His Criticism Never Ceased: 
Willard Cole’s Pulitzer Prize-winning 
Campaign Against the Ku Klux Klan, 
1950-1953

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“Considering the three Ruffins, the Whiteville News-Reporter editor, the editor of the Tabor City Tribune and the Sheriff, I guess we despised the Editor of the Whiteville News Report most, and for good reasons. He conferred titles to the Negro race, referring to them as Mr. and Mrs. He had desegregated his publications . . . His criticism never ceased for one moment against the KKK. 

– Early Brooks

Old buildings moan and creak and shiver in the dark as the heat of the day settles out of their aging timbers. Willard Cole was oblivious to the night noises surrounding him. They were comfortable, predictable, and still sometimes unnerving. The clatter of the old Underwood typewriter filled the room. Every so often he would pause to pluck a key back into the machine or untangle several that jammed. His fingers were stained with nicotine and ink, ink from the typewriter ribbon and from the newspapers piled everywhere in his office. He would sometimes take a sip of very weak whiskey. Several small rings of moisture remained on the desk next to the small caliber revolver.
Thomas Hamilton carefully adjusted the cans and the flour sacks and the boxes of sugar on the shelves behind the counter of his grocery store in Leesville, South Carolina. In those days in small grocery stores most of the groceries were behind the counter and customers asked for what they wanted. But Hamilton was distracted, increasingly so. Since he had gained authority and confidence in the Masons and the Ku Klux Klan, he was committing more and more of his time to those activities and not the activities that kept food on his own table. It was 1949, and he had decided to sell his grocery store and devote himself to growing the KKK’s membership and influence.

He smiled to himself. He thought North Carolina – Charlotte, maybe – would be fertile ground. And maybe down in the southern part of the state, near the state line. Whiteville, he thought. Whiteville is certainly an appropriate name for a town. The bell jangled as a customer walked in the front door. Hamilton did not bother to look up; he was still smiling to himself.

Southern newspapers praised the Klan and its mission throughout the last decades of the 19th Century. In Montgomery, Alabama, the Selma Times and Messenger urged its readers to “organize a Ku-Klux Klan whenever ‘blacks’ organize a [Union] League.”2 The Mobile Register echoed that, urging whites to organize “Ku Klux Clubs.”3 The editor of the Tuscaloosa Monitor, Ryland Randolph, formed and led a Klavern,4 while Colonel William L. Saunders, editor of the Wilmington Journal in North Carolina, was a leader of the Klan in 1867.5 The Ku Klux Kaleidoscope was published for a time in Goldsboro, North Carolina,6 while Texas had a pair of like newspapers: the Ultra Ku Klux in Jefferson and the Daily Kuklux Vedette.7 The Forest Register in Mississippi changed its name to the Ku Klux before an 1871 election.8 Other newspapers were less obvious in their affiliation, but no less committed. The Oxford, Mississippi Falcon in 1868 published the names of all local African Americans who voted.9 In North Carolina in the election of 1898, Josephus Daniels and his newspaper, the News and Observer of Raleigh, North Carolina, demonized African Americans and appealed to the fears of whites for
jobs and the safety of white women. Voices raised against the Klan were few in the South as the media, attendant to its financial interests and privileged place in Jim Crow culture, did not object to a system they were part of and helped perpetuate.

Horace Carter, owner and editor of the nearby *Tabor City Tribune*, and a friend of Cole, also battled the Klan. Their campaigns ultimately earned their newspapers the 1952 Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious Public Service, resulted in the arrest and conviction of over 300 presumed Klansmen, the imprisonment of 62 Klan members, and the complete dismantling of the organization in Columbus County, North Carolina and Horry County, South Carolina. These were the first Pulitzers awarded to any North Carolina newspapers or journalists and were the first non-daily newspapers nationwide to win.

Besides the *Tribune* and *News-Reporter*, four other newspapers won Pulitzers for Public Service, two of them outside the South: the now-defunct *New York World* in 1922 for exposing the internal operations of the Klan; Georgia’s *Columbus Enquirer Sun* in 1926 for a number of editorial stands, most notably for opposing the Klan, publicizing lynching, and supporting justice for African Americans; the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* for publishing editorial cartoons against the Klan and general news coverage; and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* for its expose of Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black’s membership in the Alabama Klan.

There were precious few other voices. Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Writing in 1959 and Hazel Freeman Brannon Smith, winner of the same award in 1964 and the first woman to win a Pulitzer. Smith owned four rural weekly newspapers in Mississippi and was cited for her general coverage of the Civil Rights movement. Hodding Carter II, owner and founder of the *Greenville Delta Democrat-Times* in Mississippi, was also a progressive southern journalist, but won the 1946 Pulitzer for editorial writing for his stands against the treatment of Japanese-Americans in World War II. Cole and Carter were in that thin tradition of progressive southerners who embraced
William Faulkner’s view on race to “accept insult and contumely and the risk of violence, because we will not sit quietly by and see our native land, the South, . . . wreck and ruin itself twice in less than a hundred years.”

**Purpose and methodology**

It is the purpose of this study to examine the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in southeast North Carolina and northeast South Carolina during 1950-1953 through the *Whiteville News-Reporter* and its editor, Willard Cole. Cole’s campaign took a toll on him personally and on the twice-weekly newspaper he edited: the *News-Reporter* lost 40 percent of its circulation during a three-year period while it opposed the KKK. Cole was repeatedly threatened and was compelled to carry a gun. This study relies principally on the archives of the *Whiteville News-Reporter*, encompassing the entirety the Klan’s rise and fall in North and South Carolina, from its first appearance on the streets of Tabor City on July 22, 1950 through Cole’s departure from the *News-Reporter* in the wake of the awarding of the Pulitzer Prize in May 1953.

**Literature review**

Like a storm-whipped wave, the Ku Klux Klan advanced and retreated numerous times since its founding, originally spawned amidst the chaos of the postbellum South “during the restless days when time was out of joint . . . and the social order was battered and turned upside down,” stated scholar David Chalmers. Into this environment, the Ku Klux Klan was founded by half a dozen ex-Confederate soldiers in Pulaski, Tennessee in a lawyer’s office on Christmas Eve 1865. Historian Allen Trelease claimed the Klan was “transformed into a terrorist organization aimed at the preservation of white supremacy . . . a counterrevolutionary device to combat . . . Reconstruction policy in the South.” Trelease added, “For more than four years [the Klan] whipped, shot, hanged, robbed, raped, and otherwise outraged Negroes and Republicans” and anyone else who crossed it. The Klan was never a monolithic organization as popularly portrayed, although its most prominent leader was former Confederate Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest.

Renewed white patrols,
Black Codes, and anti-vagrancy laws were all aimed at controlling the behavior and movement of freedmen and were passed in the first two years after the end of the Civil War. \(^\text{17}\) The violence was echoed in the Carolinas in the early 1950s as the Klan attempted to reassert its dominance. By 1867, in scholar Sally Hadden’s opinion, “Klan members routinely resorted to violence … to punish freedmen for their political convictions and to prevent the enforcement of the Fourteenth Amendment.” \(^\text{18}\) The increasing violence, murders, and kidnappings and goaded by President Ulysses Grant, Congress reacted with the Ku Klux Klan Acts of 1871 and the Enforcement Acts, \(^\text{19}\) permitting suspension of habeas corpus and allowing federal intervention. \(^\text{20}\) Driven underground, the Klan was given a new lease on life with the withdrawal of federal troops at the end of Reconstruction. \(^\text{21}\) In historian Walter L. Fleming’s estimation, nearly all southern white men in the post-Civil War period took part in the wider movement that modern observers call the Klan. \(^\text{22}\) Fleming’s scholarship runs counter to many histories that contend Klansmen were a distinct minority among Southern men. \(^\text{23}\)

The Klan reappeared in 1915, stimulated by D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* and its romantic portrayal of the Klansman as the epitome of Southern chivalry. \(^\text{24}\) A Methodist minister, William Joseph Simmons, took advantage of the racial tensions and formally reorganized the Klan in Georgia on Thanksgiving Day 1915 with a ceremony at Stone Mountain. \(^\text{25}\) According to scholar Daryl Davis, the Klan was “depicted as the savior of the white race against the ravages and criminality of the black race.” \(^\text{26}\) Perhaps five million Americans belonged to one of the affiliated Ku Klux Klans during its height in the mid-1920s. \(^\text{27}\) Even President Warren Harding was implicated. \(^\text{28}\) More than 40,000 Klansmen paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., in 1924. \(^\text{29}\)

Thrusting itself into the political arena proved the Klan’s undoing, Chalmers contended; the Klan simply could not deliver. \(^\text{30}\) Its organization was splintered by factionalism and the greed and immorality of its leaders. \(^\text{31}\) The Klan expended considerable energy and political capital opposing Catholic Alfred E.
Smith’s bid for the presidency in 1928 and, whether because of that or other reasons, it experienced a sharp decline in membership after that election. Its image became one of “popular disrepute” in scholar Arnold Rice’s view. The Depression also contributed, in historian Daryl Davis’s opinion, to the pullback of the Klan. By scholar William Moore’s reckoning, in 1930 there were only 35,000 Klansmen nationwide, a startling decline in half a decade.

There was always a strong moralistic and nativist strain to the Klan, overlaid by religious convictions. In both its first and second iterations, the Klan, historian Kathleen Blee explained, “linked sexual morality to racial and religious hatreds by depicting Jewish, Catholic, and black men as sexual savages.” Blee noted, “Wrapping political issues in the mantle of moral concern obscures underlying political agendas.”

