivan, May 28, 1970 (Birmingham file); Director to Birmingham, June 1, 1970; Birmingham to Director, Sept. 2 and 29, 1970. One researcher has determined that the content of Shelton’s speeches during this period became less racist, more anticommunist, and more critical of violence; Moore, “A Sheet and a Cross,” 238–57.

¹⁷⁴ Moore to Sullivan, June 19, 1970; Director to Birmingham and Charlotte, June 23, 1970.

¹⁷⁵ Wallace spokesman Finus Gaston was described as a “behind the scenes political figure

By 1970, the number of individual COINTELPRO actions had dropped 71 percent since their peak in 1966. Internal disruption through the use of informants continued, however, so that by late 1970, as UKA membership declined to 5,300, Shelton was suspicious that even his own officers were informing. He announced that the UKA national office had purchased a polygraph machine to check Klan units for spies and once again warned that he would use sodium pentothal to secure accurate results.¹⁷⁶ Birmingham agents were able to prevent the test from being administered at the 1971 annual meeting, however, ensuring that FBI informants were not exposed.¹⁷⁷

Nevertheless, at least two more national officers quit the UKA.¹⁷⁸ About this same time, a snitch jacket operation framing a Klansman as an informant caused a member of Lawrence Klavern #610 to stop attending Klavern meetings.¹⁷⁹ In Florida, media operations, notional communications, and snitch-jacket operations had reduced the UKA to a small number of Klaverns.¹⁸⁰ The Grand Dragon of the Indiana Realm, which had just become the largest UKA group in a northern state, also became a FBI informant, enabling the FBI to splinter that Realm.¹⁸¹

Despite a vigorous recruitment drive that commenced after Shelton returned from prison, the decline in nationwide UKA membership continued.¹⁸² As COINTELPRO came to a close in 1971, FBI figures

in Alabama.” The meeting featured a Tuscaloosa Police Department narcotics agent and Lieutenant Governor–elect Jere Beasley. Director to Birmingham, Aug. 26, 1970, and Jan. 5, 1971; Birmingham to Director, Jan. 5, 1971; Director to Tampa, Dec. 9, 1970, and attached memorandum, in “UKA-FL Tampa File section nine,” author’s FOIA request; *Washington Post*, Nov. 30, 1970.

¹⁷⁶Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here*, 76; *New York Times*, Nov. 28, 1970; Tampa to Director, Dec. 9, 1970, UKA-FL Tampa File, Section 9; Birmingham to Director, June 29, 1970, and April 1, 1971.

¹⁷⁷Birmingham to Director, Jan. 5, 1971.

¹⁷⁸*Ibid.*; Gray to Brennan, Jan. 5, 1971.

¹⁷⁹Mobile to Director, Jan. 5, March 17 and 29, 1971; Director to Mobile, Jan. 19, 1971.

¹⁸⁰Drabble, “FBI in Florida.”

¹⁸¹Indianapolis to Director, Nov. 23, 1970; Director to Indianapolis, Dec. 8, 1970; John George and Laird Wilcox, *American Extremists: Militias, Supremacists, Klansmen, Communists, and Others* (New York, 1996), 374. For context, see Reed, *Night of the Klan*.

¹⁸²*Atlanta Journal*, June 29, 1970; U.S. Department of Justice, *FBI Annual Report 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1970), 26; *New York Times*, Nov. 30, 1969. Shelton made two to four speeches a week in late 1970; *New York Times*, Nov. 28, 1970.

placed total Klan membership in the United States at 4,300.¹⁸³ The trend continued, with membership plummeting to 3,200 in 1972 and to between 1,400 and 1,700 in 1974—a noteworthy decline from the reported peak in January 1967.¹⁸⁴ In a coordinated effort among federal, state, and local authorities, COINTELPRO had played a significant role in vitiating both the Alabama Realm and the UKA national organization.¹⁸⁵ Although Klansmen continued to commit murders and other crimes in the 1970s, their misdeeds were vigorously prosecuted and juries often found them guilty. The UKA lasted until 1989, when a civil suit effectively destroyed the organization, but in the 1970s younger organizers created new Klan groups in areas of the South that had mostly been left untouched by the events of the 1960s.¹⁸⁶

Although COINTELPRO was very successful in neutralizing the UKA, the covert operation had unanticipated consequences regarding the relationships that racist, right wing organizations believed they had with federal authorities. As long as vigilantes could operate with impunity, Klansmen had envisioned themselves as allied with police, the FBI, HUAC, and other counter-subversive institutions in American politics intent on finding and exposing individuals seeking to undermine the nation's government and social structure. They

¹⁸³Rich, "Ku Klux Klan Ideology," 148.

¹⁸⁴Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, xii, 575; *Durham Morning Herald*, Dec. 29, 1974, in *Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina Clippings* (C363 K95), 161, the North Carolina Collection at the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As of March 1973, some estimated that the *Fiery Cross* had about five thousand subscribers; Gary E. McCuen, *The Racist Reader: Analyzing Primary Source Readings by American Race Supremacists* (Anoka, Minn., 1974).

