

A WAVE OF TERROR THREATENS THE SOUTH

Fighting the Supreme Court ban on segregation, Citizens Councils could become a new Klan.

By **HODDING CARTER**, Pulitzer Prize-winning editor of the Greenville, Miss., *Delta Democrat-Times*

At first, the cloud was no bigger than a man's hand . . . or a sheet of duplicating paper. . . .

Last July, two months after the Supreme Court's decision against segregation in the public schools, six citizens of Sunflower County, Mississippi, met in Indianola, the county seat, for a purpose which was soon to be applauded by many fearful Southerners and looked upon with misgivings by many others just as fearful. Which category is the more numerous is still anybody's guess.

The six were not men who were suspect in their own communities, or elsewhere in the state. On the contrary, one of them was an attorney and former sheriff, Arthur B. Clark, Jr. Another was a banker, Herman Moore. A third, who was to become the most important to the group's purpose, was Robert B. Patterson, a 32-year-old planter, a redheaded former para-trooper who had been captain of Mississippi State's football team.

The six men were dedicated to a purpose which has been supported for generations by most white Southerners. The South's public schools in general, and Mississippi's in particular, must remain racially separated, they told each other, despite the Supreme Court ruling.

So far, they have agreed that violence must be ruled out. They looked upon themselves as nonviolent men, seeking to forestall hotheads. Instead, they would organize to bring economic pressures upon the Negro; he would be discouraged from political activity in a state where less than ten per cent of all Negroes over 21 have tried to vote. And any white citizens who opposed the program would be subject to political and social pressures.

No name was decided upon for the organization which all agreed would be necessary. That came later.

On the heels of the meeting, thousands of citizens of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta—in which Sunflower County lies and whose 18 counties have a three-to-one ratio of Negroes to whites—began receiving form letters, signed mostly by young Robert B. Patterson. Some among them were asked to attend quasi-secret meetings in Indianola.

By mid-October, the Citizens Councils were organized, with a claimed 25,000 members in some 24 of Mississippi's 82 counties, at a \$5 membership fee each. Before Christmas, permanent headquarters had been set up at nearby Winona, with Robert Patterson as

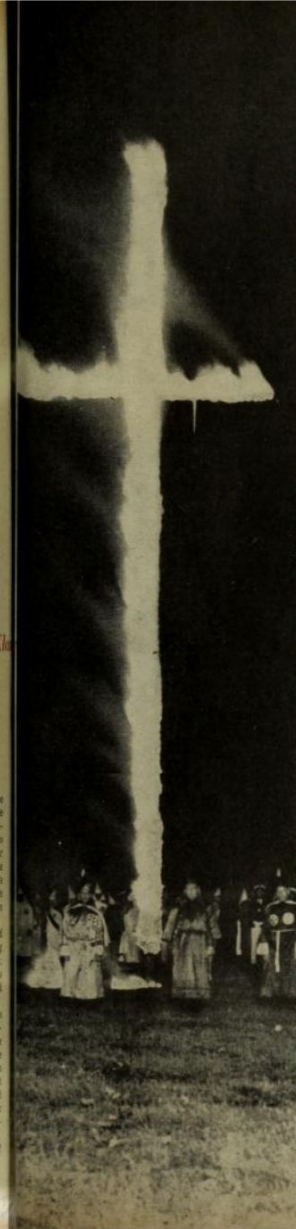
full-time executive secretary. By then, the Citizens Councils had played a leading role in the passage of two constitutional amendments: one intended to hold down the Negro vote through more difficult qualifications for voting, and the other empowering the state legislature, in extremity, to abolish the state's public school systems "as a last resort"—which is to say, if integration ever appeared likely in Mississippi.

And by mid-January, the Councils had spilled over into the Black Belts of adjoining Alabama and, to a lesser extent, into Georgia; organizers were busy in Tennessee, Arkansas and Louisiana, as yet with small success, and in South Carolina and northern Florida.

