

TITLE: Testimony on Ku Klux Klan in Congressional Hearing

Context:

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TESTIMONY OF HARRIET POSTLE

I live in the eastern part of York County [South Carolina]... on Mr. James Smith's plantation; I am about thirty years old; my husband is a preacher; I have a family of six children; the oldest is about fourteen; the Ku-Klux visited me last spring.... I was asleep when they came; they made a great noise and waked me up, and called out for Postle [her husband]; my husband heard them and jumped up... when I got up I found he was gone; they kept on hallooing for Postle and knocking at the door ...I was so frightened I did not get on my clothes at all; it looked like they were going to knock the door down; then the rest of them began to come into the house, and my oldest child got out and ran under the bed; one of them saw him and said, "There he is; I see him;" and with that three of them pointed their pistols under the bed; I then cried out, "It is my child"...my child came out from under the bed ...I begged them not to hurt my child; they did not hurt it, but one of them ran the back against the wall, ground a piece of skin off as big as my hand; I then took a chair and sat it back upon a loose plank, and sat down upon it; one of the men stepped up; seeing the plank loose, he just jerked the chair and threw me over, while my babe was in my arms, and I fell with my babe to the floor, when one of them clapped his foot upon the child, and another had his foot upon me; I begged him, for the Lord's sake, to save my child; I went and picked up my babe, and when I opened the door and looked I saw they had formed a line; they asked me if Postle was there; I said no... I told them he was gone for some meal; they said he was there somewhere, and they called me a damned liar; one of them said: "I am going to have the truth tonight; you are a damned, lying bitch, and you are telling a lie;" and he had a line [rope], and commenced putting it over my neck; said he: "You are telling a lie; I know it; he is here;" I told them again he was gone ... the one who had his foot on my body mashed me badly, but not so badly as he might have done, for I was seven or eight months gone in travail [pregnant] ... he beat my head against the side of the house till I had no sense hardly left; but I still had hold of my babe...

“Q: Whether you were a member of the Ku-Klux organization?”

“A: I was, sir. I joined in January last.

“Q: What did you find to be the purpose of the organization after you got in?”

“A: The purpose of the organization was to break down the radical party by whipping and killing....

“A: Wesley Smith told me that he and William White, William Smith, and Mr. Spender killed Charley Good because he belonged to the radical party—at least, I don’t know any other reason...

“Q: What sort of man was he [Charley Good]?”

“A: A very good man....

“Q: What did White say about the mode of killing him?”

“A: He said he shot him, and then turned the butt of his gun and sunk the cock in his head.

“Q: What was done with his body?”

“A: It was thrown in the river.....

“Q: do you know of any other deeds of that kind committed by the Klan?”

“A: Yes sir; about the same time down in Chester district, there was two Negros killed – Sam Skafe and Eli McCollum. Pinckney Caldwell and Joe Smith, members of the Klan, told me they had done it. The men was taken as prisoners, and down at Turkey Creek Bridge they put them on the banisters and shot them. One fell back on the bridge and the other fell over in the water; when he struck water he swam to a little pile of trash below and caught there, and they shot him dead with an Enfield rifle.

“Q: When did you make up your mind to leave the organization?”

“A: After Charley Good was killed; I then determined, whenever I got a chance, I would tell all I know about it.”

“I Reside in York County, and have lived there two years. I was initiated as a member of the Ku-Klux-Klan. I took the oath at my own house. Three persons were initiated at the same time. I attended one meeting and heard the constitution and by-laws.... The contents of the oath, as near as I can remember, were that female friends, widows, and orphans were to be objects of our protection, and that we were so support the Constitution as it was bequeathed to us by your forefathers; and there was to be opposition to the thirteenth, fourteen, and fifteenth amendments. The fourteenth was particularly specified in the oath I took.... The penalty for divulging its [the oath's] secrets was death....

“The first meeting I attended there were eight or ten person sworn in, and a proposition was brought forward to make a raid upon such and such persons.... The object was to discountenance people from joining the [Union] League [a Republican and pro-Radical Reconstruction organization]. I heard this from the members. They said that those who belonged to the League were to be visited and warned; that they must discontinue their connection with the League. If they did not, on the second visit they were to leave the country, and if they didn't leave they were to be whipped; and if after this they did not leave, they were to be killed. I know this was how the purpose of the order were to be carried out.... Charley Byers told me they had whipped him.... Charley Good, who was whipped very badly by the Klan, came to my house two or three days afterwards. He was a blacksmith, and a very good workman.... Charley Good was whipped so badly that he could not follow his trade for several days. Two or three weeks after that he was killed...

“Charley Good was killed because he was a republican.....

“He was regarded as a man of republican principles, and was considered a person of some influence in that neighborhood....”

The excerpts of the testimonies were taken from 42nd Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Report 41, pt. 5 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), pp. 1943-1944(Davis), pp. 1945-1946 (Berry), pp. 1951-1952 (Postle).