From White Supremacy to White Power: The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Nazification of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1970s

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In the 1960s, the leader of the largest Ku Klux Klan organization in the United States presumed that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was a meritorious ally engaged in a common battle against Communist subversion. By 1971 however, United Klans of America (UKA) Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton had concluded that the FBI was “no longer the respected and honorable arm of justice that it once appeared to be.” A year later the UKA’s Fiery Cross published an editorial written by former American Nazi Party official William Pierce, who declared that the federal government had “been transformed [into] a corrupt, unnatural and degenerate monstrosity,” and exhorted Klansmen to launch a bloody revolution against it. Twenty years before overtly repressive FBI tactics at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and Waco, Texas, convinced thousands of Americans to join the militia movement, Klansmen had already begun to condemn the FBI and espouse revolution.

This article argues that during the 1970s, Klan organizers transformed a reactionary counter-movement that had failed to preserve white supremacy by terrorizing civil rights organizers and black citizens, into a revolutionary white power movement that inculpated Jews and the federal government. It describes how these organizers combined latent revolutionary impulses within Klan ideology with more esoteric anti-semitic and anti-republican discourses, infusing Christian Americanism—the Klan’s particular admixture of white supremacy,
anticommunism, nativism, and segregationist theology— with National Socialist dreams of a corporate state, Christian Identity theology, and racial anti-semitism.5

This change occurred as American race relations went through a profound transformation.6 The rise of neoconservatism, which attacked liberalism and the welfare state while eschewing overtly racial rhetoric, was particularly important in this context.7 Before 1964–1966, massive resistance had papered over class divisions in the Deep South, masking a division over the use of violence that would ultimately divide the segregationist constituency.8 In the mid-1960s however, Southern leaders began to relinquish Jim Crow and suppress racist violence, even as they helped to slow civil rights implementation and undo efforts to extend civil rights legislation, reconfiguring structures of white privilege by exploiting racial anxieties in the rest of the nation.9 In the course of subsequent conflicts over urban riots, court ordered busing, and affirmative action, the nation learned to understand race in “nonsystematic, nonstructural terms.”10

Klansmen also attempted to re-articulate discourses of whiteness during this period. Like neoconservatives, they shifted focus from racial minorities to the federal government. Yet they clung to biological notions of race, warning that busing, affirmative action, and other egalitarian measures promoted miscegenation. As their former segregationist allies discarded the formal institutions of white supremacy, Klansmen came to realize that it was no longer possible to revive white supremacy or to attract a mass base.11 This article argues that they turned to esoteric conspiratorial discourses to cope with this predicament.

The larger political, social, and cultural context within which the Ku Klux Klan became “thoroughly alienated from routine political processes,” then, is quite clear.12 Yet explanations for particular trajectories remain opaque: Why did Klan organizers of the 1970s incorporate these particular countersubversive discourses? Why did they focus their most vehement hatred of the federal government on federal law enforcement agencies? More specifically, why did the FBI become such a central target of their wrath? This article, based upon research in FBI counterintelligence files, as well as white supremacist and white power publications, provides one explanation.13

A rich, readily accessible literature exploring the devolution of black power and new left organizations has described how covert FBI operations and “agents provocateurs” debilitated them by discrediting leaders and aggravating factionalism, influencing a process by which alienated revolutionaries came to embrace terrorism.14 Some Klansmen also turned to anti-federal government terrorism during this same period, but their publications and communications are buried in archives. These materials attest that Klansmen also came to believe that informers from within and spies from without were disrupting constitutionally protected organizing activities and violating individual civil rights.15

Drawing on a larger study, this article summarizes how an FBI covert action program called COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE exposed, disrupted, and helped to vitiate Klan organizations between 1964 and 1971.16 Some operations ex-
posed Klan activity to public scrutiny, facilitating a process by which vigilantes were transformed into “extremists” in American political discourse. Others harassed Klan organizers and discredited Klan officers before the rank and file, aggravating factionalism and facilitating purges. As resignation, frustration, and fear led to membership losses and the disbanding of local klavern units, the UKA disintegrated into antagonistic factions. A number of other Klan groups disappeared entirely. This article argues that this dire situation spurred Klan organizers to fundamentally rethink their rhetorical and organizational strategies. While acknowledging that legitimate and legal surveillance operations aimed at uncovering criminal activity and facilitating prosecution certainly caused Klansmen to condemn the federal government, it argues that they embraced vehement and scurrilous anti-FBI rhetoric to oppose what they saw as illegal and unconstitutional machinations of political repression.

**COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE and the Disruption of the Klans, 1964–1971**

Between 1960 and 1964, as direct action campaigns for civil rights spread across the South, activists were met with interstate Klan organizing and an increase in vigilante violence. In recalcitrant areas, this situation would not change until federal authorities intervened to boost black voter registration, providing accommodationist politicians with a large enough political base to shift toward moderation. In 1963–1964 moreover, armed African Americans in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama began to defend civil rights activists and to retaliate against white vigilantes. A breakdown in law and order ended toleration of Klan violence, and in December 1965, Deep South juries began to convict terrorists that had previously helped to maintain a white supremacist social order.

Meanwhile, liberal politicians and justice department bureaucrats came to view segregationist mob violence, race-related civil disturbances, and Klan vigilance as threats to internal security. After a number of civil disturbances in May–June 1964, they argued that federal prosecutors and enforcement should target the Klan, and FBI executives stepped up intelligence efforts to predict and contain outbreaks of racial violence. After Klansmen murdered three civil rights workers in Neshoba County, Mississippi, in June, President Johnson challenged FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to prevent terror by suppressing Klan activity. In response, FBI executives launched an aggressive campaign of surveillance, harassment, infiltration, and intelligence collection.