Perhaps it is a coincidence, but no Negro has yet sought to enter public schools in Mississippi. In fact, in Sunflower County, the Councils' birthplace, no Negro voted in the constitutional-amendment election to tighten the voting qualifications—and the amendment was aimed at disenfranchising the Negro. And the Councils have discovered that economic pressure can be a potent weapon against recalcitrant Negroes.

This, in the barest outline, is the story of

Flaming Crosses like this once cast their eerie flickers on hooded meetings of old-time Klansmen.



what has happened since six men met in Indianola. But an outline does not suffice as a key to the questions that are uppermost in the minds of many Mississippians, white and Negro, and—this is no secret—in the minds of Federal Bureau of Investigation agents, concerned with possible violations of civil liberties.

Those questions are: Are the Councils an incipient Ku Klux Klan? If not, can and will they come in time to resemble the latter-day Klan of hideous memory?

I think I can answer these questions, at least partially. I hope I can answer fairly, even though my newspaper and I myself have almost from the beginning been a primary target of the Councils' letter and platform barrages. Before I do, I want to emphasize three facts:

The first is that little disagreement exists among white Southerners in the one-sidedly or heavily Negro-populated areas of the deep South as to the desirability for continued separate schools. That gives the Councils an advantage at the start.

The second is that, by and large, the men who thus far have led the Councils' movement have standing in their communities. They are, primarily, men with an obsession—namely, that integration of the public schools means blood integration as well—and this obsession is shared by many who abhor the Councils. It may be remembered, unhappily, that at the outset of the Klan's revival in the '20's, men also gave way to their obsessions, whether about Negro, Catholic or Jew or all three.

Councils Silence Opposition

The third fact is that in the first six months of the Councils' existence, they have won each fight they've entered, or objective they've sought, without physical violence. Most of the vocal Negro opposition to continued segregation in Mississippi has been silenced. The two amendments designed to keep the Negro in his traditional place have been one-sidedly approved. Not a single office seeker in a state which will hold statewide elections this summer has publicly criticized the Councils, even though some have privately wrung their hands over their actions. And the offensive by duplicating machine has—as I know—isolated the relatively few white citizens who have spoken out against the Councils.

Against such a background of easy, unopposed success and locally impeccable leadership, it could be predicted that the Councils will not turn into the lash-wielding, night-riding, sheeted mobs which once—and in some places not long ago—terrorized Southern communities even before the Supreme Court's edict. I find it hard to believe that my friends—or, perhaps my onetime friends—in nearby Arcola and Leland and Hollandale and Cleveland (mayors and schoolteachers and lawyers and planters and businessmen) are going to try to ride me out on a rail just because I disagree violently with them in respect to the Councils. I cannot imagine their turning hoodlum or worse.

But I can imagine hoodlums taking over if today's leaders give way to boredom or anger or despair. These Citizens Councils, which so far have spread unchecked across Mississippi and elsewhere in the South, can become instruments of interracial violence. The ingredients are there. The incentive and the incendiary spark are lacking—so far. If and when these should appear, I say, soberly and in warning,



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that the men in white robes will seize control.

Let's have a closer look at what the men of the Citizens Councils have been saying and doing. I have kept most of their missives and have recorded most of their activities, at least those which I could discover. The sum total is not encouraging:

1) On August 24, even before the Councils had been formally organized, Robert Patterson mailed an incredible letter to potential members. In it, he listed by name and address almost every major hate group and publication in the United States—some 30 in all—and recommended that the members-to-be subscribe to the listed publications, even though, as he pointed out, they might be anti-Semitic; they were—almost entirely, as a checkup proved. A few were merely isolationist. Some were also anti-Catholic. Most were anti-Negro. In the aggregate, they represented as indecent and provocative a collection of bigoted publications as was ever compiled. We called Patterson's hand on this shameful bibliography. Subsequently, he pleaded innocent of anti-Semitism and pointed out that some of his best Council members were Jews, which was the puzzling truth.

2) At one of the earliest formative meetings of the Councils-to-be, one speaker said pessimistically that he doubted that a Council could be organized in my home town, Greenville, because of "those rich Jews and that damn newspaper." As of now, he is still right about the inability to form a Council, though I say with community pride that the reasons are broader than those he gave.