The image of white female purity and sexually predatory African American men were ubiquitous images that helped unite southern whites politically. As a technique, it effectively split the 1890s populist, progressive, and reformist movements in the South. It led towards segregation and the disenfranchisement of blacks, according to historian Joel Williamson. This transformed the political and social system of the South for half a century. The Klan stoked a primal southern terror, what Williamson calls “the older fear,” that blacks would “rise massively and kill whites, or do them bodily injury, or destroy their property.”

In historian Peter Williams’ view, “Violence has for centuries enjoyed a legitimacy in Southern culture that has shocked and baffled outsiders.” This is “expressed in such forms as dueling, lynching, or even overly aggressive stock-car racing,” plus the violent outrages of the Klan, Williams added. According to Simeon Enser, an active Klansman in the 1950s, Klan violence had a salutary effect on people. “It kept a lot of people that was raising hell, and beating their wives, and running around, damn, if it didn’t keep a lot of them home,” he recalled. Some Baptist preachers were in the Klan at that time, according to Enser. In fact, some men joined the Klan to avoid becoming its target. Again at Stone Mountain, Georgia, this time on May 9, 1946, the Klan tried to rise once more
from its own ashes, rejuvenated by an Atlanta physician, Dr. Samuel Green, who styled himself grand dragon. In the early 1950s, the Civil Rights movement was just stirring and times were again unsettled in the South. President Truman’s unilateral integration of the military portended nothing good for Southern whites, many fretted. The southern “situation … seemed conducive to Klan reorganization.”

Green’s death in August 1949 deprived the Invisible Empire of its only truly national leader until David Duke in the 1970s. Into that vacuum in the early 1950s in the Carolinas stepped Thomas L. Hamilton, who had attended the Stone Mountain ceremony. He was initiated, along with 500 others, into the Klan, and was made an officer of the reborn KKK. It was Hamilton, styling himself grand dragon, moved to Leesville, South Carolina and reintroduced the Klan into the area, only to be challenged by Cole and Carter.

As the 20th Century blended into the 21st, the number of hate groups doubled nationwide from 457 in 1999 to 917 in 2016. The vast majority in 2016 (663) were anti-government “patriot” and/or militia groups that cast far wider nets of racism than the Klan, especially against Latinos and Hispanics. Scholar Patsy Sims claimed some violent hate groups regard the Klan as “outmoded and tame” and are committed to a “level of violence that makes the Klan pale” by comparison. Between 2006 and 2016, the number of organizations using a variation of Ku Klux Klan in their names had declined from 164 to 130 distinct groups. Though accurate numbers are hard to come by and difficult to update, the Southern Poverty Law Center estimated there were between 5,000 and 8,000 active Klan members in the early years of the 21st Century.

**Cole’s background**

Cole was born in Miller’s Creek, North Carolina and graduated from North Wilkesboro High School. The son and grandson of itinerant Methodist ministers, Cole spent a life in journalism without a college education. “We were brought up without any concept of race,” his daughter Mary Jo Burnette recollected. “We were brought up to take account of people’s
character, not their color.”

Cole worked first at The Journal-Patriot in North Wilkesboro in the printing department. One day, the newspaper’s publisher “came back and asked if there was anyone here who can write. My dad raised his hand. Two years later he was editor,” Burnette remembered. Demonstrating a flair for journalism, Cole eventually became editor of the Ashe County (N.C.) Journal, following that with a stint as a reporter for the Winston-Salem Journal. He was married twice and divorced once from his only wife. In the midst of the Depression, gambling debts forced him to leave his family and hide with a relative in Ohio. He lived “the life of a hobo,” said Burnette, drifting from jobs in the coalfields to construction. He took over Carter’s job for two years as executive secretary of the Tabor City Merchants Association before assuming the editorship of The News-Reporter in 1948. He left the News-Reporter in 1954 for several years, working as a field representative of the United States Brewers Foundation. In 1958, journalism lured him back again, and he became editor of the just-launched the Lumberton Post in Lumberton, North Carolina. He worked at the Post for five years before founding the Robeson County Enterprise in 1963, also in Lumberton.

This study employs historical research methods to examine the actions and coverage of Cole while he challenged the Ku Klux Klan and sketches the frames of those events. Historian and social scientist Donald Shaw contended a quarter century ago, “The content of the newspapers reflect the day-to-day judgments of the press at one level and the intrinsic values of a social system and culture at other levels.” Each small decision accumulates, demonstrating and creating with considerable precision a picture of the opinions of a newspaper and its effect and agenda for the communities it serves.

I. COLE CONFRONTS THE KLAN

On Saturday evening, July 22, 1950, the Ku Klux Klan suddenly appeared on the streets of Tabor City, North Carolina, 20 miles from Whiteville. A parade of nearly 30 cars carrying 100 rifle-brandishing and robed vigilantes wound through its dusty streets; there was no violence at the KKK’s first appearance. A little
over a week later, the *News-Reporter* on July 31, 1950 ran the first of dozens of editorials opposing the Klan.  

Columbus County has no need for such demonstrations as was staged recently by the Ku Klux Klansmen in Tabor City. Indeed, it has no need for the Klan.

It may be that some good may have been done by this organization [in the past] but the evil so outweighs the good that any county and any state can well do without this type of fraternity.

Any organization, whose roster of members is not available to the general public, may be, quite properly, looked upon with considerable skepticism. However orderly their parades and their meetings may be, Ku Klux Klansmen need some distinguishing characteristic other than a face covering before they have any place in the American way of life.

The *News-Reporter*’s second editorial appeared in the August 31 edition – no separate news stories had yet appeared in the *News-Reporter* – and was in response to the Klan attack on Fitzgerald’s Myrtle Beach nightclub that resulted in the death of a police officer/Klansman. “When James Daniel Johnson donned the pants, shirt and coat of a Conway policeman,” Cole editorialized, “he was wearing the uniform of protection. When he draped himself in the robe of a Ku Klux Klansman, he was wearing the uniform of deception. It was in such a uniform that he was killed.”

Cole continued,

Public judgment should … be withheld until an inquiry is completed … and only then will we know the full extent of the ignominy of this officer’s demise.

If the information now available to the public is correct, Policeman Johnson got only what he deserved … The Klansmen, of which Johnson was one, had turned into hoodlums and “torn up” the dance hall …

It was bad enough for private citizens to cover themselves in the garb of the KKK, but for a
policeman to put a KKK robe over his officer’s uniform and then engage in hoodlumism is almost incomprehensible.

The hope here is that there will be more men who don the uniform of protection and fewer who don the uniform of deception.  

In a September 21, 1950 editorial, Cole blasted the Klan for dragging a swimming instructor from his car and beating him. The *News-Reporter* blamed Hamilton for inciting mob violence in that same incident. “Sometimes there are extenuating circumstances when a man or men commit crimes of passion,” said the editorial, “but there can be no mitigating circumstances when robed hoodlums attack innocent persons on the public highway.”

**A cross carved**

An African American woman, Evergreen Flowers, was severely beaten by a mob of 40-50 unmasked men and was “virtually unable to walk” after the attack, the *News-Reporter* revealed in a January 22, 1951 front-page article. As a “caravan of cars” encircled the Flowers’ rural home, Mrs. Flowers’ husband, Willie, retrieved his gun, but found he was out of ammunition. He “ran outside and went to the home of his brother about a half-mile away to obtain shells,” though by the time he returned the assailants had fled. Neighbors reportedly did not recognize any of the cars or their occupants, the story contended. Because neither Mr. nor Mrs. Flowers was “robbed or marked,” this “eliminate[d] any suspicion that it was an organized act of the Ku Klux Klan,” according to authorities. Since the Flowers could not identify any of their attackers, it was “difficult to make any progress in the investigation,” the *Times-Reporter* explained.

In the *News-Reporter’s* next edition, a front-page article revealed the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) had joined the investigation into the Flowers attack and new details were released. No further violence had been reported to authorities, the newspaper observed. Mrs. Flowers had been beaten with a gun and sticks, had a cross carved into her hair, and shoved into the trunk of a car. The Flowers’ daughter was also home at the time of the attack,
which occurred just before midnight.\textsuperscript{81} Conversations overheard between the nightriders indicated that Willie Flowers was the target of their attack.\textsuperscript{82} Special protection was offered the Flowers, but they declined.\textsuperscript{83} Authorities still clung stubbornly to their original assessment regarding the perpetrators, as did The News-Reporter: “There was a strong presumption that the Ku Klux Klan, as an organization, had nothing to do with the attack,” The News-Reporter continued. “It was believed that a gang of hoodlums, some of them from outside the county, had imbibed too freely and had set themselves up as judge and jury.”\textsuperscript{84} However, the article concluded, “The proximity of the Chadbourn incident to Horry County, where the Ku Klux Klan has been charged with numerous crimes against helpless victims, served to heighten State and national interest.”\textsuperscript{85}

Four days later, in a January 29 editorial, the News-Reporter discussed the Flowers incident, again without mentioning the Klan. Instead, it still referred to the nightriders as a mob and as gangsters.\textsuperscript{86} “There is no sanity in such a mob and not a semblance of decency in the entire group,” Cole wrote. “Columbus County has no need and just as little respect for mob violence. Those responsible for this outrage deserve all the loathsome epithets that have been hurled in their direction and they must feel terribly cheap to have to listen in silence when called the sneaking cowards they are.”\textsuperscript{87} Finally, Cole stated, “Columbus County does not want men of their stripe to take action against any citizen, no matter what the provocation.”\textsuperscript{88} A month later, the Flowers’ home burned to the ground.\textsuperscript{89} The Flowers family, however, had moved out of the rental property weeks earlier, though some of their property was still in the house and was destroyed.\textsuperscript{90} A Columbus county sheriff’s department examination found no evidence of arson.\textsuperscript{91} Nevertheless, the SBI was invited to assist in the investigation, said the News-Reporter’s story on February 26.\textsuperscript{92} Future events and evidence would demonstrate it was a Klan attack.

