

Chad Pearson: Sabbatical Report.

I am pleased to report that I had a very productive sabbatical during the Fall 2020 semester. Despite the on-going public health crisis, I was able to consult archival material, read published primary and secondary sources, and write. As a result, my understanding of the views and actions of former slaveowners in the Reconstruction Era has improved considerably. More important, I have already incorporated this new information into my classroom teaching. My knowledge of vigilante groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camelia has improved considerably, and I believe I can comfortably highlight underexplored relationships between plantation managers and vigilantes. Most significantly, this sabbatical has helped increased my confidence as a historian and classroom instructor. For years, I have wanted to take the time necessary to understand the relationships between former slaves and slave owners in the immediate post-Civil War period. This research is important for two basic reasons: 1) it helped me finish research that I will use to write a book about elite forms of violence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My research into the Klan and Klan-like organizations is an important part of this larger project. 2) I want to improve my teaching. I look forward to sharing this knowledge with colleagues, fellow historians, and, above all, my students.

Like everyone else living during the Fall of 2020, I faced difficulties. My original plan to visit several archives in multiple states had become unrealistic by the early Fall simply because most research facilities were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet I was persistent, which paid off. Fortunately, I visited archives in Tennessee and Kanas after making appointments. I found these visits enormously fruitful.

The Tennessee State Archives in Nashville was especially helpful. This research center houses papers related to the Ku Klux Klan, and I consulted documents from former members.

The organization, which emerged in nearby Pulaski, spread throughout the state before establishing chapters in many regions of the South. Thankfully, this archive houses records of some of the organization's high-profile members. I found the papers of Henry Melville Doak, a former Klansman, especially useful. By consulting his papers, I gained new insights into the thinking of the organization's leadership. The "mere consciousness that there was a Ku Klux Klan," Doak wrote decades after participating in the group, led to labor suppression and established "peace and quiet." Other sources in the archives, including books and manuscript collections, shed light on the organization's secrecy, its relationship with local politics, and the way its members responded to "carpetbaggers" and the federal government.

Fortunately, I was able to conduct much of my research from home. Thanks to the internet, I was able to access some archival sources remotely. The University of Alabama, for example, has uploaded many letters from former slaveowners and Confederate veterans to its website, which I have found useful. *Chronicling America*, an on-line newspaper source, contains many additional sources. Moreover, I read published primary sources, including autobiographical accounts by Klan leaders like Tennessean Nathan Bedford Forrest and Georgian John B. Gordon. Such sources provided me with a glimpse into how they viewed society after the Civil War. As Forrest put it, "The government which we sought to establish and perpetuate is at an end." Fellow Confederate General and future Klansman, Gordon, understood the stakes involved: "The negroes are freed and may refuse to work." Gordon imagined a dystopian future: "what assurances can we have of law and order and the safety of our families with four million slaves suddenly emancipated in the midst of us and the restraints to which they have been accustomed entirely removed?"

I spent most days consulting secondary sources. I read about 100 pages a day, and believe I am in a strong position to identify dominant trends in the historiography and update my lectures. From the Reconstruction period to the 1950s, historians were generally sympathetic to white supremacist vigilantes, believing that the Klan and Klan-like organizations were virtuous organizations responsible for redeeming the South from the mistake of “negro rule.” Today, we would consider these scholars racist, and few current historians have much in common with this earlier cohort. Most current scholarship focuses on the Klan’s cultural, racial, and political dimensions. For example, historians have said much about the regalia worn by Klansmen while highlighting their commitment to the white supremacist policies of the Democratic Party. Some scholars have written about the federal government’s legal clampdowns on the Klan, noting how late Reconstruction Era laws led the organization’s collapse.

My growing familiarity with primary and secondary sources has helped me develop what I believe is an original interpretation of the first Klan and similar organizations of the period. In essence, I have found much evidence supporting my hypothesis that the Klan functioned like a pre-industrial employers’ association. Indeed, Klansmen like Doak, Forrest, and Gordon identified a handful of labor-related problems and solutions. These men were determined to maintain control over the lives of former slaves, and in some ways, they sought to continue the same repressive managerial activities that they had mastered before the Civil War. After learning about the Klan’s formation in Middle Tennessee in 1866, Forrest expressed enthusiasm, believing that this organization promised to keep the former slaves “in their place.” Klansmen consisted of whites of all classes, though the organization’s chapters were led by those from the middle and upper classes. These included shopkeepers, lawyers, and, above all, property owners. In regions throughout the South, Klansmen fought against at least three challenges:

absenteeism, idleness, and rebellion. Klansmen, collaborating closely with plantation owners (they often overlapped), expressed considerable frustration that former slaves decided to leave their old worksites for new opportunities. In dramatic cases, Klansmen resorted to kidnapping. In response to idleness and slowdowns, Klansmen often employed the lash, whipping both men and women to enforce discipline. Finally, some Klansmen decided to murder those involved in rebellions.