In the wake of the Mississippi murders, FBI agents not only solved bombings, murders, and other acts of Klan vigilance, but also began to anticipate and prevent such acts through the use of informants, surveillance, and other counterintelligence techniques. In communities where local power brokers decided to repress Klan violence, the FBI provided intelligence to local police. They also gathered evidence of minor criminal violations and turned it over to local authorities, who targeted Klansmen with selective enforcement of the law. Ef-
fective organizers were arrested and prosecuted for petty offenses, wasting time and depleting finances and curtailing activity.

Agents pressured reluctant local authorities to crack down on local vigilante activity and refused to share information with complicit law enforcement authorities. They conducted aggressive interviews, warning Klansmen not to engage in violence and creating an impression that Klansmen were under almost constant surveillance. They reinforced suspicions and aggravated infighting by insinuating that Klan leaders were fleecing the membership. Fearing that their telephones were tapped and that listening-devices had been planted in their meeting places, some Klansmen refrained from further acts of violence, while others reorganized into small terrorist cells.\textsuperscript{19}

Yet the Klan continued to grow, and in many areas vigilantes operated with tacit or active support from local or state law enforcement agencies. After careful consideration during mid-summer 1964, Bureau executives decided to expand the counterintelligence operations that they had employed so successfully against the communist party. In September they supplemented the aggressive law enforcement tactics with a highly secret covert action program called COINTELPRO-White Hate.\textsuperscript{20} Covert action was expedient. It allowed the FBI to act without interference from justice department lawyers who required informants to surface for criminal trials despite slim chances of gaining conviction, and it avoided direct clashes with local law enforcement.\textsuperscript{21}

COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE aimed

\[\ldots\text{to expose, disrupt and otherwise neutralize the activities of the various Klans and Hate organizations, their leadership and adherents \ldots to frustrate the effort of the groups to consolidate their forces or to recruit \ldots [and] to capitalize upon organizational and personal conflicts of their leadership.}\]

The program targeted the nation’s largest and most active Klan organizations, groups such as the UKA, the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi, the Original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Louisiana, and the Florida Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. They also targeted two small but unruly anti-semitic groups, the American Nazi Party (ANP) and the National States Rights Party (NSRP).\textsuperscript{23} Some members of the Minutemen, a tiny but militant anticommunist group that stockpiled arms, conducted paramilitary exercises, and, by the late 1960s, bombed leftist establishments, also received attention, especially if they held cross-membership in Klan organizations.\textsuperscript{24}

As opposed to the secretive, hierarchically organized White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi, which was eventually destroyed through a combination of federal conspiracy prosecutions, covert action, and police repression, the FBI could not prove that UKA leaders commanded their followers to commit violence.\textsuperscript{25} The UKA was a legally incorporated organization that elected its officers, held public rallies, and published a monthly newspaper. Although
individual members of the UKA committed acts of violence, the Imperial Wizard contended that he never sanctioned this and that he would expel any Klansman convicted of criminal activity.26

Since the power of all Klan organizations depended on secrecy of membership and sympathy from local officials, the FBI provided information gleaned by informants to like-thinking politicians, journalists, and other public figures, enabling them to muster evidence to expose and discredit them. They identified Klan members in cartoon postcards, thousands of which they sent to homes and places of employment. Compromised, some Klansmen lost their jobs or quit the Klan.

On FBI request, the Internal Revenue Service conducted selective tax investigations against Klan leaders. The FBI also helped the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to expose Klan activity in public hearings held during winter 1965–1966. Illegal financial schemes, advocacy of violence, and allegations of embezzlement, personal vices, and other sordid tales led to infighting and resignations, as well as membership losses and a decline in Klan activity. As a direct result of the hearings, the UKA banished a Klan robe-contractor. The Louisiana Grand Dragon, who cooperated with the committee, was also ousted, while Grand Dragons of Texas and Alabama resigned. Imperial Wizard Shelton and four other national UKA leaders were convicted of contempt of congress after they refused to produce Klan records and were incarcerated in federal prison for six months during 1969. Left leaderless subordinates bickered, aggravating internal factionalism.27

The Fiery Cross editorialized against what it called “a planned attempt to frighten witnesses” into surrendering their Constitutional rights, through “harassment and intimidation,” and “when did you stop beating your wife type of questions.”28 Shelton protested that no allegations of subversion had been made against the Klan and that the UKA did not seek to overthrow the government; he alleged that an Anti-Defamation League commissioner had bragged about how the organization had manipulated HUAC.29 He characterized the hearings as “a devilish conspiracy to make it appear that I had diverted Klan funds to my personal use,” and called the investigation “unethical, un-Christian and un-American.”30

This denunciation marked the beginning of a slow shift in UKA rhetoric toward the federal government, one that became increasingly antagonistic as the decade wore on. At this point, UKA leaders were still unable to conceive that the circumstances that had led to the HUAC exposé were permanent. Before the hearings, Shelton had argued that “left wing elements” were “using the Klan as bait to destroy the Committee.”31 As the hearings came to a close, the UKA press still portrayed HUAC as a “victim” of harassment and intimidation by communist dominated groups.32 Shelton continued to speculate that “[t]he liberal element has gained control over the committee and it is their purpose to utilize the Klan and to force the Klan to join forces with the liberal, as well as the Communist groups, in bringing about the destruction of the Committee itself.”33 Shelton as-
serted that “the FBI and Justice Department have harassed members of this Klan and other right-wing organizations, causing them to lose their jobs.” Yet he also reached out, offering, “it’s not necessary for them to infiltrate. If they fill out an application, they can do so and we’ll welcome them into the Klan and have fraternal unionism.” Shelton retained faith in the American political system, viewing subversive infiltration of various parts of the government, rather than a complete subversion of the republic, as the cause of his woes.