In the dark overnight hours of Monday, April 30, 1951, “[u]nannounced and unobserved,” masked Ku Klux Klansmen fanned out across Whiteville, plastering stickers across town.\textsuperscript{93}
The stickers read, “KKK: Yesterday, Today and Forever,” next to an image of a Klansman on horseback waving a torch. Cole regarded the appearance of the Klan with rage. For the two years after Klansmen slapped those stickers on the News-Reporter’s building that April night, he angrily banged out articles and editorials on his ancient typewriter. Cole’s worries for his safety were well placed, said the memoirs of Early Brooks, a former police chief at Fair Bluff before and during the Klan uprising. “It was very well known the New Report editor slept with his pistol at his bedside, as well as traveled with it,” recalled Brooks.94 “Most any of us would have taken a chance with him on his travels, but the occasion never presented itself.”95

Unequivocal

In a May 5, 1951 editorial, the News-Reporter responded to stickers incident in unequivocal language.96 Whether the pasting of stickers on doors and windows in Whiteville was the work of Klan representatives or pranksters, this is the sort of thing that is unwanted here.

The KKK has no place in a democracy.

The KKK is a symbol of mob violence. And mob violence is too much like a foreign ideology to be desirable in America.

Even if it were assumed that the Klan always has a noble objective when it marches in mobs, that is not the American way. Floggings lead to lynchings and lynchings lead to riots.

It cannot be said that justice is always meted out in a democracy, but there is no justice in mob action.97

“If there are Klansmen in this area,” the editorial concluded, “let them take warning that their presence does not meet with the approval of the citizenry.”98 As the editorial campaign and the violence escalated, Cole began to feel the effects personally. Handbills and notes were slipped under the wipers of his car and under the door of the News-Reporter’s office, warning that the Klan was watching.99 Cole’s children had a personal curfew,
keeping them indoors after dark. Occasionally, the family would be awakened at their Clay Street home in the middle of the night by Knocking at the front door. But there would be no one there. Cole’s car was vandalized. James High was courting publisher Leslie Thompson’s daughter and only child Carolyn during the height of the Klan campaign. “We were just not allowed to park outside of the house and stay sitting in the car,” he recalled. In those days, couples would often sit on the porch on a summer’s evening, but that, too, was unacceptably dangerous. Coming home from a date, the couple “had to knock on the door and announce who we were … because the door was locked,” something “a little unusual” during the early 1950s in rural North Carolina.

Cole would often write late at night and the shadows and the darkness and the noises of the old building and the outdoors left him uneasy. “When you’re working at night and the wind blows sometime and the doors shake” made Cole justifiably nervous in High’s opinion. Sportswriter Jiggs Powers found Cole poking his revolver in his face one night when he entered the News-Reporter building quietly. Both men often worked late at night, Powers because of the nature of sports and Cole, probably because of the lack of distractions. “At night [Cole] would rare back in his chair, brought him a glass [of bourbon] … and on his right side he had a pistol … and they would converse about” what Cole had written, High stated. “What do you think about this? … Let me read you something,” Cole would ask Powers, said High. “Then he would light up a cigarette, maybe take a swig, but always like I say, had the pistol.”

**A Sunday school picnic**

Cole splashed word across the front page of the August 13 edition of a night rally, promised to be the most spectacular in the Southeast for a quarter century. Hamilton and Grand Dragon Bill Hendrix of Florida were slated to speak at a rally in a tobacco field on Saturday, August 18. The News-Reporter stated that District Solicitor Clifton Moore would prosecute anyone caught disguising his or her voice, giving secret passwords, and/or covering her or his face. Cole reported on the rally in the August 20 edition. The story appeared on the front
page of the *News-Reporter*, as did virtually every article during the Klan uprising (editorials excepted). Cole made a conscious decision to let his community know that the most important issue facing the area was not the ongoing Korean War or the impending presidential election, but the challenge presented by the Klan.

“The Ku Klux Klan openly invaded Columbus County with a spectacular, circus-like roadside show eight miles south of here Saturday night,” Cole wrote, “and defiantly declared that “there will be many more such meetings in North Carolina during the coming months …” Turning out for the well-advertised assembly were an estimated 5,000 people – robed Klansmen, Klan sympathizers, and those drawn through curiosity. The well-organized meeting apparently went off as planned.

There was no disorder … Police seemed to be everywhere as a reported 97 robed Klansmen went through their ritual, but they had nothing to do except handle traffic. The Klansmen were as peaceful as a Sunday school picnic and the crowd was just as orderly. Scattered applause punctuated Hamilton and Hendrix’s speeches. The two leaders “blasted virtually everything but the BIBLE and the Klan” for 90 minutes, Cole wrote. Photographers lit the scene eerily with “almost continuous” picture taking. A trio of Klansmen posed for photographs in front of their Klan banner as if it was a tourist attraction. As many as 700 of those present asked for membership applications, said a source. Applicants were reportedly vetted to prevent infiltration by law enforcement or anti-Klan sympathizers.

On an inside page, another article appeared, filled with small observations and anecdotes from the rally. “The audience failed to respond in saying the Lord’s Prayer,” when prompted by Klan leaders. Readers learned that there were “a million flash bulbs” and that *Life* magazine had sent several photographers, as had the Associated Press. Hamilton tolerated the flashes until a photographer snapped a shot of Klansman passed out from the heat. Hamilton told the crowd, “the KKK stands for truth, right
and justice” and would “fight for segregation to the last ounce of blood” regardless of what the Supreme Court might rule.\textsuperscript{123} The Klan held a nocturnal rally in a field between Whiteville and Tabor City on August 18, 1951 prompting a rare front-page \textit{News-Reporter} editorial.\textsuperscript{124} It was the most intensely and overtly religious editorial by either newspaper involved in the Pulitzer Prize-winning campaign against the Klan. The themes discussed – morality, religion, loving thy neighbor, submitting to civil law, conformity to the social order – are many of the general themes interlaced throughout the entire campaign by the \textit{Whiteville News-Reporter}.

The \textit{News-Reporter} chose to frame the editorial through strong religious imagery, choosing “The Doctrine of Love” as its title in a good versus evil, love versus hate dichotomy. There are numerous other similar pairings in the editorial: defiance of the law and obedience, moral and immoral, Christian and antichristian, law and order and chaos. Just below the title of the editorial, in large letters, was a scriptural quotation: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.”\textsuperscript{125} It set the tone for the entire piece. “Every Christian should be concerned – prayerfully concerned – and every citizen should be concerned with what was advocated at the Klan meeting between Whiteville and Tabor City,” the editorial began.\textsuperscript{126} Every citizen of our country should be concerned because the very foundation of our way of life – the Christian and democratic way of life – is at issue. Are we to become a nation where class is pitted against class and race against race?

The doctrine expounded by the speakers at the meeting was, in the main, a doctrine of hate and defiance – defiance of the law … Hatred of certain people and groups and races was fervently demonstrated. Certain conditions that exist in our midst were related in an effort to justify this doctrine of defiance of the law and legally constituted authorities … The failures, evil and immorality of some were used as some of the pitiful reasons, or excuses, to justify this group taking the law into their own hands, becoming self-appointed judges, jury and
executioners. Such a philosophy is difficult of acceptance.127

After setting the scene, the editorial then moved into the heart of the religious argument. Jesus taught us by saying, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” “And who is my neighbor?” the lawyer asked Him. He answered with the parable about the good Samaritan, with which we are all familiar. This parable teaches us that our neighbor is anyone – red, yellow, black, white, Jew, Gentile, Catholic, Protestant, Budhist [sic], or Moslem . . . Our neighbor is all men because God created man – all men – in His own image, and after the creation, God blessed man.128

Then the editorial moved from God’s law and sphere into that of humans: law, liberty, and order. The News-Reporter contended that Christian duty required obedience to human law to protect a nation from external and internal enemies.

The very existence of our material world is founded upon the law and order of God, as taught in our Bible. Our social order is founded upon the laws of our land. Our country was founded upon the principles of freedom and liberty. Our laws are based on the wisdom of the ages. We, as citizens of this country, have the Christian duty, as well as the patriotic duty, to uphold and defend our country from attack, both from without and within. We have only to become acquainted with what is going on in the world today to realize that ours is the most favored nation, and we, as citizens of it, are the most favored of all peoples. We reached this position, not by defiance of authority, but by living under and in obedience to the laws which we have (or should have) a part in making. We reached this position, not by hating one another, but by an honest effort to understand our neighbor.129

Concluding, the News-Reporter urged forgiveness, not retribution.

The challenge that faces our nation and world today is not the hate doctrine as preached so fervently on this recent humid August night between
two of Columbus County’s important communities, but the doctrine of love as taught by the Blessed Messiah two thousands years as He walked in a world that was just as sinfull as the one we know . . . in a world that He pleaded with to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s . . . in a world where He was to hear men who hated, not loved, so bitterly that it chose a murderer in preference to the Son of God . . . a doctrine of love, not hate, such as Christ manifested when He prayed: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

There should be no hatred – no hatred even of the Ku Klux Klan. There should be only an earnest effort to understand that Christ taught obedience to law – that he preached a doctrine of the brotherhood of man.

An editorial in the August 20 issue, suggesting that Klan headgear might be masking hoodlums, drew a threatening letter from a Klan sympathizer, published on the front page of the August 27 News Reporter. In a few sentences, rife with grammatical errors, Cole was told to “stop your yapping about the KKK,” since it was “only out for the right things in life,” the letter writer stated. “Every decent person is in favor of the KKK & their purpose,” so “stop acting the fool” and “you wont have anything to worry about.” The letter concluded with a warning against further “publistie” and to “watch your step here after.”