3) At a subsequent organization meeting, a speaker was interrupted by a town marshal who rose, brandished his .45 and roared to the audience that his weapon was the only language that the Negroes would understand or that could keep them in their places.

4) Late last summer, the directors of Greenville's baseball team, a member of the Cotton States League, leased the ball park to a Memphis promoter. The directors knew that he had scheduled a baseball game between a Negro all-star team and a team made up of assorted white players from an assortment of Southern leagues. These teams had played elsewhere in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas without incident. Our newspaper—I was away—printed advance stories without comment.

Threats Prevent a Ball Game

Within hours after the first story, the Councils moved in. Two county Council spokesmen—there was no Greenville member yet—notified our mayor and chief of police that if the game were not canceled, scores of Council members would stage a sit-down strike on the diamond and prevent play. At about the same time, Greenville and the county were showered from the air with handbills warning of a boycott of the city by nearby rural and small-town residents if our "experiments in race mixing" were not halted. To their credit, the chief of police, the mayor and the baseball board stood firm. But the promoter canceled the game and substituted two Negro teams.

I wrote an editorial condemning the Councils' proposed defiance of law, the cancellation of the game and the victory of the gang spirit. Within days came the first of a half-dozen widely distributed personal attacks, four of them unsigned, one signed by Patterson and one by two other presumed Council members.

continued



The Councils are trying to keep Negroes and whites separate by economic pressure

The long anonymous diatribe was in what purported to be verse. I can't help quoting one stanza, in the hope that boat owners everywhere will come to my aid:

Convicts and race mixers, you're their defender,

Service to the South you do not render.

You may write your books and ride your yacht

But express Southern Sentiment you do not!

That same week, the county was flooded with hundreds of copies of nationally distributed anti-Semitic pamphlets. These did not bear the imprint of the Council, but it was an unfortunate coincidence. Two members of the five-man, unpaid Baseball Association Board were Jews, one was a Catholic. Their religions were cited in persistent and seemingly calculated street-corner gossip as being the reason they were willing to let Negroes play baseball with white men in Greenville.

5) Citizens Council literature has frequently warned of and deplored imminent physical conflict and reminded its readers that Washington owned slaves, that the Negro is congenitally and forever inferior, that Jefferson wanted the Negro deported, that the white South would have been mongrelized following the Civil War had not our forefathers stood with their backs to the wall and that, "unless we organize, the Negro leaders will continue to exert pressure until violence breaks out; and then, regardless of how you feel, you will be drawn into the conflict for the issue will then be White against Black."

6) Patterson, cashing in on widespread belief among white Southerners that the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is a Communist-inspired and -directed organization, hell-bent on racial absorption, links any and all critics with that group. Thus, during the campaign for the school-abolition amendment, he listed as its supporters every political leader in the state, the Mississippi Farm Bureau, the Mississippi legislature and the Mississippi Education Association. Against it—although one Mississippian in three did vote against the amendment and many spoke out courageously against it—he listed only our newspaper, one other newspaper, one legislator and the "Mississippi

NAACP, Northern AFL Leaders and Northern CIO Leaders," pointing out that the CIO subscribed \$75,000 to the NAACP last year.

The Delta counties, in which the Councils' strength is greatest, went ten-to-one and better for the amendment, though the state at large, even with this one-sided and heavy vote in the Delta, approved the amendment only by a two-to-one vote, with 14 of 82 counties going against the amendment. Since that election—held, ironically, during the Christmas season of good will—I have received more venomous letters than ever before, for a like period, in my newspaper lifetime.

7) Prizes are being offered to Mississippi school children for review of a booklet, *Black Monday*—the day of the Supreme Court's decision—written by a Mississippi circuit judge. Its thesis is that a single school system means "mongrelization." It describes the people of Italy, Greece, Spain and the South American countries as decadent because of admixture with the Negro and ascribes the fall of ancient civilizations to Negro integration.