So far, COINTELPRO had focused on exposure rather than disruption, so that penetration and informant development could be expedited without raising suspicion, so its effects were subtle. After an executive conference on March 25, 1966, however, the FBI escalated covert operations, disrupting white supremacist publications, organizational finances, and public meetings. As these operations took their toll, the UKA would become increasingly alienated from its erstwhile allies. In July 1966, for example, the *Fiery Cross* counseled Klansmen to “pay no attention to the snoopers of the SO called Justice Department” and asked them to consider:

... what happens from the night the F.B.I. takes down license numbers and snaps their picture. Joe Smith who was in attendance at the Klan Speaking and who has not yet joined the organization or maybe he has no desire to join starts receiving letters, post card cartoons from non-existent organizations making claims against Klan leaders, post cards with a cartoon on the back side for everyone to see saying “KLANSMAN trying to hide behind your sheet? You received this—someone knows who you are!” Many times they will be sent to the place of employment instead of the mans [sic] home. Their purpose for this naturally is to bring about economic pressure.

... A week later he receives through the mail a letter from a FAKE organization. ... Since the F.B.I. is guilty of taking pictures and getting license numbers from cars that are in attendance at the Klan speakings and then days later these people start receiving the hate literature on the Klan, we ask this question. If it is not the F.B.I. who could in turn be receiving this information to harass the WHITE CHRISTIAN CITIZENS? ARE THEY ALLOWING OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TO USE THIS INFORMATION? These things do not just happen, they are planned. COULD THERE BE AGENTS FROM THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE who have infiltrated the F.B.I.? WHAT IS THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE OF B’NAI B’RITH?
The article questioned whether “ADL smear information on the Klan is exchanged with HUAC for names it has uncovered in order to further their smear campaign?” The Anti-Defamation League, it declared, “subverted the traditional American system whereby every accused has the right to know his accuser.”

The UKA leadership, which had gone out of its way to beseech erstwhile FBI allies in the wake of the HUAC hearings, now expressed vehement outrage. This anger arose from alienation; frustration, discouragement, divisiveness, anger, and fear were festering due to COINTELPRO-operations that were disrupting the UKA’s ability to function effectively. Yet the UKA remained unable to conceive that the FBI viewed the Klan as subversive, and unable to comprehend that it was acting deliberately, to suppress Klan organizing. Patriotic, counter subversive, and pro-law enforcement, they blamed government-infiltrators for their woes.

This change occurred because beginning in April 1966 and escalating until 1968, FBI agents mailed thousands of cartoons and hundreds of fake letters depicting embezzlement and personal aggrandizement by Klan leaders, resulting in defections and factionalism as well as conflict between rival Klan organizations. Poison-pen letters snitch-jacketed UKA leaders, i.e. framed them as informers. FBI informants raised controversial issues, aggravated factionalism, and usurped leadership positions. As with the more familiar COINTELPRO operations conducted against black nationalist groups, agents circulated propaganda and informants attacked Klan leaders despite the fact that violent confrontations, including at least one internecine killing, ensued.

COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE thus used unethical, extralegal, and some, perhaps many illegal methods. Illegal or not, the program was very effective. One of the first Klans to succumb was the Tampa-based United Florida Ku Klux Klan, which by April 1965 was reduced to a hard core once COINTELPRO facilitated media exposés and crackdowns by local officials. Postcards and other anonymous communications facilitated internal factionalism in 1966–1967, reducing membership to a handful. By January 1967, federal prosecutions and covert action had reduced membership in the White Knights of Mississippi by two-thirds. Other operations facilitated the removal of the UKA Grand Dragon for Mississippi and the takeover of that realm by Imperial Headquarters. The Assistant Grand Dragons of Louisiana and Florida, two successive Grand Dragons in Alabama, and the Grand Dragon of Pennsylvania had also succumbed. Membership declined in each state, including the UKA home base of Alabama.

Aggressive interviews, a federal injunction, cooperation with local police, an illegal burglary, and covert action had reduced membership in Louisiana’s Original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan by 75 percent and divided the group into three factions. Covert action significantly reduced Louisiana UKA membership as well. After COINTELPRO splintered the state realm in 1967, FBI informants rose to leadership positions and directed reorganization efforts. Similar efforts neutralized Klan groups in Tennessee. Aggressive interviewing, post cards, notional communications, a poison pen letter, and informant disruption split the South Carolina realm into antagonistic splinter groups. The head of the Indiana
realm, the largest group in the North by 1972, also became an FBI informant. By 1970, an informant was even influencing the content of the Imperial Wizard’s speeches.

In Florida, the Bureau helped law enforcement, journalists, and local businessmen and officials to expose and harass members of the UKA, resulting in the dismissal of the Grand Dragon and an Imperial takeover. Subsequent media operations, notional communications, and snitch-jacket operations severely damaged the NSRP and by 1971, reduced the Florida UKA to a small number of klaverns. The Bureau used similar tactics in Virginia and North Carolina. Informants and notional communications split both realms into competing factions. By 1969, the Virginia realm was fragmented and lacking direction. As the North Carolina Grand Dragon served out his contempt of congress sentence that year, informants and notional communications further splintered the realm, facilitating a subsequent break with the Imperial office. Membership in what had been the largest UKA realm in the nation dwindled to a few hundred. Other operations disrupted relations between Shelton and other Imperial officers.

According to FBI figures, total membership in Ku Klux Klan organizations had peaked at 14,000–15,000 in 1967. As COINTELPRO came to a close in April 1971 this figure had dropped to 4300. At the annual UKA Klonvocation that year, Robert Shelton proclaimed that Klan organizers would “bring back to the fold those who have dropped out along the way because of internal chaos caused by agent-provocateurs which has taken place in all pro-American organizations who are exposing the conspiracy element in American society today.” The trend continued however, plummeting to 3200 in 1972 and 1500–1700 in 1974.