The News-Reporter did not comment or reply editorially, though it is important to note that the newspaper was allowing its opponents the right of reply and did so in as prominent a location as its own criticisms of the Klan. Carter believed doing so actually helped prevent physical violence against the editors and reporters opposing the Klan.

A thin crowd

The next Klan rally, nearly two months after the first, drew a thin crowd that “seemed indifferent and munched boiled peanuts as if bored by the proceedings.” What it lacked in numbers, it made up in vitriol, according to the News-Reporter's
account. The Klan “emptied its bag of hate in an hour-long tirade before a few hundred people . . . on the same field where it attracted 5,000” people earlier. Instead of “praying language,” Hamilton “hurled unprintable words at the Klan’s pet hates.”

Three days later the News-Reporter commented editorially on the rally along with the earlier one in August. “In the August Klan rally, Grand Dragon Hamilton prayed piously and invoked the blessings of God,” opened Cole’s editorial. “It was a stirring appeal with every indication of reverence and was accepted as such even by those who disagreed with his subsequent declarations of hatred.” Cole came to the point of the Klan in the next paragraph.

What is underneath the Klan’s cloak of piety came to light at the second rally. Undoubtedly peeved by the lack of public response to his hate campaign, Hamilton could restrain himself no longer and unleashed a tirade of unprintable words, calling people names not used in polite society and certainly not by people who claim an affinity with the God of love.

A month later, the Klan rated another editorial, this time in the wake of the arrest of 11 of 25 robed Klansmen for parading down the aisles of a church in full regalia and then stepping onto public property while still masked in violation of a new South Carolina law. About a dozen of the Klansmen escaped police, doing “what any scared rat will do,” Cole remarked, “scurry for the cellar and the attic.”

Horry County, South Carolina sheriff Norman Sasser was applauded for “a long struggle in his bailiwick” that eventually culminated in the arrests. “He couldn’t convict anybody for the murder of a Conway policeman because a grand jury wouldn’t indict,” the News-Reporter editorialized, “but the South Carolina Legislature gave him and other officers an anti-mask law which should prove most effective.”

II. FEAR RODE ALONG

It was rare for a byline to appear in the News-Reporter of this period. However, on the front page of the November 19 edition was an exception, “Fear Rode Along,” carrying Cole’s byline and set in two-column type. It was the story – part-opinion, part-fact – of one of the victims of the nightriders. “I saw the dark spots
on the victim’s thighs!” Cole began. “Through the red coloring of a common disinfectant, I saw the results of a vicious assault by masked hoodlums,” made by a leather strap “cut from a discarded harness for a horse.” He continued the narrative:

He told me how it happened. He was at home, where all citizens, both good and bad except those convicted of crime and sentenced to jail, should be at 11 o’clock at night. The guise of an emergency was used to bring him out into the open, the details of which will be omitted from this item. Ordered inside a waiting automobile, he sat down with burly men whose faces were hidden by masks. Let all the honest, upright, God-fearing people take this ride with him!

For a mile or so, his eyes were free to see whatever there was to see in a murky night. Others sat in the car, but they were not the only passengers. Fear, with a capital F, rode with him. A screaming, hysterical family had seen him go. Their cries were still ringing in his ears.

Where? What? Why? These were questions which surged through his fear-stricken mind. But for the moment they went unanswered. As the victim and Fear, and his captors rode along, other cars joined the procession. And a blindfold was put on . . . to blot out everything except the unreasoning dread of what might be in store for him.

Cole then turned to the attack itself, delivering images that must have taken his readers right to that spot on an empty country road.

Perhaps, it was less than an hour that passed before the victim came face to face with his punishment. Two men held both his arms. And the barbarism of centuries ago welled up in the men who had gathered for this resurrection of savagery and bestiality.

Swish went the instrument of torture as it slapped against human flesh on one leg. Swish went a similar instrument of torture as it struck the other leg. And alternately went the belt-type pieces of leather as a man on the left and a man on the right satisfied their lust for
the sight of pain.

When these gentlemen (?) of law and order had finished with their human target, they set him free – free to go home but not free of fear.148

The investigation was at a dead end and the logistics of the case were daunting. “Can they patrol every road in the county? Can they call every citizen in for questions and get an admission of guilt from the guilty?” Cole asked.149 He wondered whether it was the work of Klansmen. “Your guess is as good as mine. But they were wearing masks. And this sort of thing wasn’t happening before the KKK was organized in this area,” he believed.150

The victim I talked to declared emphatically that he was innocent of the fault which the masked men gave as their excuse for the flogging. I don’t know about the merits of the case. I just saw the results.

The bruised flesh made me wonder how many others have been treated in the same manner. It raised the question of how many citizens cannot go to sleep at night with a feeling of security that they will not be molested in the privacy of their homes.

“Officers will never raise the curtain from this sort of lawlessness and hoodlumism,” Cole admitted, because there simply were not enough personnel.151 He chose to overlook the obvious – that some of those officers were either Klansmen or at least sympathetic to their cause. It would take “an aroused public” to dismantle and banish the Klan, he concluded. “Until this is accomplish [sic], each citizen may well ask the question: Am I next?”152

A photo of the bruised legs of Clayton Sellers, who was unidentified, appeared in adjoining columns.153 The front-page banner story described two recent floggings.154 Sellers was kidnapped from his home, but not without a struggle. Both his wife and he managed to fire five shots at the masked men who abducted him, while his mother nearly pulled off the mask of one of the nightriders.155 Sellers was taken across the South Carolina line, flogged with a piece of tire, and accused of beating his mother, a
charge he denied then and later.\textsuperscript{156} The beating of Robert Lee Gore was detailed in another front-page story, with a notation that it had not been reported immediately by the victim, said the \textit{News-Reporter’s} account.\textsuperscript{157} The Klan’s campaign of violence was accelerating and the pages of the \textit{News-Reporter} began to fill with stories of the KKK.

\textbf{A dream}

“We dreamed last night of a trial in court,” Cole began an editorial on November 26, 1951. On the bench sat a man wearing a robe, but not the robe of a jurist. His face was masked and none could tell whether he was … any of the … legally-trained men who ordinarily occupy the bench in Superior Court.

Over in the jury box were 12 men, all wearing masks and robes. There was no way of knowing whether they were Klansmen or just men who happened to cloak themselves in the regalia similar to that of the Klan …

Counsel for the defense was denied the privilege of asking the name of any juror who was about to sit in judgment upon the guilt or innocence of his client. He could make no challenge.\textsuperscript{158}

The defense was not allowed to find out whether there was “spite” in the heart of the jurors, whether one of the juror’s “corn had been trampled last summer by the defendant’s stray cows, or whether the judge was a “booze hound, a philanderer, or an honest, God-fearing citizen.”\textsuperscript{159}

We knew that this was typical of how victims of mob violence are tried. The only regret was that those who participate in terroristic activities could not have a similar dream, because we know that if any of them were brought into court and asked to stand trial before a masked judge and jury, they would be the first to cry out for their rights in the Constitution.\textsuperscript{160}

“It was a revealing dream,” Cole concluded. “May others have the same.”\textsuperscript{161}

Three issues later, Woodrow Johnson, a white mechanic, was beaten for “drinking.”\textsuperscript{162} He left his house to help two men whose
car, ostensibly, had broken down. \textsuperscript{163} Johnson was hustled into a car and driven to an isolated spot where he was bent over the car’s fender and thrashed with a belt. \textsuperscript{164} As many as 25 men were involved, Johnson estimated. \textsuperscript{165}

**Christmas wishes**

Following in the vein of “Fear Rides Along” editorial, Cole addressed his next letter to Santa Claus in the Christmas Eve 1951 edition. \textsuperscript{166} The editorial opened with a list of the three top stories of 1951: the approval of the health and agriculture program in a special election, location of a new industry in Whiteville, and the “invasion of Columbus County” by the Ku Klux Klan. \textsuperscript{167} Cole let Santa Claus off the hook for the Klan’s appearance. “Our earliest recollection of you and annual contacts for two-score years furnish positive assurance that you strive only to give the best possible for each person you visit,” Cole wrote. “So, we’re not blaming you for the KKK invasion or the subsequent acts of mob violence.” \textsuperscript{168}

[W]e ask you, Mr. Claus, to fill our homes with love for humanity, with a broader understanding of the meaning for Christmas, with a knowledge that the birth of Christ was God’s way of showing His love for His people, and with the realization that the Messiah taught a doctrine of love rather than a doctrine of hate and terror.

If you, Dear Santa, have space in your pack, will you please leave all of us enough of the capacity to think clearly to enable us to understand that when the people run the government, there is mob violence; and when the government runs the people, there is dictatorship. Give us a package of common sense to maintain the balance in which we preserve our liberties and free enterprise and at the same time our cherished tradition of law and order. \textsuperscript{169}

Santa Claus may have been employed as a stand-in representation of Jesus, allowing a more informal and conversational approach in keeping with the holiday season that was a combination of the sacred and the secular.
III. THE TURNING POINT

The New Year 1952 came, and there was no turning point evident. But it was there nonetheless, present in two front-page stories. The first detailed the sentencing of three Nakina, North Carolina men to two years on the road gang for “threatening to ‘klux’” a farmer if he did not evict an African American tenant farmer. The offense happened on Christmas Day, 1951, said the news story. It was the first conviction since the Klan first appeared in Columbus County, North Carolina and Horry County, South Carolina. The Ku Klux Klan was not specifically mentioned, according to one witness quoted in the News-Reporter story, only that the word “klux” was used. One of the defendants’ eventual excuses for using the word was that it “had entered the language as a verb synonymous” with beating. The threatened farmer chased off the trio with his shotgun. Columbus County solicitor Robert S. Schulken called the incident “the most terrible thing that has ever happened in Columbus County,” declaring that “when it gets to the place that a man can’t say who is going to live on his place, it is a matter of grave concern.” The tenant farmer was not named in open court, the News-Reporter stated.