Additionally, my research has helped me better understand the question of “outside agitators.” These were the “carpetbaggers”—northerners who backed the Reconstruction reforms overseen by the Republican Party. In fact, one of my most important discoveries is that Klansmen hated these individuals more than they disdained the African American masses. One can understand why: northerners established educational institutions that introduced African Americans to ideas that challenged the interests of Southern elites. From the perspective of the South’s political economy, such outsiders had no “place” in the South. The same could not be said about the African American masses. The elite wanted them to do one thing only: perform labor on agricultural worksites.

In response to the presence of “carpetbaggers,” Klansmen helped to master a technique popular with other vigilantes: drive-out campaigns. These campaigns were designed to remove those they considered “troublemakers” from communities. In practice, it involved isolating, intimidating, expelling, and blacklisting their targets. Consider the case of a teacher of former slaves named John Dunlap in Shelbyville, Tennessee. According to the *Pulaski Citizen*, Dunlap and “a couple of negros” were forced into the woods by Klansmen and given “a sound thrashing.” The “thrashing” demonstrated the gravity of their rage, but it did not speak for itself. Immediately following the beating, these attackers demanded that Dunlap “pack up and leave

town, which order he says he will obey.” One witness, an unidentified Confederate veteran, later reported that he was taken aback by the flogging’s excessiveness, observing that he had seen plenty of Blacks “whipped by different persons,” but he “never saw any one beaten as this man, Dunlap, was.”

Dunlap’s situation was not uncommon. I spent months reading similar accounts about the conflicts that erupted between Klansmen and northern teachers. One of the best accounts is found in John L. Hunnicutt’s autobiography, *Reconstruction in West Alabama: The Memoirs of John L. Hunnicutt*. Hunnicutt, a former Klansman, was upfront about the coercive activities he employed to keep his community free of “carpetbaggers.” He wrote about how an educator from Connecticut came to his community to organize the students into “some kind of league.” In response, Hunnicutt and his comrades sought to shame the man, asking “him if he fully realized how he stood in the estimation of the white people of that country sleeping around in these Negro houses and drilling and organizing them for something we know not what.” Hunnicutt and his menacing followers gave the frightened man an ultimatum: “I then told him, If you let the sun go down on you one more time in Hale County, you will be in hell when it rises.” The teacher acquiesced, demonstrating that intimidation worked.

I suspect that the Klan’s use of drive-out campaigns inspired other vigilante groups, including the mostly midwestern-based Law and Order Leagues, elite organizations that sprung up in the mid-1880s. While the Klan sought to run out Republicans, Law and Order Leagues drove out anarchists, socialists, and labor militants during some of the most dramatic strikes of the late nineteenth century. I discovered these connections partially by consulting sources at the Kansas State Historical society in Topeka, which was open during the pandemic. I spent hours at this archive where I learned much about how organized elites in places like Sedalia, Missouri

and Parsons, Kansas built Law and Order Leagues and fought strikers during the dramatic 1886 Southwestern Railroad strike.

With this research under my belt, I will deliver presentations to members of the broad academic community, including Collin colleagues and those at professional gatherings of historians. I am scheduled to present my work at the next Labor and Working-Class History Association conference, which will take place in May, 2021. Furthermore, I am preparing a book manuscript, which will combine my work on the Klan with research I have previously conducted.

Above all, this research will help me improve my classroom teaching. I have added information to my PowerPoint slides and updated my lecture notes. I am confident that my classes will become even more stimulating. In my years of teaching, I have found that students learn best when exposed to people's voices from the past. Indeed, one my favorite parts of teaching is sharing primary sources, which we analyze together. Thankfully, I have many new documents to share.

I would like to conclude by thanking members of Collin College's Sabbatical Committee, President Neil Matkin, former Provost Abe Johnson (current Senior Vice President of Operations) former Dean Mary Barnes-Tilley (current Provost), former Associate Dean Kristen Streater (current Dean), and the Board of Trustees for providing me with this wonderful opportunity.