If the dream of the 1960s died in 1968, the year of political assassinations, the Tet Offensive, and the fizzling of the new left, it also marked the demise of the postwar Ku Klux Klan. As riots subsided and Southerners began to tolerate (or circumvent) more extensive school integration, the Klans were deprived of issues to exploit, even as the FBI and local police hindered acts of terrorism, and local juries convicted individual terrorists. At the same time, covert action was vitiating Klan organizations. In 1978, as the full extent of COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE became public knowledge, Robert Shelton admitted that “the FBI’s counterintelligence program hit us in membership and weakened us for about ten years.” Yet Klan organizers continued to attack rival groups as bogus organizations and their leaders as agents-provocateurs. COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE and subsequent law enforcement efforts thus had an enduring legacy, as internecine squabbles among racist activists have remained pervasive. The white power movement today is still characterized by a basic “lack of solidarity, common purpose and collective action.”
As the UKA went into steep decline during 1971, an Alabama Klansman who had been “well acquainted” with Shelton “for years” formed a splinter group called The Southerners.\textsuperscript{54} By 1972 this group had become the lay-arm of the Assembly of Christian Soldiers, Inc., a Christian Identity congregation.\textsuperscript{55} A majority of the Southern Louisiana UKA membership formed a new Klan that embraced nazism and affiliated with the Minutemen.\textsuperscript{56} The Minutemen and the NSRP also recruited alienated Klansmen.\textsuperscript{57} FBI agents viewed such splintering as a successful result of covert action, as well as an opportunity to promote further factionalism.\textsuperscript{58} While some splinter groups were controlled by FBI informants, this tactic nevertheless raises a question about unintended consequences: while COINTELPRO caused militants to leave their respective Klan organizations, disrupting organized Klan activity, some Klansmen made common cause with other alienated racists, embracing paramilitarism and genocidal anti-semitism.\textsuperscript{59}

The Minutemen had viewed the FBI as an anticommunist ally in the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{60} Targeted by federal law enforcement agencies and incarcerated on weapons charges in 1968 however, Minutemen leader Robert DePugh, began to decry a “Liberal-Communist-Socialist conspiracy that now effectively controls the federal government. . . . [that is] determined to put me in prison and destroy the Minutemen organization any way they can.”\textsuperscript{61} His case became a cause célèbre for the emerging white power movement.\textsuperscript{62} Ever since 1958, when FBI informants testified against a NSRP activist accused of bombing an Atlanta synagogue, the group had consistently attacked the Bureau as an anti-white secret police agency. Organized by former members of The Columbians Inc. in 1958, the NSRP propounded a conspiratorial, genocidal form of racial anti-semitism that had first arisen in the 1930s. In terms of the shifts that would mark white power discourse in the 1970s, however, this came to constitute a vanguard ideology. The party admitted Catholic and foreign-born members and was influenced by the teachings of Christian Identity preacher Wesley Swift, a pioneer promoter of the millenialist creed in the United States.\textsuperscript{63}

Some post-war Klan leaders had also come to view Jews as an enemy of the white race not only because of their supposed domination of subversive activity, but also because of who they were, and anti-semitism had become their all encompassing conspiracy theory.\textsuperscript{64} The White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi, the most violent Klan group of the 1960s was the first large Klan group to do so. Imperial Wizard Samuel Bowers embraced Christian Identity in 1967, after which a small cell of Identity-influenced associates bombed synagogues and residences of Jewish leaders.\textsuperscript{65} The NSRP, which undertook both cooperation and competition with various Klan groups, promoted conspiracy theories that fixated on racial anti-semitism.\textsuperscript{66}

In contradistinction, the United Klans of America (UKA) championed what it called “Christian Americanism.”\textsuperscript{67} It promoted an updated version of what
Alexander Saxton has termed “hard racist” discourse, a white supremacist vision of America as *Herrenvolk* democracy, characterized by the institutionalized subordination of racial minorities in all aspects of political, social, and economic life, justified by biological racism. Anti-Catholic nativism had underpinned the ideology of the second Ku Klux Klan during the 1920s but anticommunism and nativist anti-semitism largely supplanted it after the Great Depression. By the mid-1960s however, the UKA was de-emphasizing the latter. As massive resistance succumbed to federal legislation, committed white supremacists increasingly employed anticommunist rhetoric to defend white supremacy, and although segregationists’ attempts to present the 1964 Civil Rights Act as communist-inspired ultimately failed, countersubversive anticommunism girded UKA conspiracy theory throughout the 1960s.

Unlike the NSRP or the ANP, for which communism was inherently Jewish, anti-semitism played an ambiguous role in UKA anticommunism, forming a “biological/ideological continuum” between the racial threat of blacks and the ideological threat of communists. UKA organizers credited Jewish communists with providing the brains and the driving force behind integration, but adhered to a religious view of Jewish difference. Robert Shelton thus blamed international Jewish financiers for World War I and the Great Depression, but he asserted that if Jews converted to Christianity, they would be welcomed into the Klan. Until the late 1970s then, UKA religious rhetoric adhered to the traditional segregationist Protestant hermeneutic.

Shelton forbid UKA members to attend meetings addressed by notorious NSRP Identity-preacher Conrad Lynch. Paramilitary drill among Klansmen remained highly secretive and officially the UKA also kept its distance from the Minutemen. In general, before 1966–1968 most UKA members remained unconvinced by genocidal anti-semitism, Christian Identity eschatology, and conspiratorial, scurrilous anti-FBI rhetoric of the National States Rights Party. Southern Klansmen, many of whom were military veterans, completely rejected National Socialism as a foreign and totalitarian ideology.

