

TO KU KLUX KLAN, YEAR WAS TRYING

Groups Often Divided, Lose
Members and Finances

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VICTORIA, Va., Sept. 6— There wasn't a sound except for the rustle of robes and the thin crackle of country music from a sound truck.

The marchers, sunlight shining off their white satin gowns, moved along the main street of town in a sharp column, wearing hoods pulled back to expose their faces.

The men and women, about 60 in all, smiled shyly at each other or looked straight ahead, faces frozen and tight-lipped.

The sidewalks of Victoria, a small town near the North Carolina border, were empty except for a few Saturday afternoon shoppers and a small knot of elderly Negroes who stood on a corner with hands in pockets and watched. Up the street, a white girl about 18 nudged her boyfriend as the marchers shuffled by, and she snickered: "There goes the high school cheerleading squad."

This was just one of the humiliations the Ku Klux Klan has suffered recently. It has been a trying year for the Klan. Fragmented, beset by bickering and without direction, the brotherhood faces financial woes on the one side and dwindling membership on the other.

Humiliation filled the day here for the marchers and leaders of the United Klans of America, Virginia Division.

Parade Without Onlookers

First there was the parade that attracted no spectators and intimidated no one. Then it began to rain lightly, and the rally at a cow pasture on the outskirts of town this evening did not get under way until 8 o'clock.

When the rally did begin, just 300 persons turned out to hear the Klan speeches, listen to the racial jokes and observe the ritualistic cross-burning.

When it was all over, and the robes were folded away for another year, it appeared that the Virginia Klan, which claims the third largest membership in the nation, appeared in as much trouble as its hooded brethren in other states.

The imprisonment of Sam H. Bowers, imperial wizard of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, and infiltration of his organization by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation have all but subdued the Klan in Mississippi, where it is regarded as the most militant.

The imprisonment of Robert M. Shelton, imperial wizard of the United Klans of America, and two of his top aides in North and South Carolina for their refusal to turn over Klan records to the old House un-American Activities Committee, has left a leadership vacuum in the largest of the 14 independent Klan groupings.

"The Klan is going through a bad time," observed a worker for the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, which has watched the Klan over the years.

The B'nai B'rith worker said: "In the past, the Klan was the vanguard of racism, but now there's so many groups around spouting racism, and we have just had a national candidate running on this type of platform. People don't need to join the Klan any more to get together and talk hate. They can find more social acceptance right in communities with groups out in the open fighting desegregation."

Testimony in 1966

The House Committee on Un-American Activities heard testimony that 17,000 Americans were active members of the Klans in 1966. That number, at least of active membership, has since declined, the authorities report, but no reliable estimates of current numbers are available.

Klan terrorism also has receded, and the trend can almost be wholly attributed to new Federal laws that allow Federal prosecution of most racially motivated crimes. Some states, however, have managed to mobilize local law enforcement against Klan excesses.

Before he went off to jail to start serving his one-year sentence for contempt, Mr. Shelton had started a program inside the United Klans to revamp their public image. He talked then about new recruiting methods and moving away from rurals oriented activities.

At about the time that Mr. Shelton entered jail, his rejuvenation program was contributing to the election of a new grand dragon in Virginia. Robert S. Hudgins, a round-faced man in his mid-30's from Richmond.

Mr. Hudgins initiated rules to eliminate "profanity on the rally platform."

He said: "I do not allow any drinking — this is a Christian organization."

He said that he would attempt to create a new image for the Klan by attracting "quality" members. "The days of taking in anyone who had the initiation fee are over," he announced.

Before the weekend, Mr. Hudgins predicted 2,500 persons would attend the rally. When only 300 turned up, Mr. Hudgins put on a brave face and climbed on a flatbed trailer and tried to encourage the rank and file with calls to greater efforts.