“Only six hours after three men had been sentenced to two years each for threatening to ‘klux’ a Nakina farmer, mob violence flared again,” the News-Reporter noted in a nearby column. H. D. Best was “seized” from his home after being persuaded to look up a phone number for two men searching for a Whiteville car dealership. He was accused of mistreating his wife by a “mob” of at least 15 men who flogged him until he was “almost numb,” requiring hospitalization. Columbus County Sheriff Hugh Vance kept most details of the attack “confidential,” declining to confirm whether Best recognized any of his assailants. The pattern of the attack was “almost identical” to other floggings, the sheriff reported. The News-Reporter writer noted in the article’s concluding paragraph that “the public has ignored the seriousness of the situation and unsuspecting victims are falling easy prey.”

On January 17, an exhaustive account of a Klan abduction took almost one column of the front page and
three columns on page two of a “graphic,” written as an almost blow-by-blow, minute-by-minute narrative of an attack on Lee and Louise Tyson with a “leather belt and boards as wide as my three fingers and just as thick,” said one of the victims.183 “Hoodlums wearing regalia like that of the Ku Klux Klan committed” the “vicious” flogging.184 The couple was snatched while walking in early December, accompanied by Sheriff Sasser, who was, evidently, not attacked.185 The News-Reporter, though, implied involvement of the Horry county sheriff, who, for reasons never disclosed, drove the Tysons to Hallsboro to buy liquor.186 “The Tysons made no mention of the seemingly remarkable coincidence that they had been carried by the same spot [by Sasser] twice during the course of the evening and that it was on the third trip that” their pick-up truck “was brought to a halt,” by another vehicle, although it did not block the road.187 At least six men wrenched the Tysons from the truck. Details of the assault were not released until more than a month later.188 The ostensible excuse for the beating was Mr. Tyson’s refusal to attend church or allow his family to attend.189 Said the News-Reporter, “Tyson had heeded the mob’s warning” and had “gone regularly since he was flogged.”190 It was the fifth reported flogging in recent weeks attributed to the Klan; two similar attacks could not be directly blamed on the KKK, although the details were similar.191

The coverage and the attacks had been coming so quickly that Cole and the News-Reporter considered it newsworthy to wonder in the January 17 edition that “a strange but welcome quiet, as if a ‘cease-fire’ had been ordered, reigned” on the Klan front during the previous weekend with no reported attacks.192 The newspaper speculated it might be the “proverbial calm before the storm.”193 Vance “declined to speculate on the possibility” that Klan members had “temporarily or permanently” called off their campaign.194 “In lay circles,” the News-Reporter observed, “it was regarded as unlikely that the mob had been frightened into hiding.”195 Police officials would not comment on any possible resumption of the Klan “rampage.”196
Reaction from the pulpit

Referring to the Klan in all but name, the Columbus County Ministerial Association in late January 1952 “lashed out at hooded lawlessness,” said Cole, beneath an eight-column, two-line banner headline. The News-Reporter printed the text of a letter that would be read from the pulpits of churches of all denominations on January 27. Ministers had been quiet up to this point, something the group alluded to in its public proclamation. “The continued increase in instances of lawlessness has made it necessary that we, as ministers, declare ourselves opposed to such acts,” the group announced. The ministers declared, “We believe that the organization which inspired these acts to be destructive of law and order and conducive to individual fear, political corruption, and general anarchy.” It would take “Christian citizens [to] stand against this evil” and urged cooperation with police.

The News-Reporter described a threat against a Fair Bluff church for inviting an African American quartet to perform. The concert was cancelled in the wake of threats reportedly from the Klan. The pregnant wife of the minister was particularly distressed and the minister complained of a recurrence of an old stomach ailment and hypertension. They left town very soon afterwards. There were numerous instances over three years of Klansmen marching down church aisles on Sundays, intimidating clergy and parishioners alike. Cole praised the ministers for their “daring that characterized the spiritual leaders of old … the only position that men of God can take.” Cole urged that the ministers be protected. “If any pastor, who has spoken out in defense of freedom, is molested in any way, either by threats or by efforts to oust him, he must have the united backing of every God-fearing man.”

In a “surprise” action, Hamilton disbanded the Fair Bluff Klavern for “un-Klannish’ activities,” the News-Reporter stated on the front page of its January 28 edition. Officials “continued their silence on the possible meaning” of the action. Hamilton did not contact the News-Reporter, but notified the Associated Press instead. He accused some Fair Bluff Klansmen of the “wrong attitude”
and taking “the law in their own hands,” something the Klan did not approve of, according to the News-Reporter story.210 “The viciousness of a threat to the church brought a shudder to outsiders as the news gradually leaked out,” Cole wrote.211 In a January 28 editorial, Cole noted, “[I]f the Fair Bluff Klavern became so rotten as to merit the disavowal of Grand Dragon Hamilton, it must be pretty bad.”212 Cole urged the Klan leader to release the membership list to authorities, so the guilty could be punished. Otherwise, Cole reasoned, Hamilton was “a rat deserting a sinking ship.”213

**Blackville**

Cole claimed in the same January 28 editorial that Whiteville’s reputation had sustained a black eye in the statewide and the national press and called the town “Blackville.” The racial parallel is both striking and uncomfortable, if not paternalistic and racist. “Columbus County is … known as a place of floggings and mob violence” caused by Hamilton and his cronies.214 “The development which substituted ‘black’ for ‘white’ in the name of Whiteville was the hoodlumism which came out of the tirade of hate and pseudo-piety at the Klan rally,” Cole claimed.215 “Only the extermination of this cancerous growth can restore” the reputation of Whiteville, Cole continued.216 “And this is the time for all honest, decent believers in the future of Columbus County to stand up and be counted. This is the time for the disbanding of all Klaverns.”217

Several incidents were mentioned in a front-page update in the January 31 issue. A motorist, apparently feigning car trouble, attempted to convince a Whiteville man to help him. The intended victim refused to leave his house and instead gave the man a “raking over” for trying to induce him to work on the car.218 The next morning the Whiteville man received a warning note from the Klan.219 A Brunswick County flogging was reported along with an attack by nightriders on an unnamed woman from several months earlier.220

On February 4, Cole revealed “newly disclosed” incidents involving a lawyer, flogged early in January, and two other men, one African American and the other white.221 The
African American man was flogged for “cussing in front of a white woman” and for becoming drunk, the News-Reporter maintained.222 The attorney was beaten for “not caring for his family.”223 A woman escaped a beating because she was pregnant; the Klansmen cut a cross into her hair instead.224 A widower was also beaten, though his purported crime was not revealed.225 Yet another man was convinced to leave his home on the pretense of a house-painting job and then flogged.226

In a further assault, a supposed Klansman knocked at a house, but a woman refused to come out, denying her husband was home.227 The Klansman replied he knew otherwise and made a motion as if to batter the door open with his shoulder.228 Inexplicably, he then left. “What the men didn’t know, but apparently sensed, was that the intended victim was standing in an unlighted hallway, directly in line with the front door, with a shotgun and was prepared to mow them down when they came through the screen” door, the News-Reporter explained.229 The newspaper would not “vouch for the accuracy of this story,” but it seemed “typical of the armed readiness of many homes.”230

The News-Reporter’s campaign continued its two-front campaign through news coverage and editorials. Cole picked up on the theme: “[A]s we interpret citizenship, the citizen’s first obligation is to law and order.”231 That obligation, Cole editorialized, implied “an oath of allegiance to his government.”232 Those who keep an oath to the Klan “are aiding and abetting in mob violence and should welcome the opportunity to break the Klan oath.”233 Those who broke their pledge to the Klan should not be “suffering any pangs of conscience … to a cause which is found to have no sacredness.”234

IV. AN “EXTRA”

“Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation today bagged ten alleged Columbus County floggers,” The News-Reporter told its readers in a special, extra edition on February 16, 1952, under a huge headline: “10 Floggers Nabbed.”235 The banner story continued, “Operating in the cloud-darkened dawn of Saturday morning, between 35 and 40 FBI agents swooped across the Flair Bluff countryside and picked up”
the 10 Klansmen “without difficulty.” The News-Reporter’s extra was published on Saturday, February 16, hours after the FBI raids were staged. The Klansmen were “marched, handcuffed, between at least two agents” to be “advised of the charges against” them. The 10 men, some of them “unshaven” and all of them “crestfallen,” did not appear to recognize each other, said the News-Reporter. Two of those arrested were former police officers: Early Brooks, former chief of police at Fair Bluff and Horace Strickland, a former Tabor City policeman. Brooks was grand kleagle of the Fair Bluff Klavern disbanded by Hamilton.