American Nazi Party Commander George Lincoln Rockwell attempted to recruit Klansmen, but he rejected terrorism. He condemned illegal arms stockpiling and paramilitary organizing as adventurism, hinting that the Minutemen were actually communist spies. Under his leadership, the ANP engaged in provocative stunts and counter-demonstrations to draw media attention and thus create a constituency for a National Socialist political party. Rockwell vehemently rejected the NSRP’s attacks on the FBI. A great admirer of J. Edgar Hoover, Rockwell declared in 1962 that “ONLY the Federal Bureau of Investigation [stands] between America (and therefore the World)—and Communist total victory! . . . Heil Hoover!” The NSRP rejected Nazi ideology and, given his support for the FBI, charged that George Lincoln Rockwell was an agent provocateur. Given its anti-federalism, the NSRP was less reticent about endorsing the Minutemen.

While all these groups competed with each another, they all envisioned themselves as engaged in a vigilant struggle against an *encroaching* subversion. They
differed in their interpretations of how far subversion had succeeded, with the NSRP and the ANP expressing the type of anti-semitic rhetoric, and the NSRP expressing the type of attacks against the FBI, which would be adopted by white power organizers in the 1970s.\(^\text{79}\)

**Beyond Christian Patriotism:**
**The UKA Incorporates Anti-Federal Government Discourses**

In 1968–1971, the *Fiery Cross* newspaper characterized the Anti-Defamation League as a “Gestapo,” but it presented black nationalists, new leftists, and Jewish pornographers as separate threats to the republic.\(^\text{80}\) In 1971–1972 however, UKA rhetoric shifted markedly toward the very white power themes which it had previously rejected. As late as May 1972 Robert Shelton asserted that “I am against Jews not because they are Jews, but because they do not hold allegiance to this country.”\(^\text{81}\) In November 1971 however, the publication asserted that “Jews are the real enemy,” and by 1972 it included references to a “Zionist conspiracy.”\(^\text{82}\)

Particularly striking evidence of this shift is apparent in the January 1972 issue, where one editorial adopted Nazi rhetoric, arguing that “the only hope of saving what is yet salvageable in this culturally and racially moribund nation lies in revolution.” The world had become a “slum,” colonized by “culture distort[ing]” Jews, thus necessitating a choice between “decay and death, or drastic change.” The time had come, the author argued, for the “‘elite minority’ who read the *Fiery Cross* . . . to clear away the dead wood and debris of now defunct ‘modern age’ and make way for the new Post-Modern age, and the reassertion of the life urge.”\(^\text{83}\) By 1973, UKA editorials were supporting a suit against the estate of J. Edgar Hoover filed by anti-semitic publisher Eustace Mullins, and the paper published its first Holocaust denial pieces.\(^\text{84}\)

COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE and local police operations also provoked alienation among American Nazi Party activists, influencing concurrent and re-enforcing changes in Nazi discourse.\(^\text{85}\) Although Rockwell had toyed with religion in the late 1950s and began incorporating identity into neo-Nazi cosmology in 1965, the Nazi movement became apocalyptic only after his assassination by a disgruntled stormtrooper in 1967.\(^\text{86}\) Rockwell had viewed Jewish conquest of government as incomplete.\(^\text{87}\) As the movement split into competing factions however, many Nazi organizers abandoned Rockwell’s non-violent and pro-FBI stances.\(^\text{88}\) Joseph Tommasi borrowed ideas from militant leftist groups such as Weatherman, advocating cell structures and “leaderless resistance.”\(^\text{89}\) James Warner began warning his Nazis about FBI surveillance, while William Pierce called for armed insurrection.\(^\text{90}\) According to a 1971 article in *National Socialist Bulletin*, the bureau had become “nothing but the tool of the pro-Jewish anti-White System dominating this country.”\(^\text{91}\)
The UKA also turned against the FBI during these years. In May 1969, a *Fiery Cross* article had extensively quoted J. Edgar Hoover as authority on Communism, and praised the Bureau’s countersubversive work. In May 1970, Shelton had accused a “rotten corrupted Justice Department” of planting provocateurs in the UKA. In spring 1971 however, COINTELPO was exposed by a group of antiwar activists, who stole intelligence and counterintelligence documents from an FBI field office in Media, Pennsylvania, and published them. Over the next few months, a five part series of special reports entitled “EXPOSING! The FBI and the CIA,” appeared in the *Fiery Cross*. Arguing that “the forces of law and order in this country are arrayed on the side of the criminals,” one article asserted that the “principal functions” of the FBI and CIA were to engage in “harassment of honest citizens instead of prosecuting traitors and criminals.”

Robert Shelton now charged that the FBI had turned into an un-American “Gestapo-type police force” and warned that the Klan “would not continue to sit back and be intimidated” by the FBI’s “illegal practices.” He protested that it had become impossible to cooperate with law enforcement agencies that “categorize us on every occasion and thwart our works with the use of informants in our organization.” At the December 1971 Klonvocation, Shelton attacked the FBI directly, complaining that:

> our members have been harassed continuously, now, we no longer intend to continue to be stepped on over and over again. The FBI, Ladies and Gentlemen, is no longer the respected and honorable arm of justice that it once appeared to be, it is the pawn of the one-worlders and Mr. Nixon’s CFR [Council on Foreign Relations] connections, and we intend to fight them as long as they continue to fight us.

He warned about “implementing the ‘second degree’ after which you will know for sure that the man next to you thinks just as you do.”

The featured speaker at this Klonvocation was Imperial Kludd Robert Miles, whose Michigan UKA delegation circulated literature that characterized recent school bus bombings in Pontiac as a symbolic act against “tyranny” and called for the abolition of the FBI. According to these handbills, the Bureau had deteriorated in a politically controlled “supersnoop department” under a “corporate-state” dictatorship. The Bureau had become a “Gestapo force,” disrupting local police activity, wiretapping the phones of innocent patriots, monitoring political dissenters and utilizing repressive paramilitary law enforcement tactics on behalf of an amoral “Beast,” an “anti-Christ” elite who placed themselves above God.