¹⁸⁵See Drabble, publications and working papers, <http://www.geocities.com/drabbs/workingpapers.html>.

¹⁸⁶Gary Thomas Rowe provided highly suspect testimony in the suit. Belknap, *Federal Law*; May, *The Informant*, 360–63; Newton and Newton, *Racial and Religious Violence*, 604; Kirk Loggins and Susan Thomas, "The Menace Returns," *Southern Exposure* 7 (Summer 1980): 50–54; *New York Times*, March 10, 1974, Dec. 21, 1978, March 15, 18, and 20, April, 5, 7, and 15, May 5, 15, 22, 27, and 28, June, 10, July 5 and 8, Aug. 8 and 13, Sept. 7, and Nov. 11, 1979, Sept. 28 and Nov. 24, 1980, Aug. 5, 1981, Dec. 8, 1983, Feb. 3 and May 18, 1984, and April 12, 1985; *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 23, 1980; *Washington Post*, May 28 and Aug. 17, 1979, and May 18, 1984; *Fiery Cross* 18, no. 17 (1979): 4, in Wilcox Collection of Contemporary Political Movements, Folder RHWL-G540, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas; *New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 1, 1989; Rich, "Ku Klux Klan Ideology," 157.

were slow to understand the change in federal priorities. As late as 1966, despite the convictions related to the Liuzzo murder and the HUAC exposé, Robert Shelton continued to believe that the FBI and the UKA were allies in a fight against subversive forces seeking to destroy the republic. He retained faith in the American political system, and believed that infiltration by various parts of the government was the cause of his woes. As late as 1966, he had said of the FBI “it’s not necessary for them to infiltrate. If they fill out an application, they can do so and we’ll welcome them into the Klan and have fraternal unionism.”¹⁸⁷

As COINTELPRO took its toll, however, the UKA became increasingly critical of federal law enforcement officials. By 1971, Shelton was calling the FBI a “Gestapo-type police force” and warned that the Klan “would not continue to sit back and be intimidated” by the FBI’s “illegal practices.” More radical voices spoke of “tyranny” by an “anti-Christ” elite.¹⁸⁸ Because racism and vigilantism had become identified with “extremism” in American political discourse and Klan organizations were in precipitous decline, these hard-core white supremacists abandoned Klan ideology and began to search for new discourses to explain their predicament.¹⁸⁹

Indicative of this shift, a Klansman who had been “well acquainted with Shelton for years,” left to form a splinter group called “The Southerners.”¹⁹⁰ By 1972 this group had become the lay arm of the Assembly of Christian Soldiers, a congregation within the Christian Identity movement—a militant sect that propounded apocalyptic anti-Semitism.¹⁹¹ In the 1970s, the UKA also began calling for revolu-

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Mikell, *They Say Blood*, 54. See also, Drabble, “To Ensure Domestic Tranquility,” 325–28; Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here*, 163–66.

¹⁸⁸ *Washington Post*, June 16, 1971; “Abolish the FBI” handbill, United Klans of America, 1971, from the National Klonvocation (Nov. 27–28, 1971), Tuscaloosa, attached to report, Dec. 6, 1971, in “UKA-FL Tampa File, section ten,” author’s FOIA request.

¹⁸⁹ Drabble, “To Ensure Domestic Tranquility” and “White Supremacy to White Power.”

¹⁹⁰ Birmingham to Director, April 27, 1971.

¹⁹¹ The group was active in Mobile from 1972 through 1974, with public rallies drawing three hundred people on average. Law enforcement authorities implicated members of this group in an assassination plot against Spring Hill College Human Relations Center Director Albert Foley. Newton and Newton, *Ku Klux Klan*, 26, 204, 535; Albert S. Foley, “New ‘Church,’ Old Klan,” *America*, Oct. 21, 1972.

tion, flirting with National Socialist theories, the Christian Identity movement, and paramilitary groups. By the 1980s, even casual observers could discern the presence of a revolutionary white power movement that embraced anti-Semitism and paramilitary organizing. The FBI, with whom Robert Shelton had hoped to achieve fraternity in 1966, had come to be seen as the tool of a Zionist conspiracy.¹⁹² This too was a legacy of COINTELPRO.

COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE and other FBI covert operations are worth studying because they provide case studies for evaluating the efficacy of extralegal covert action techniques undertaken in the interest of domestic security. In Alabama such techniques proved very successful, but they also provided racists with grist for their conspiracy theories. These issues are particularly important now, because the United States government is currently unshackling the intelligence community and increasing surveillance of American citizens, so that it can engage in preventive operations against transnational terrorist cells. At a time when the American people are re-evaluating how to preserve the delicate balance between the preservation of their liberties and their need for collective security, they ignore such questions at their peril.

¹⁹²Drabble, "White Supremacy to White Power."