

A Ku Klux Klan threat, 1868

Introduction

Reconstruction politics was a catalyst for widespread racism and hatred that freed people experienced throughout the South. The Ku Klux Klan, founded by a Confederate general in 1866, became known as the “invisible empire of the South” in which members represented the ghosts of the Confederate dead returning to terrorize African Americans and Republicans. Although it was a covert organization, the Klan’s displays of violence and intolerance were anything but discreet. Many murders and beatings were never reported due to fear of reprisal from the Klan. This document is an example of the type of threats for which the KKK became known. In this case, the target was Davie Jeems, a black Republican recently elected sheriff in Lincoln County, Georgia. The language of the document evokes a ghostly menacing presence; even the handwriting is reminiscent of a ransom note. The word “notice” and the two holes at the top indicate that it was most likely posted in a public place. Someone has written on the back of the sheet that “similar threats have prevented all the other Republican officers to take their [commissions].” With the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1871, the already weakened Klan became dormant, but it resurfaced again in 1915.

Excerpt

Notice

To Jeems, Davie. you. must. be, a good boy. and. Quit. hunting on Sunday and shooting your gun in the night. you keep people from sleeping. I live in a big rock above the Ford of the Creek. I went from Lincoln County County [*sic*] during the War I was Killed at Manassus in 1861. I am here now as a Locust in the day Time and. at night I am a Ku Klux sent here to look after you and all the rest of the radicals and make you know your place. I have got my eye on you every day, I am at the Ford of the creek every evening From Sundown till dark I want to meet you there next Saturday tell platt Madison we have, a Box. For him and you. We nail all, radicals up in Boxes and send them away to KKK - there is. 200 000 ded men retured to this country to make you and all the rest of the radicals good Democrats and vote right with the white people

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Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction and transcript and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer these questions.

1. Why was this notice addressed to Davie Jeems? Explain why the notice was apparently posted publicly.
2. How did the author(s) of the note use fear of the supernatural to frighten the reader?
3. To what extent does this note show the frustration and anger of some white Southerners to the policies of the Radical Republicans?

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Image

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To Jeems, Davie, you must be a good boy and quit hunting on Sunday and shooting your gun in the night, you keep people from sleeping. I live in a big rock above the Ford of the Creek. I went from Lincoln County & County during the war I was killed at Manassus in 1861. I am here now as a Locust in the day time and at night I am a Ku Klux sent here to look after you and all the rest of the radicals and make you know your place. I have got my eye on you every day, I am at the Ford of the Creek every evening from sundown till dark. I want to meet you there next Saturday tell Platt Madison we have a Box for him and you. We nail all radicals up in Boxes and send them away to K K K there is 200 000 dead men returned to this country to make you and all the rest of the radicals good Democrats and vote right with the white people you have got it to do or leave this country no nigger is safe unless he joins the Democratic Club then you will be safe and have friends. Take heed and govern yourself accordingly and give all your friends timely warning.

Ku, Ku, Klux, Klan

Ku Klux Klan to Davie Jeems, ca. 1868, page 1 (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09090)

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This man was elected
 in April to the Sheriff's
 office of the County of Lincoln
 Similar threats have prevented
 all the other Republican
 officers from taking their
 oaths

Ku Klux Klan to Davie Jeems, ca. 1868, page 2 (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09090)

A Ku Klux Klan threat, 1868

Transcript

Ku Klux Klan to Davie Jeems, ca. 1868 (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09090)

Notice

To Jeems, Davie. you. must. be, a good boy. and. Quit. hunting on Sunday and shooting your gun in the night. you keep people from sleeping. I live in a big rock above the Ford of the f Creek. I went from Lincoln County [*struck: C*] County during the War I was Killed at Manassus in 1861. I am here now as a Locust in the day Time and. at night I am a Ku Klux sent here to look after you and all the rest of the radicals and make you know your place. I have got my eye on you every day, I am at the Ford of the creek every evening From Sundown till dark I want to meet you there next Saturday tell platt Madison we have, a Box. For him and you. We nail all, radicals up in Boxes and send them away to KKK - there is. 200 000 ded men retured to this country to make you and all the rest of the radicals good Democrats and vote right with the white people you have got it to do or leave this country no nigger is safe unless he Joins the Democratic Club then you will be safe and have friends. Take heed and govern yourself accordingly and give all your Friends timely warning.

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[2] This man was elected in April to the Sheriffs Office of the County of Lincoln. Similar threats have prevented all the other Republican officers from taking their com