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover announced the arrests himself in Washington, DC. The Klansmen were charged in the case of North Carolinians Dorothy and Ben Grainger, flogged on October 6, 1951, a case that had been kept quiet by the FBI. Ben Grainger was forced to remove his clothes and Klansmen in their robes and hoods beat him until he defecated, said the News-Reporter account. The couple was taken across state lines into South Carolina, giving

the FBI jurisdiction. Thirteen flogging incidents were including in the indictments, according to the News-Reporter. The newspaper detailed, briefly, the incidents, starting with the Evergreen Flowers beating in January 1951. Cole also reported several incidents of “telephone-users” with “stalled automobiles” who were dissuaded when they saw potential victims display firearms. One potential victim let his bathrobe “accidentally” gap open, revealing a .38 in his belt. Whiteville, Cole wrote, was “shaken” when Dick Best was beaten and the town’s windows were “rattled” when Rev. Purcell was threatened. The News-Reporter also published details of a drive-by shooting of an African American family’s home. At least 18 bullets “rained” into the house; James Stevens and his family were instructed to leave town within 10 days by Klansmen. “Stevens’ testimony in a whiskey case one day earlier may have been a motive,” the newspaper reported.

In the second of only two front-page editorials, and beneath a photo of a Klan sign, Cole warned that just “the cessation of violence . . . is not the answer to
the county’s present predicament.” He added that it does not mark the goal which must be obtained . . . to [vaccinate] against this cancerous growth upon the body of society.” Rather, all those “guilty of these atrocities must be ferreted out . . . and punished. Cole concluded, Over the platform at the great Klan rally last August and on the stickers, which this gang of nightriders plastered on cars and store windows, were the words, “Yesterday, Today and Forever.” Only when “Yesterday is left and “Today and Forever” have been deleted permanently from the Ku Klux Klan activities in this county will the task of our citizenry be accomplished.

Three days later, in the News-Reporter’s banner story of its regular Monday edition, the U.S. district attorney announced he would not be seeking the death penalty in the cases. Work was progressing on another 11 cases, the article related. A photo of some of the 10 men arrested in the first wave of arrests was spread across half the front page: “No longer hooded,” the caption read.

The task ahead
“The unmasking of 10 former Klansmen,” Cole wrote in a February 21 editorial, was “merely the first step along the road back to security and orderly existence for Columbus County.” He urged readers to “take a second look at any denials” from Hamilton about Klan complicity in the violence. “There is one thing he cannot deny,” Cole wrote. “12 people were not flogged with ropes and pieces of machine belting in the six months before he spat, with pseudo-piety, his doctrine of hate and prejudice in a dusty field … [and] that such floggings did occur in the following six months.”

Cole looked deeper at the cause of the Klansman’s enmity, wondering whether “education and religion” had failed them. “Have members of this movement and their sympathizers been neglected by society in such a way as to cause a perverted sense of human values?” he wondered. “Has any agency really tried to help these people in the proper manner?” Cole urged establishing a “council on family relations” and bringing the parents of juvenile delinquents into court, something that California was
experimenting with at the time. He felt it worthwhile to employ an investigator to look into the “cause of the unwholesome atmosphere which the Klan claimed it sought to correct.”

“Maybe our answer will be that we can’t afford this sort of program, that we haven’t time to attempt more than enforcing the letter of the law,” Cole added. “But it won’t be an adequate answer. It won’t alter the fact that we haven’t hesitated to ask the Federal Government, the State Government, and the county to spend many, many thousands of dollars” tracking down the nightriders. He concluded: Mob violence must go. The contemptible cowards who hide behind a hood and robe to deprive men of their liberties, even if only for an hour, must be caught and punished. But an enlightened citizenry must do more than rest easy when that task is accomplished. With the dawn of another day of orderly existence must come a program, intelligently planned and efficiently executed, to encourage slum-dwellers among our rural population to develop a sense of responsibility as to their duties as parents and citizens. Failing that, little will have been learned from this horrible experience with hoodlumism.

**Arrests keep coming**

A floodgate of arrests and indictments seemed to have opened. On February 28, 1952, another dozen men were arrested, this time in Chadbourn, North Carolina in connection with an attack on Esther Lee Floyd. Cole called it a “curtain-raiser” to the unfolding drama” of the Klan’s dismantling. Police officials “smiled broadly” when asked whether more arrests were expected. Cole reported “the Ku Klux Klan nightmare in Columbus County appeared certain to be bared in minutest detail.” Police had followed supposed Klansmen, the News-Reporter related, and cases had been built carefully as “positive proof” was sought, rather than “the unsupported identification of a frightened victim.” Four days later, the News-Reporter stated a federal grand jury in Raleigh had indicted 10 ex-members of the Klan on kidnapping and conspiracy charges. Several of them had been charged earlier after the first FBI round-up, while others were
newly-indicted Klansmen. Three days after that another half dozen men – three of them from Whiteville and one a second former Fair Bluff police chief – were arrested, some of them hauled out of their beds. Warrants for an additional four were being temporarily withheld. A semi-pro baseball player, Floyd Rogers, was arrested. He was also a sergeant first class in the Fair Bluff Battery of the National Guard, said the article.

Reeling from the arrests, Hamilton lashed out at the nation’s newspapers at a rally in South Carolina, according to the News-Reporter’s March 6, 1952 issue. It was self-promoted Imperial Wizard Hamilton’s first public appearance since the mass arrests. “When the truth is out on those floggings in North Carolina, you’ll find few Klansmen connected with them,” Hamilton claimed. “I have personally tossed out … and disbanded Klansmen because they didn’t live up to the ideals of the Klan.” Hamilton then added, “I will protect God’s House to the last drop of my blood and that isn’t true of some of our preachers. See them on Sunday wearing robes in church and then watch their actions on the other six days of the week.” Solicitor Malcolm Seawell of Robeson County declared that no one could belong to the Klan in his county after digging “up an old carpetbagger and scalawag law to clamp down on the Klan.” Hamilton responded, “But nowhere in the constitution of North Carolina does it say that the Klan is banned. And the attorney general of that state has proven me correct in this argument.”

The third straight Fair Bluff, North Carolina police chief, Jack Ashley, was indicted in connection with two floggings on April 1, perhaps appropriately, and removed from office the next day, said the News-Reporter in an April 3 front-page article. Legal maneuvers commenced, News-Reporter readers learned in another front-page article, something they should have expected if they had kept the editorial clipping from January 21 predicting such an eventuality. While the case would likely be tried in Columbus County, the jury would be selected from an adjoining county.

**Turning on each other**

The News-Reporter’s front-page columns, once filled with accounts of mob violence, were
now filled instead with stories of
the trials of those involved in the
floggings. And, cornered, the
Klansmen began to break ranks
and turn on each other. Former
police chief and grand kleagle
Brooks changed his plea to “no
contest” in a “dramatic”
courtroom development just as his
victim prepared to testify. 
“A
murmur swept the courtroom and
Brooks immediately left the seat
he had occupied as one of the
defendants,” the News-Reporter
related. The victim, Woodrow
Johnson, “pointed his finger” at
another defendant, identifying him
along with Brooks, as the two men
who had “lured him into the
hands of the nightriders.”
Johnson testified that Barfield
“grabbed him around the neck”
and warned him not to “holler” or
be killed.

“Six days and two evenings
of toil in a hot courtroom came to
an end shortly after 9 o’clock
Saturday night [May 10, 1952],”
the News-Reporter stated on May
12. Eleven of thirteen men were
convicted after almost four hours
of deliberation. The jurors
returned to the courtroom, “tired
but unruffled,” to find the
defendants guilty of conspiracy to
assault and assault. They
dismissed two kidnapping charges
and acquitted two of the
Klansmen. Four road-gang
sentences were immediately
handed down, while seven men
were only fined by Judge Williams,
who called them all “organized
outlaws and hoodlums.” A
“flurry of excitement swept the
courtroom” when Ray Kelly’s
sentence was imposed. There
were “frenzied sobs” from family
and friends and one called out,
“That’s what you get for trying to
do right.”

The News-Reporter chastised
one of the defense lawyers, J. R.
Nance of Fayetteville, in his
statement to the jury. Nance
remarked, “If the good people of
Whiteville knew Woodrow
Johnson [one of the victims] as
you and I now know him, there
wouldn’t have been 40 [Klansmen]
out there; there would have been
hundreds, and I’d have been one
of them.” The News-Reporter
called it a “scurrilous attack,” but
not just against Johnson; it also
besmirched Whiteville. “We
contend that there aren’t
‘hundreds’ of people in this
community who would participate
in or go out to see any mob take
the law into its own hands at a
lonely cemetery or anywhere else
media

history

monographs

20:1

... [or] countenance or condone the brutal beating of any man, no matter how sorry or how low-down.” In the same editorial, The News-Reporter disagreed with the sheriff who felt an impartial jury could be obtained in Columbus County, calling such a thing “distant from the truth.”

The arithmetic is simple. There were 1,562 members of the organization, if reports are approximately correct. Add the wives of these members and the total is 3,124. Most couples have at least two out of their four parents living, and you have another 3,124, making a total of 6,248. You can add another 3,124 from the brothers and sisters of these KKK members, raising the total to 9,372. A man who doesn’t have at least two personal friends, who would be embarrassed to return a verdict against him, is pretty friendless, so you can increase the total to 12,496.

“The chain of friendships, kinship and organization connections could even be carried beyond this point,” the editorial continued. “However this should be sufficient to convince anybody, who seeks the truth ...”

The imperial wizard falls

Imperial Wizard Thomas Hamilton returned to Columbus County, Cole told his readers on May 26, only this time it was “through the persuasive powers of the law.” Hamilton led police on a hunt before his arrest, the News-Reporter related, apparently having “gotten wind” of warrants about to be brought against him. He “had flown the coop deliberately,” said the News-Reporter. Initially, Hamilton went to Augusta, Georgia from his Leesville, South Carolina home. Evidently, North Carolina journalists had accompanied police attempting to apprehend the fleeing imperial wizard. “North Carolina newsmen,” the News-Reporter observed, “were on the scene as the sometimes comical and sometimes frantic search progressed.” They were “shocked by the indifference of South Carolina newsmen to the story and amazed by the sympathetic attitude” of regular South Carolinians. Eventually, Hamilton agreed to surrender to authorities at his attorney’s office.
In the News-Reporter’s July 10 edition, readers learned the SBI had brought charges against three Hallsboro men and one Whiteville man in cases involving Clayton Sellers and Lee Tyson. Several other victims were mentioned for the first time, though without elaboration: J. Melton Russ, Lawyer Jernigan, and Greer P. Wright. Seventy defendants were involved in 178 cases brought by various law enforcement agencies up to that point, according to the News-Reporter.