Given “rumors” that Miles had become “a prime candidate for the next Imperial Wizardship of the UKA,” FBI agents expressed concern that “many northern Klansmen appeared to be more militant and dedicated than did those from the South.” Bucking the overall trend, the Michigan UKA realm had actually grown under Miles’s 1970–1971 stewardship. Indeed, Robert Miles soon
emerged as one of the most important architects of the so-called “Nazification” of the Klan during the 1970s. Between 1971 and 1979, Miles formulated the relationship between traditional Klan craft, esoteric theologies, and European racist discourses, mixing elements from Catharist Dualism and Christian Identity with Gnostic neo-paganism and National Socialism.103

Convicted of conspiracy to bomb school buses in 1974, largely on the testimony of an FBI informant, Miles’s case became a cause célèbre among white power activists.104 In 1975, the Dearborn Michigan UKA asked, rhetorically, whether activists should “do some killing? Cut off, root and branch, the satanic Jews and all their lackeys who are stirring up the niggers against us?”105 After his release in 1979, Miles sponsored a series of gatherings where Klansmen, Nazis, Christian Identity preachers, and paramilitary enthusiasts exchanged theoretical perspectives and debated tactics. Christian Identity preacher Robert Butler provided a similar forum at the Aryan Nations compound in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho.106

By this time, membership in Nazi groups had risen to its highest level since the second World War, and a new Klan, led by former Nazi David Duke, had arisen.107 Along with four other former American Nazi Party members, Duke fused Klan iconography with Nazi racialism, NSRP anti-FBI rhetoric, Minutemen paramilitarism, millennial Christian Identity, recruiting thousands to the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.108 By 1978–1979, they would recruit thousands of young whites into their Nazi–Klan hybrid organization.109 By 1980, hybrid Nazi–Klan associations began to exceed membership in traditional Klan groups.110

In the Midwest and the West, identity-influenced paramilitary groups such as the Posse Comitatus also sprang up during the late 1970s.111 The Christian Patriot Defense League (PDL) founded in 1977, mixed Identity, survivalism, and tax protest, updating Minutemen discourse for the 1970s. Bi-annual CPDL vents in Louisville, Illinois, attracted Miles, Beam, and Holocaust “revisionist” Willis Carto, as well as Klan leaders espousing Identity.112 UKA leaders also flirted with paramilitarism.113 Paramilitary Klan units had been small and secret during the 1960s, but the 1970s Klans publicized their existence.114 In 1980, former David Duke associate Bill Wilkinson resurrected traditional Klan ideology, creating a militant Klan that publicized paramilitary training, and engaged in violent provocations against civil rights activists.115 Exposed as an FBI informant in 1979 however, Wilkinson also bought discredit to the idea that Klan vigilantism in support of law enforcement retained any viability.116

Younger Klansmen, many of them Vietnam veterans bitter over an alleged betrayal by the federal government, founded the most active Klan paramilitaries.117 In response to the Wilmington, North Carolina, riots of 1971 for example, former U.S. Army Special Forces member and Klan splinter-group leader Leroy Gibson offered paramilitary training courses. By 1971, his group had eclipsed the North Carolina UKA, even as other breakaway UKA members began fraternizing with Nazis. Ten years later, another North Carolina green beret named Glenn Miller would create the largest Nazi–Klan paramilitary of the period.118
Louis Beam, a special forces helicopter gunner who became alienated by what he viewed as government betrayal in Vietnam, exemplified all these trends. After joining the Texas realm of the United Klans in 1968, he launched terrorist operations against antiwar activists and leftists in the Houston area. In 1977, he joined David Duke’s Klan and organized paramilitary training for about 500 Texas Klansmen. He became an “ambassador at large” for the Aryan Nations in 1981. Two years later, Beam called for armed insurrection against a “Zionist Occupation Government” in a revolutionary manifesto called “Essays of a Klansman,” which became an influential white power movement text. He attributed the demise of the 1960s Klans to a conspiracy whereby an Anti-Defamation League slush fund paid FBI agents provocateurs to murder civil rights workers, bomb churches, and provide false testimony in court.

It was former Rockwell aide William Pierce however, who most effectively re-formulated racist discourse after 1970. Pierce had edited National Socialist World during the critical 1966–1967 transition period when the American Nazi Party embraced a white power line. After appearing in the Fiery Cross in 1972, Pierce editorialized for David Duke’s newspaper in 1976. In 1978, Pierce wrote The Turner Diaries, a futuristic novel that dramatized insurrectionary activities against “race-mixers,” homosexuals, the Pentagon, and the FBI. Synthesizing Social-Darwinism with ideas from Teutonic legend, Pierce intoned that separate biological evolutions had a spiritual component, that mankind is following a predetermined course of racial destiny toward union with God. His philosophy of “Cosmological Theism” asserted that members of the white race posses a “divine spark” that if acted upon, could “trigger” catastrophic events leading to a perfect age of racial redemption, and Pierce exhorted racists to launch genocide against “subhumans.” Messianic sanctions for anti-government terrorism became increasingly influential as the slowly evolving legitimacy crisis between insurgent white power and neoconservative government came to a head.

The government responded with conspiracy prosecutions, because white power activists had supplemented hitherto more formal organizations with loose, hybrid associations and informal alliances. As early as 1969, FBI agents had noted “recent marked increase in violent acts throughout US on the part of individuals not affiliated with Klan or other white hate-type organizations.” Many of them “did have previous affiliations with such groups.” In the 1970s, processes associated with globalization began to undermine national sovereignty and territorial-based notions of national culture. In the 1980s, revolutions in informational technology opened cyberspace to racist organizers. Formal organizational allegiance became highly unstable during a period of continual group formation and collapse. Racist activists rejected hierarchical chains of command in favor of a secretive cell structure and the “propaganda of the deed.”