Politicians Take No Chances

Now, most of these examples of Council activity might be minimized as the evanescent work of the ever-present American crackpot, Southern division, or as a battle of words that can't really hurt anyone. But these tactics are only window dressing. Mississippi office holders and present or potential candidates for local and state and national office are taking seriously the Councils' threat to screen them for pro-Negro sentiments. After all, the Council may well have the 25,000 members it claims. Those members, with their wives and their children of voting age and whomever else they might influence, could be a decisive bloc, provided they voted together, or even provided they decided to black-list any candidates. Practical Mississippi politicians aren't taking any chances. A good many of them are joining up and urging their supporters to do so. After all, if one office seeker is branded a "nigger-lover" by the Councils or an opponent, he would have an ace up his sleeve as a Council member.

But political shenanigans in themselves don't mean violence. The threat has always lurked in rural Mississippi—in the courthouse corridors every time a Negro seeks to register;

every time he is suspected of believing in or advocating integration or support of the NAACP; every time he appears to step out of line in any way. The Councils' decision to use economic pressures is a deterrent to the hotheads, but it is no guarantee against violence, especially if the Negro selected for the object lesson doesn't give way. Nor do even the economic pressures sit well with people who take the Bill of Rights seriously.

I don't know how often such pressure has been exerted. I do know of many asserted instances which the Councils have not disclaimed. Here are some of them:

In Indianola, the Councils' birthplace, lives Dr. Clinton Battles, who, three years ago, was the first Negro to register and vote in that county since Reconstruction. Dr. Battles has urged the Negroes to register, and has publicly approved the Supreme Court's decision. Some of his patients consequently are deserting him. They—the story goes—have been approached by white citizens who tell them that if they don't find another doctor, they'll lose their jobs or their credit. Neither Dr. Battles nor any other of the 114 registered Negroes—out of the 38,000 Negroes in the County—voted in the voter-qualification-amendment election.

Likewise in Indianola, a noncontroversial Negro insurance and fraternal order, the Sir Knights and Daughters of Tabor, got ready to hold its annual statewide meeting. The program listed a debate on desegregation. The organization was warned that it could not meet in Indianola if any aspect of desegregation was discussed. The meeting was held, but the debate was canceled.

In Belzoni, another small Delta community, a well-regarded Negro undertaker, T. V. Johnson, was asked by the state's most controversial Negro, Dr. T. R. M. Howard of all-Negro Mound Bayou, to be community chairman for Negro Boy Scout activities. Dr. Howard, who is often criticized by members of his own race for extremist views and alleged self-seeking, is the organizer of a sort of home-grown NAACP, the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership. (Looks like all God's chilluns got councils.) White citizens discovered that undertaker Johnson was a director of the Negro Regional Council. They "advised" Johnson not to accept the Boy Scout post and

*The hope is that
the Federal Government
will not tolerate
organized terrorism*



Decent schools for Negroes, like the one where these children romp, may help provide a way out of impasse.

warned that unless he parted company with the Negro Council and had his name stricken from the county's voting rolls, he wouldn't get any further credit and might find himself looking for another home. He's still in Belzoni, though not as a Scout committeeman or voter.

In Columbus, Miss., Dr. Emmett Stringer, a Negro dentist, was president of the state NAACP. He has been subjected to severe economic pressure, including refusal of loans at a bank where he previously did business. His family has received telephone calls announcing that he had been killed and asking about the disposal of the body.

On another occasion, a prominent Mississippi citizen and Council member, while turning his automobile around in a Negro woman schoolteacher's driveway, inadvertently ran over some flower beds. The woman apparently remonstrated vigorously and, according to reports, cursed the driver. He returned later and shot her in the leg. She was fired from her teaching post.

Another Mississippi Negro teacher joined the Roman Catholic Church and began attending services in a white cathedral with a without hindrance, as happens in many Catholic churches in the South. She, too, lost her job.

So the stories run, unendingly. I have no way of knowing how many are true or how many have Council members as protagonists. I do know that Mississippi's Negroes believe them; so do many Mississippi whites—some approvingly, some with disgust and pity.