**A mammoth trial**

Through July 1952, the drumbeat of indictments kept coming, culminating in a mammoth trial of 163 cases against 84 defendants. The drama was somewhat diminished as the “Klan’s house of cards kept tumbling” with the “most resounding crash” coming with Hamilton’s decision to plead guilty to assault and conspiracy to assault, a “complete reversal from his claim of innocence.” Other Klansmen began changing their pleas as well, mainly to no contest. There was fall-out from the trial. The Whiteville police chief resigned after it came out during testimony that he had been a Klan member in the early stages of its organization in the area, although before he became chief. He claimed to have attended only one meeting.

In another front-page article on the Klan, Cole described Hamilton’s dreams of a “Klan empire powerful enough to control the state.” One witness quoted Hamilton saying, “If you get enough Klansmen, no Klansmen will be convicted.” Hamilton’s dream evaporated as witness after witness chronicled his instructions to assault “helpless victims.”

The News-Reporter noted in a July 28 article that there were 22 FBI cases and 187 SBI cases against Klansmen. The Klan trial spurred the News-Reporter to a flurry of editorials in late July and early August. Writing just before Hamilton’s sentencing, Cole termed him a “pitiful figure, [n]o longer arrogant and abusive, no longer defiant and denunciatory, no longer shouting hate while uttering pious and hypocritical prayers.” Alluding to one of the Klan’s preferred means of terror, lynching, Cole noted that Hamilton appeared to have come to the end of his rope. There was always a societal “price for
listening to the preaching of [a] disciple of hate,” Cole concluded. “The scars will remain, even after the wound has healed. It is ever thus when a cancerous growth is removed.”

Hamilton was sentenced to four years at hard labor, starting October 1, 1952 said the News-Reporter’s July 31 front-page article. Fifteen other Klansmen were given prison sentences varying from 18 months to six years. Forty-six others drew fines. Judge Williams applauded the generosity of Solicitor Moore and told the convicted defendants “the law is not vindictive. It does not seek revenge. It is not bloodthirsty.” The News-Reporter noted that a maximum of 536 years of prison time could have been imposed.

In an editorial in the same issue, Cole laid most of the blame at the feet of Hamilton, letting some of his fellow citizens off the hook. He drew an artful parallel to the horseback riding Klansmen of the Reconstruction era, but with a twist … this time Klansmen rode to jail.

Some of the men who rode under the banner of the Klan were honestly misguided. They got into the organization for various reasons. A few carried a Bible in one hand and a pistol in the other. Some sought political power. Others hoped for business gain. Some wanted to control the courts. Others felt they were “lifting” up erring humanity. Some entered for adventure … Others sought to [prevent] the consolidation of Negro children with white children.

Back of it all, however, was a grasping hand, linked to a man whose mind was filled with beastly thoughts of brutality. “Do a good job or you’ll have to do it all over again” was one view he took of the flogging of Mrs. Evergreen Flowers …

Yesterday, the Klan rode again. This time the brains of the Ku Klux Klan, minus his satin-looking robe, went on a ride to a prison road gang where he will have four years to form new Klaverns and perhaps elevate himself anew to Imperial Wizard … Most of the people in Columbus County prefer that he ride there instead of in their midst …
IV. THE PULITZER PRIZE

“Cole was seated at his desk chatting with a visitor about the city elections,” a May 7, 1953 News-Reporter article related, “when George Munger of the Greensboro Daily News broke the [Pulitzer] news by telephone.”328 In quick succession, others called, including Jonathan Daniels of the News and Observer.329 Cole gave “a major share of the credit to Sheriff H. Hugh Nance and Solicitor Clifton L. Moore,” the News-Reporter observed, noting “without honest, upright men in the key positions . . . no crusade against crime can be successful.”330

A recollection of Cole and his times written by James Saxon Childers, former editor of the Atlanta Journal, was published in the News-Reporter’s centennial edition.331 I was expecting to meet a stalwart man, one of the blunt, rugged kind they breed in the hills of North Carolina. This fellow was rather short and he was soft spoken. He had an easy smile … In Cole’s 8-by-10 office, the plaster was chipped and the chairs battered.

Cobwebs drooped from the ceiling, and newspapers and books were splattered on an old metal frame. Cigarette ashes, tapped toward the tray, had skidded across the desk. Sometimes Cole would sit with one foot on a chair, sometimes with both feet on the desk. However he sat, he looked straight at you.

Cole uses his Pulitzer Prize for a paper weight.332

In an editorial, Cole did not think the “greatest reward” was the Pulitzer. “Rather, we believe the richest harvest from this experience is a renewal of our faith in the soundness of an awakened citizenry and a restoration of full confidence that right and justice can triumph in any community and on any level if good men united in the cause of righteousness.”333 Headlines in type larger than the newspaper’s nameplate on May 7, 1953 proclaimed: “News Reporter Wins Top Pulitzer Prize.”334 The Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious Public Service was awarded on May 4, 1953 by Columbia University and shared with the Tabor City Tribune of Horace Carter.335
Dénouement.

In a successful bid to be released from prison, Hamilton repudiated the Klan in an October 1953 letter addressed to Cole. He urged his “friends” to disband the Klan “wherever it exists and work wholly out in the open for the causes in which they believe.” Two days later, the News-Reporter reacted to Hamilton’s personal rehabilitation in an editorial, “Hamilton’s Manly Apology,” that was generous and forgiving in tone. “While Columbus County will not soon forget the heartaches and suffering which Thomas L. Hamilton brought to its people,” the editorial began, “it will applaud his forthright declaration that he is through with the organization he once headed.”

While the scars will remain on the hearts of the misguided followers, both they and the casual, uninvolved citizenry are Christian enough in their thinking to accept his manly apology. Expressed in such words of humility, only an unforgiving people could do otherwise.

He is no small man who, after years of activity and fanatical devotion to the Klan, can come to the point of publicly admitting that he was “misguided and wrong” in his thinking.

In late February 1954, the former imperial wizard was released after serving 17 months of his four-year sentence. In an editorial in the News-Reporter’s February 25, 1953 issue, Cole praised the parole board’s decision. Perhaps fittingly, but certainly in a sense drawing the saga to a neatly packaged close, Cole announced he was leaving the News-Reporter in the same edition. He described “an indelible moment when the flames of duty leaped madly into action” and noted that “not always could one be certain that justice and right and humanity would triumph.” He repeated the words he had used nearly seven years earlier on May 26, 1947 in his first issue as editor. “Your newspaper is more than a builder of cities … It is, and must continue to be, the lamp which lights the pathway of humanity to higher cultural values, to better living, and to God.”

Willard Cole’s death warranted an obituary in The New
York Times. He died after a stroke in the early morning of May 28, 1965, a few hours after returning home at 11 p.m. from working at the desk of the newspaper he founded, the semi-weekly Robeson County Enterprise in Lumberton, North Carolina. Cole was survived by his wife, a son and daughter, and four grandchildren.345

Former Imperial Wizard Thomas L. Hamilton died September 30, 1976 in Augusta, Georgia. He had been a pastor at several Baptist churches and was a member of the North Augusta First Baptist Church at his death at age 69. He and his wife, who survived him, had one child, a daughter. There was no mention of his Klan affiliation in his obituary.346

V. CONCLUSIONS

Why does consideration of the coverage of the News-Reporter matter? It matters because Cole and the others stood up to the forces of history, tradition, and the status quo and refused to be complicit with continuing injustice. It is important because the Civil Rights era culminated in the destruction of segregation – a quasi-slavery – and the acknowledgement and enforcement of the rights of a significant section of African American citizens. Cole and Carter and their two newspapers played a part in that. That it was a minor part in a backwards, nearly forgotten corner of the country, does not diminish the part the drama played in weaving the successful tapestry of the civil rights movement. In fact, the bravery required in a small town among neighbors and without the klieg lights of celebrity and visibility is far greater and more dangerous than in large urban areas of major media.

Cole’s stand shows to everyone who reads the story something of the human spirit and the courage that makes the American system work its best when people of conscience and courage make it work as intended. As Edmund Burke remarked, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” Carter summed it up best, noting in his memoirs his feelings after witnessing the first Klan parade through Tabor City. “My duty as the only newspaperman in Tabor City stared me squarely in the face. I could not compromise my conscience,” he wrote.347

One expected result of this
study was that liberalism would be evident in the News-Reporter coverage, because of the tradition of liberal southern journalists. Race, central to southern life for nearly four centuries, was also anticipated to be obvious. But liberalism was scarcely in evidence, if at all. And race, while the subtext and the “Invisible Man” in the room, to borrow the title from Ralph Ellison’s book, was also not as visible as expected. Religion was the overriding theme of the newspapers’ campaigns against the Klan and was also key to much of the Klan’s own justifications for its actions. The Pulitzer acknowledged the transcendence of religious tolerance and core moral value over religious zealotry and the false idols of white supremacy.