In 1987, an anti-racist watchdog group destroyed the last remnants of the United Klans of America with a civil suit, by convincing a jury that the organization was liable for the actions of two Klan members who had murdered a black youth. A former Exalted Cyclops turned state’s evidence, testifying that
his superior had admonished him for lack of militancy and testified that the UKA employed a military chain of command. As additional Southern Poverty Law Center civil suits based on the concept of “vicarious liability” shut down or curtailed activity by some of the most active white power groups in the United States, racist organizers called upon individuals to commit random acts of terror. Racist organizing became even more ephemeral, as a racist “counterculture” embedded in a trans-Atlantic “cultic milieu,” engaged in “sustained interaction.”

Over the previous quarter century then, racist organizers brought about ideological, strategic, and tactical transformations, such that a reactionary ideology of white supremacist vigilantism metamorphosed into a revolutionary ideology of millennial white power and anti-state terror. Klansmen had become “enraged and frustrated” by “their own failure to reform the system.” They had joined other racists to construct an “alternative ideological and cultural system” that “communicate[d] a complete chasm with the prevailing political order,” by employing “slanderous jargon” against the federal agents that had suppressed organized Klan activity.

This shift however, was not simply political, having occurred during a period of substantial change in American society and culture. Declining faith in government programs and profound disillusionment with public institutions was accompanied not only by decline in social solidarity and increasing skepticism toward civic obligation, but also by an increasing hostility to traditional values. A new ethic of personal liberation provided freedom for individuals to reinvent themselves and create new associations and affiliations, breaking off from conventional society, family, neighborhood, and community. Neo-conservative critiques thus linked government “over regulation” to “family values,” employing religious rhetoric to characterize feminism, divorce, abortion, and homosexuality, as threats to white paternal and heterosexual authority.

The shift to white power discourses was indicative of this general trend but opposed to neo-conservative prescriptions. Thus, racist organizers participated in tax revolt by responding to rural economic crisis with the radical Posse Comitatus. One group of Nazis and Klansmen even attempted to supplement President Ronald Reagan’s aggressive anticommmunist foreign policy with a private filibustering expedition against the island of Dominica. Embrace of pre-millennial identity hermeneutics and racial gnosticism occurred during an evangelical reawakening characterized by fundamentalist readings of scripture, post-millennial predictions of imminent apocalypse, and testimonials to born-again awakenings. Building survivalist compounds and flirting with occult knowledge corresponded to new age communes and delving into non-Western spiritual traditions. Articulation of a pan-white unity that departed from both the Klan’s Protestant nativism and Adolph Hitler’s Nordic-Germanic Aryanism, opposed a growing ethnic consciousness among European Americans.

Racist paramilitarism too, constituted one small section of a broad paramilitary culture that arose after 1975 in response to a disruption in white masculine identity that occurred with defeat in Vietnam, de-industrialization, and a relative
decline in relative international economic power. The paramilitary subculture ascribed social and political gains by racial minorities and women, massive non-white immigration, and rising crime rates to a liberal cultural ethos that had allowed the nation to succumb to political tyranny and cultural decay. Enthusiasts explicitly opposed adoption of female traits by a new masculinity, celebrating violence as a form of liberation from psychological restraints.

The racist-right’s embrace of esoteric conspiracy theories blaming a “Zionist Occupation Government” for the nation’s ills also constituted a particular version of a more general transformation, as conspiracy theories entered into mainstream political and cultural discourse in the 1970s. Centering on beliefs that whole populations were being openly manipulated without their knowledge, conspiracy theories of the period betrayed nervousness about the “viability of individual autonomy” in a post-industrial economy characterized by the growth of mass-based consumer culture. These theories portrayed large social and economic organizations, bureaucracies, information processing systems, communications networks, discourses, and social institutions as autonomous, rational, and motivated entities, which possessed a will and a means to subordinate human agency. They characterized social control as an instantaneous phenomenon of mass communications, which disabled rational self-control and converted people into automatons.

Reflecting this general trend, white power activists used esoteric millennial rhetoric to warn that a “Jewsmedia” was creating a nation of slaves who accepted feminism, homosexuality, and racial miscegenation in return for material comfort. Racist conspiracy theories had long fixated upon the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, a watchdog group that had long exposed anti-semitic groups in the public sphere. The release of COINTELPRO files in 1977, which proved that FBI agents had exchanged information on Klan groups with the ADL and helped the Jewish War Veterans harass the American Nazi Party, reinforced these ideas. As congress, President Jimmy Carter, and the courts curtailed FBI and urban red squad activities in the late 1970s, allegations arose that intelligence files had been transferred to the ADL, so that it could act as an extra-legal clearinghouse for political intelligence. Under J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI had been particularly reluctant to enter into any formal intelligence-exchange relationship with the group. Given increasing privatization of security during the 1980s, however, allegations that zionist operatives were acting as agents provocateurs gained increasing interest, especially once President Reagan authorized the FBI to enter into “contracts or arrangements for the provision of goods or services with private companies or institutions” such as the ADL.

Even if the FBI had restricted itself to uncovering the perpetrators of terrorist acts in the 1960s, militant Klansmen would still have come to view the Bureau as a tool of subversive forces. Since covert operations enabled selective use of the criminal law, utilized extra-legal covert action techniques, and harassed individual organizers however, polemics that focused on FBI counterintelligence operations drew attention from those Americans already prone to embrace anti-federal-
ist conspiracy theories.\textsuperscript{152} This development occurred within larger processes of political, social, and cultural restructuring during the most recent wave of globalization. Yet this particular trajectory, from a localized white supremacist vigilantism inspired by white supremacist nationalism, to a transnational cultic milieu of revolutionary terrorists inspired by white power millennialism, was in no small part due to an FBI covert action program that had vitiated the Ku Klux Klan.

