

Counterculture analysis: the klu klux klan



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The Ku Klux Klan: A Counterculture Within the American Society

Picture a perfect, white world filled with Christian beings. No one defied their beliefs, no one looked any different than they did. This was the common aspiration of all members of the infamous group The Ku Klux Klan, otherwise referred to as the KKK. Formed in 1865, in Pulaski Tennessee, the Ku Klux Klan was established as a means of upholding white supremacy in a great time of change incorporating non-Caucasian citizens (Newton 7).

The Ku Klux Klan can be referred to as an example of a counterculture in their time, which also happens to still be relevant to this day. A counterculture can be defined as a group that rejects the values, norms, and practices of the larger society and replaces them with a new set of cultural patterns tailored to their beliefs(Thomas 37). In 1866, non-Caucasian citizens were beginning to enter the light of the media's focus. African Americans were beginning to exit the slavery statistic and flourish in the center of social society. Certain individuals such as some of the confederate army generals, refused to accept the incorporation of African Americans into their perfectly supreme, white society (Southern Poverty Law Center). With this idea in mind, they decided to initiate a group to not only belittle those African Americans, but push them out of the picture by inflicting danger and violence. As explained by definition, members of the KKK were completely against the acceptance of different races and revolted against the laws being accepted by the larger society. They upheld their own standards such as only admitting white, Christian members.

In 1865, The KKK quickly grew from a secretive social group to a strong force which strictly enforces reversal of the federal government's progressive Reconstruction Era-activities in the South, specifically targeting policies that elevated the rights of the uproaring African American population (History). Pulaski, Tennessee proved to be the ideal location of initiation of this group. This may have been for the overwhelming "southern attitude" toward minorities at the time. This group established violence as their attempt to pushing back Reconstruction and its incorporation of African Americans (History). Every forceful group must have strong leaders behind it, and in this case these leaders were intimidating, and inflicted violence in every case they saw fit in order to achieve their large goal of reinstating white supremacy. Army General, N. B. Forrest is a leader that first comes to mind when looking into the history of the KKK. He was named the first Grand Wizard of the organization (Newton 69). Other relevant men when speaking of the Ku Klux Klan would be the six founders: Frank McCord, John Lester, Calvin Jones, Richard Reed, James Crowe and John B. Kennedy (Newton 92-95). The ideology of the group was basically to prevent African American incorporation and keep a sense of white ruling throughout the nation despite the federal laws being put in place. In order to achieve this, members of the KKK burned crosses, and even bombed predominantly black churches and schools (History).

Perhaps what the members of this notorious society did, is not as bad as it seems from first glance. Using a sociological perspective to observe their actions can could help uncover a hidden intention behind their actions. A sociological perspective is a viewing of the behavior of groups in a

systematic way (Thomas 4). Viewing groups such as the KKK with a sociological perspective can help identify their contribution to society. Members of the Ku Klux Klan are indeed social beings. They interact with the same beings of society that everyone else does; this selective interaction could have potentially lead to their decision to inflict a strong need for white supremacy. A decline in societal improvement with the induction of non-Caucasian citizens could have struck the fight for a stop to integration ideas. Behavioral factors such as the behaviors of slaves, and the way that slaves were brought up, without education and grace, could have been a strong reason that the members of the KKK felt the African Americans were not qualified enough to lie on an even playing field with the whites that had ruled for years before. Using this perspective can broaden the view of the world, by seeing it from a member standpoint as well as a part of the larger, predominant society. This influential perspective also helps create a sociological imagination. A sociological imagination is the ability to connect the larger world with one's utmost personal life (Thomas 5). Klan members thought incorporation of African Americans into society would ruin opportunities for them in the future. Jobs, educational systems, home life, future generations of children, just to name a few were on the line if integration were to occur. The exclusion of these members from society would benefit all white citizens, not just those that looked to actually make the aspiration a reality.

The Ku Klux Klan actively exercised ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism the belief that one's culture or group is superior to all other cultures and groups (Thomas 35). The larger society, the Americans accepting of the African

American incorporation saw the KKK as a counterculture based off of this definition. Due to the Klan believing they were superior to all others cultures, especially the predominant practices, the rest of the nation saw the Ku Klux Klan as a counterculture because they clearly defied the expectation of following the Reconstruction-Era activities which was the norm at the time. In their eyes, because they rejected the norm, as any other counterculture would by definition, they were frowned upon in the eyes of the media, the government, and the people (Thomas 37). Actually, it was quite common to display a negative reaction toward the actions and mannerisms of the Klan by the American people. Specifically, the KKK refused to accept black leaders in the government, black citizens in jobs, and black citizens on any sort of even playing field. Instead, they attacked the African Americans, verbally and physically to intimidate them and chase them away from becoming more involved in society. In numerous cases they destroyed the African Americans' sanctuaries and locations of education to get their point across (Southern Poverty Law Center). Private invasions often occurred. This was the case for so many innocent black citizens such as J. C. Dunlap, Evergreen Flowers, Isaac Gaston, and Benton Ford. Ford, specifically, was enjoying a peaceful night with his girlfriend when Klan members in March of 1939 right outside of Atlanta, Georgia dropped in with an unexpected plan for the evening (Newton 267). Many victims of the KKK held similar stories in which their lives drastically changed forever.

When being thought of as ethnocentric in the eyes of the larger society, one must find a way to defend itself to the predominant culture in order to justify their means of behavior. In order to do so in this scenario, the Ku Klux Klan

employed cultural relativism in order to defend their actions. Cultural relativism is the belief that each society should be judged by their own standards rather than the standards of another culture (Thomas 36). To the members of the Klan, their actions were not to come across as superior to all other cultures at the time. Instead, they looked at their behavior as a tailored standard they believed justified their values. Members did not look to be judged by the rest of the American society using their terms and values as examples; they simply acted out in their own manner and hoped it would be looked upon as an individual value in a subculture completely isolated from the values of the American citizens who support Non-Caucasian integration. Klan members often aspired for the rest of the American society to see the world from their point of view, whether they agreed or not, merely observing in a different mindset would justify their actions and beliefs all on its own (Thomas 36).

Growing up hearing nothing but negative comments in regards to the Ku Klux Klan, I was forced to think they were an awful society of merely racist people. After further researching them and looking at their level of ethnocentrism, or pride, using a sociological perspective looking for a deeper meaning, the KKK can be thought of as a counterculture, whom of course rejects the norms of the larger society, but does so because they are afraid of change. Change can be stable for some, but leave so many unstable; Those members of this secret society could not handle the inevitable change that was among them, so they turned to violence and danger to put a stop to it. Personally, my opinion does not align with those in support of the KKK, but I simply cannot only comment negatively in regards to their actions because

their deeper meaning meant so much more for the white society many years ago, as well as today.

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