Like Germany, the South carries an unavoidable stain it may never completely erase and must constantly confront. The legacy and reminders of slavery will scar the region far into the future. It will be more than removing or defending statues in town squares and on college campuses, something other than gauzy nostalgia for a Lost Cause that was not noble, but benighted, much more than Civil War reenactments, something beyond marble tablets of honor and small Confederate battle flags next to weathered gravestones. It is in the land and the mountains. The sound of the slave auction and the smell of sweat and blood of men and women crowded together in chains, the image of human beings, one after the other being pulled off the deck of slave ships, shackled together in a daisy chain of death, plummeting into the deep to avoid detection by British men-of-war trying to stop the slave trade. The sting of the whip and the cry of the slave hunter will always be heard.

When the Klan exerted its force in the early 1950s in Whiteville and Tabor City, the editors and publishers of the Tabor City Tribune and the Whiteville News-Reporter were willing to express disapproval and resistance. In the face of seeming community support or acceptance or apathy, the editors risked public opprobrium and isolation.348

While hundreds of Klan murders, lynchings, and beatings went unreported for decades after the Civil War, by the late 1950s the group’s violence was on the front pages of the press of the South and the nation. At least a few newspapers, editors, and
journalists confronted the Klan, stalling or at least slowing down the group while the rest of the country caught up and caught on. It took courage. That is the lesson and the legacy of Willard Cole, not just for historians, but for Americans.

The years have been good to Whiteville. The News Reporter has moved to larger quarters, the town has grown, and there are many more businesses now than in the 1950s. The streets are swept clean of dust and the bigotry of the past. Children of many races sit together in the reading room of the town’s modern public library. It is a scene Willard Cole could not have imagined but helped create. And where KKK stickers were once plastered, there are ribbons honoring American soldiers – African American and white – serving overseas.
Notes

3 Ibid. Selma Times and Messenger, July 31, 1868; and the Athens (Ala.) Post, August 6, 1868 (quoting the Mobile Register).
5 Powell, North Carolina through Four Centuries, 397.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
11 Punctuation and spelling in all quotations are as originally published.
13 J.C. Lester and D. L. Wilson, Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, Growth and Disbandment, 1905 reprint with an introduction by W. L. Fleming (New York: AMS Press), 19-21. The Ku Klux Klan may have taken its name from that of the Kuklos Adelphon fraternity, founded in 1812 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. “Some authorities believe that the unusual Klan rituals were copied from the Kuklos Adelphon rules and procedural manual,” Chester Quarles noted. The English words circle and cycle are derived from the Greek word Kuklos and which can also be interpreted as a circle of friends. Quarles, The Ku Klux Klan and Related, 32.
14 Trelease, White Terror, xi.
15 Ibid.
16 Lester and Wilson, Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, 18.
18 Ibid., 207.
19 These laws would be applied again during the 1960s.
21 Quarles, The Ku Klux Klan and Related, 28.
Forrest estimated there were 550,000 members of various Klan-style organizations throughout the South during Reconstruction, a number Fleming considered plausible if the numbers of all similar groups were counted. Ibid., 30.

Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan and Related*, 53. President Woodrow Wilson considered this one of his favorite movies and screened it for friends numerous times in the White House.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


William Vincent Moore, “A Sheet and a Cross: A Symbolic Analysis of the Ku Klux Klan” (PhD diss, Tulane University, 1975), 4. The Internal Revenue Service played an important part in the suppression of the national Klan in the 1940s. Since Simmons’s revival of the Klan in 1915, all affiliated Klans owed at least nominal allegiance to a national imperial wizard. According to Rice, the IRS “hounded” the national Klan, which formally disbanded to avoid paying past taxes of nearly $700,000. This did not mean the suspension of Klan activities, but it did play a role in reducing its organizational efficiency and public image. However, the IRS action also allowed locally and regionally autonomous leaders to emerge without the interference of any national authority. A “Klonvokation” was held in Atlanta on April 23, 1944 when all Klan charters were voided and all offices were vacated. Ibid., 114, 108.


Ibid., 70.


Ibid.

Ibid., 117.


Ibid.

47 Ibid., 15.
49 Ibid., 7.
52 Sims, *The Klan*, xi.
54 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
60 Burnette interview, July 17, 2007.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid. The *Enterprise* was eventually absorbed by the *Post*, which was later merged with several other newspapers.
67 Ibid., 53.
68 Klan activities in Whiteville had been “performed for the most part in secretiveness” for many years,” said the *Carolinian* of Raleigh, an African American newspaper, after interviewing some of the “most frightened of the citizens of both races” in the area. According to the story, Whiteville was the focal point of Klan activity. “KKK Is ‘Taking Over’ Town: Whiteville is Site of Klan’s Boldest Moves: Hooded Order Giving Ultimatum Pointing out Klan’s History,” *Carolinian*, 5 May 1951, A1+.
70 Ibid.
“Wrong Uniform,” editorial, the Whiteville News-Reporter, August 31, 1950, 2. Cole did extend “[o]ur sympathy . . . to his family he left behind [though] it would be difficult to eke out a tear for the victim of this act of violence.”


“SBI Men Here To Assist With Violence Probe,” the Whiteville-News Reporter, January 25, 1951, 1+.


104 Ibid. Both High and Carolyn Thompson High were only children.
105 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 “Klan Plans Saturday Nite Meet In County,” the Whiteville News-Reporter, August 13, 1951, 1.
111 Ibid.
112 “Klan Meet To Go On As Scheduled,” the Whiteville News-Reporter, August 20, 1951, 1. A solicitor was the equivalent of a district attorney.
113 Ibid.
115 Ibid. Communists, labor unions, newspapers, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were also attacked.
116 Ibid. Hamilton invited the press to cover the rally.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
125 Peter 2:13.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid., 1-2.
131 Ibid., 2.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
“Klan Abundant With Hate But Crowd Is Thin,” the *Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 1, 1951, 1.

Ibid.

Ibid.

“What’s Underneath,” editorial, the *Whiteville News-Reporter*, October 4, 1951, 4.

Ibid.

Ibid.

“They Departed Quickly,” editorial, the *Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 5, 1951, 4.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

“Masked Mobsters Seize Resident of New Hope Section in Latest Outbreak of Terrorism in County, Night Riders Also Beat Olyphic [sic] Man,” the *Whiteville News-Reporter*, November 19, 1951, 1.

Ibid. Flogging was the contemporary term for a beating. It did, however, usually involve some sort of instrument or weapon being used in the attack, such as a broom or axe handle, a baseball bat, whip, and/or leather strap.

Ibid., 2.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid., 2.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Mrs. Tyson was not beaten because she showed the nightriders her bandaged thigh from severe burns of three weeks earlier.


“Mob Inactive As Probe Continues in This County; No Serious Incident Reported Since Dick Best Was Flogged Nearly 2 Weeks Ago,” the *Whiteville News-Reporter*, January 21, 1952, 1.


On January 31, Cole published his only political cartoon of the Klan campaign (“What a Ku Kluxer Really Thinks!”); four panels on the front page. A bed-sheeted Klansman holds an argument with himself. Ultimately, he feels ashamed of himself and “anything but American” and “pretty low.” He condemns himself for “taking the law in my own hand.” In the final panel, he hangs up his Klan outfit, promising to bury it the next day.


“Delete Three Words,” editorial, the *Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 16, 1952, 1. Elsewhere on the front page, the newspaper reported on the arrest of Grand Dragon Bill Hendrix of Florida for “sending defamatory material through” the U.S. Mail.

“The Task Ahead,” editorial, the *Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 21, 1952. In a second editorial, Cole took to task a letter writer who signed himself unashamed to be a Klansman, but who “forgot to exercise his duty as a good citizen, unafraid and unlashced, to say where he stands, by signing his name.”

Klansmen did not get the message, it seemed. Warning notes – “Beware of the KKK. Join or Else” – were scattered about Whiteville later in the week. “KKK Or Pranksters Take Time To Scatter Warning Notes About City,” the *Whiteville News-Reporter*, February 25, 1952, 1.


Night officer L. D. Duncan was appointed as Fair Bluff’s fourth and latest police chief. Early Brooks and Frank Lewis were the other two Fair Bluff police chiefs indicted for Klan activities.

“Trial Date, Place And Jury Unsettled In Ku Klux Case,” the *Whiteville News-Reporter*, April 3, 1952, 1.

“At a session earlier in the week, another seven men pleaded no contest.

“11 Sentenced In Klan Cases; Investigation To Continue,” the *Whiteville News-Reporter*, May 12, 1952, 1.

“Chief Of Police Resigns Position,” the Whiteville News-Reporter, July 24, 1952, 1. His resignation – and the reason for it – may explain why Klan literature could have been distributed repeatedly without detection throughout Whiteville.

In another story, the grand jury that acted on 96 indictments in two days recommended an all-night patrol of the county to help guard against night riding activities. “Grand Jury Recommends All-Night County Patrol,” the Whiteville News-Reporter, July 24, 1952, 1.


James Saxon Childers, 100 Years Serving Columbus County, 11.


“News Reporter Wins Top Pulitzer Prize: Cole And Carter Receive Highest Honors In Field,” the Whiteville News-Reporter, May 7, 1953, 1. Besides the medallions, a $500 check accompanied the award. The News-Reporter used the hyphen erratically throughout the study period. For consistency, the hyphen was used through the text of this study.
After leaving Whiteville, Cole suffered several strokes in the early 1960s. James High recalled the stroke scarcely slowed him down. “He had his manual typewriter set up and had a way so that he could use his foot to bring the carriage forward, and he would basically . . . type [that way] much of the time . . . with basically one finger. Maybe a lot of this typing was one finger way back before that, but his level of writing is what, I think brought him back into newspapering.” High interview, March 28, 2007.


Campbell and Clark, "Thomas Lemuel Hamilton.”

Carter, Virus of Fear, 13.

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