Notes


13. All FBI documents cited in this article are contained in this file unless otherwise indicated. The complete file as released by the FBI in 1977 is available on microfilm: Athan Theoharis, ed., COINTELPRO: The Counterintelligence Program of the FBI (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1978). “Director” denotes FBI director J. Edgar Hoover and the Bureau’s executive council. White supremacist archives include the Wilcox Collection of Contemporary Political Movements, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries; the Right Wing Collection, University of Iowa Libraries; the Special Collection, Duke University; the North Carolina State Archives; the Southern and North Carolina History Collections, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; the Sara Diamond Collection, Social Protest Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; and the Right Wing Political Collection, University of Georgia.


16. All author publications and working papers cited in this article are posted at http://www.geocities.com/Drabbs/workingpapers.


20. Gale to Tolson, July 30, 1964, Baumgardner to Sullivan August 27, 1964, Director to Atlanta et. al., September 2, 1964 (all in Section 1).


22. Director, to Atlanta et. al., September 2, 1964, (Section 1).


26. Wyn Craig Wade, The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 323; Baumgardner to Sullivan July 22, 1966 (Section 1); Birmingham to Director, September 20, 1966, (Section 1); Miami to Director March 10, 1970.


34. Quoted in Mikell, They Say Blood, 54. See also 152-155; Fiery Cross (circa 1965), in E. Pam. q #1180. Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University.

35. Ibid. He lauded FBI investigations of communist infiltration of the “so-called civil rights disorders and violence that are plaguing America.” “L.A. Men Silent at Klan Probe,” New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 8, 1966, 1.


38. Ibid. See also Mikell, They Say Blood, 3-4, 73, 94-104, 104-105.


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45. UKA membership was 10,000 in 1967. By November 1969 this had been reduced to 5,400.

46. “FBI in Alabama.”

47. Drabble, “FBI in Alabama.”


54. Birmingham to Director, April 27, 1971.


56. Drabble, “FBI in Louisiana.”


58. Miami to Director November 7, 1967; Director to Miami November 17, 1967.


61. Jones, A Private Army, 238-239.


73. See Daily, “Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown.”

74. Shelton’s order came sometime after August 1963. UKA leaders also forbid associating with the ANP and the Minutemen, and excommunicated some Klansmen who established them. Nevertheless, young leaders of some small UKA units outside the Deep South joined these groups. Los Angeles to Director, August 31, 1966, September 29, 1966; Richmond to Director, September 29, 1966; Los Angeles to Director, October 20, 1966; Baltimore to Director, February 10, 1967; Philadelphia to Director, December 27, 1965, June 9, 1966, September 19, 1966, November 22, 1966; Director to Philadelphia, September 28, 1966; Albares, “Native Paramilitarism,” 34, 66-67;


79. Compare the newspapers and pamphlets of the NSWPP, the National Socialist Liberation Front, The National (Youth) Alliance, The National Socialist Movement, the National Socialist Party of America, the White Nationalist Party, and James Buford’s ANP with those of Rockwell’s ANP in RHCUIL and RHWL. See also, “FBI Uses Jewish Blood Money in Mississippi Murder,” White Power 12 (March 1970), RHWL, C1873.
82. Wesley Swift had trained Butler. Robert Miles, RWCUIL, 138: U11.
83. The term “satanic,” common in Identity rhetoric, had not previously been used by the Library, Special Collections.
84. Pub., 1983, 10-14, available in the Freedom Center Collection, University of California, Fullerton.
87. FBI Report, December 6, 1971, in ibid.
95. Wesley Swift had trained Butler. Robert Miles, KKK Ephemerata, RHWL, 2191.9; Rich, “Ku Klux Klan Ideology,” 300-326; Brent L. Smith, Terrorism in America: Pipe Bombs and Pipe Dreams (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 55, 90; Thomas Martinez, Brother-


111. Some grew out of the Minutemen and Depression-era anti-Semitic organizations such as the Silver Shirts. Daniel Levitas, The Terrorist Next Door: The Militia Movement and the Radical Right (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002). Minuteman adherent Walter Peyson was a member of Swift’s identity church, and DePugh associated with identity-paramilitary activists Kenneth Goff and John Harrell, who kept the survivalist movement alive while DePugh was incarcerated. Aho, Swift’s identity church, and DePugh associated with identity-paramilitary activists Kenneth Goff in Contemporary America,” MA Thesis, University of Kansas, 1990, 68-69.


116. George and Wilcox, Nazis, Communists, 404-405; “Bill Wilkinson Collaborated With the FBI for Seven Years!” Thunderbolt, 270, October 1981, 6, RHWL, G1380; Editor, “What Are You Waiting For.”


118. Drabble, “FBI in North Carolina.”


123. Launched in 1966, National Socialist World targeted the intellectual wing of the Nazi movement, eventually reaching a circulation of 1,000. Schmaltz, Hate, 283.


126. Drawing on Gnostic and Neo-Platonist themes, Pierce created a “chiliastic dream with millennial sub currents.” Witsel, “Cosmological Theism.”


137. Schulman, Seventies, xx-xvi (quote), 79, Chapters 6 and 9.


139. Schulman, Seventies, Chapter 8; Rich, KKK Ideology, 353-355; Wade, Fiery Cross; 372-373, 390, 398; Newton, ed., Ku Klux Klan Encyclopedia, 53; Gardell, Gods of the Blood, 360n32; James Moore, Very Special Agents: The Inside Story of America’s Most Controversial Law Enforce-

140. Schulman, Seventies, 92-96.


144. Schulman, Seventies, 176-185, Chapter 7; Abby L. Ferber, ed., Home Grown Hate: Gender and Organized Racism (New York: Routledge, 2004); Melley, Empire of Conspiracy, 14, 155, 202.


147. Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, White Power, 5-6 (quote); Jessie Daniels, White Lies: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse (London: Routledge, 1997).


150. Wilcox, Watchdogs, 35.


152. On racist-right recruits, see Aho, Politics of Righteousness, 160-163, 185, 190-193, 209-211.