And it is also a matter of record that when the Councils spread into Alabama, the organizers from Mississippi used some strong words at Selma, even though they disclaimed violence. Two of the organizers were members of the Mississippi legislature, the third a Presbyterian minister. Subsequently, in Marengo County, Ala., State Senator Walter C. Givhan won passing notoriety when he charged that the ultimate goal of the NAACP "is to open the bedroom doors of our white women to Negro men." Givhan also foresaw the election of a Negro Vice-President and the subsequent assassination of the white President by Negroes so that a Negroid dynasty could take over. . . .

The extremist fringe? Yes, largely, but not

entirely. Nor should we forget that it is not lack of equanimity alone but the prompting of events that makes for a Ku Klux Klan, a Hitler, a Comintern.

Fate, God, history, external and internal pressures—take your choice—led the Supreme Court of the United States to declare that racially separate school facilities, no matter how equal, are discriminatory and unconstitutional. But neither God nor man has devised a way to make unconvinced people accept such a verdict immediately as wise or practical or as applicable to themselves and their established mores.

I don't like the Councils. That is not to say that I am blind to the fears that prompt them or to the dilemma of the South today. What I am sure of is that the Councils' way is not the right way. It is not American to say that unless you are with me you are in an enemy's camp; it is not American to bully the near-defenseless and the minority of dissenters; it is not American to deprive or seek to deprive any group of the franchise; it is not American to invoke the doctrine that there is a master race.

Will the American Way Prevail?

But in time of stress, Americans do not always take what we like to call the American way. I do not have the gift of prophesy. These 20,000 or 30,000, or however many they are, may shrivel or grow. The Klan of the '20's gained fewer members in a longer formative period. And its later emulators died almost a-borning.

Some alternate probabilities in respect to the Citizens Councils are crystal clear. Here they are:

1) The Deep Southern states will inaugurate—as Mississippi is now doing—a tremendous program to equalize racially separate schools, in the hope that the Negro child, the Negro parent and the Negro teacher will not continue to be discriminated against in terms of facilities. Such programs will, I believe, dampen any efforts in the heavily Negro states to enroll Negro children in hitherto white schools. In that case, the Councils will probably die of inertia.

2) Southern Negro leaders, spurred on by NAACP organizers, will decide to make an im-

mediate and continuous do-or-die effort to enroll Negro children in white schools without regard to the factors of numerical pressures, cultural lag or established folkways. Or the Federal Government may undertake to make the Court's decision equally and simultaneously applicable everywhere in the South, though this is doubtful. In either event, the Citizens Councils and their ilk will flourish. Integration will not.

3) Regardless of how moderate and conciliatory or how immoderate may be the approach of the Negro, the Federal Government or the state governments, lawless men with hate in their hearts may take over. I am certain that should provocative incidents result in violent reaction, the decent citizens will desert the Councils today just as they did yesterday's Ku Klux Klan. Unfortunately, such desertion would not mean the death of the night riders, only their control by the viciously uncontrollable. That is the greatest danger.

The one difference—which may be the hopeful one—between today and the white-robed yesterday is that the Federal Government, lawlessness that clearly violates the Bill of Rights. I cannot imagine the Federal Government failing to intervene in any widespread, organized and racially motivated terrorism.

Yet, on the other hand, I cannot visualize in the Black Belts of the South any significant integration of public-school students for a long time to come. Somewhere in between lies the yet undetermined compromise which is the genius of democracy. I believe that migration of Negroes from the areas of greatest numerical pressures will relieve the emotional pressures; that decent schools, residential separateness, pupil and parental choice and ordinary social pressures will disintegrate the Supreme Court decision into its inevitably varying local applications. In such circumstances, the Councils will wither away.

Meanwhile, as one ineffectively protesting newspaperman in one Mississippi community, I don't like what's going on. If I were a Negro or a Jew or even a Catholic, I might be even more disturbed, though it is uncomfortable enough to be labeled simply a "nigger-lover." This is ready-made trouble for all minorities.

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