The Ku-Klux organization ... Ku-Kluxism and democracy. The Ku-Klux reign of terror. [n. p. 1872].

Found among the papers of Zachariah Chandler.

The Ku-Klux Organization.

A Southern writer, residing at Columbia, South Carolina, has recently published in the New York Evening Post a series of letters relating to the Ku-Klux order, which are characteristic for the evident familiarity of the writer with the extent, character, and purposes of this organization, and for the unpartizan spirit and temperate tone of his letters.

We take the liberty of presenting herewith a few extracts from the letters in question, and of commending them to the attention of any who may be skeptical or uninformed as to the Ku-Klux and their atrocious outrages.

After supplying important information as to the organization and rules, and the numbers and extent of the order—giving facts which he has accumulated by patient investigation and observation—he is content to dismiss the subject without discussing its political bearings and motives in his public letters. But in a private note to the editor he gives expression to views, from which the Post takes the liberty of publishing extracts.

The writer thus answers the question: “Why does the order exist on so large a scale, and what are the general purposes of its leaders?”

“To my mind the only answers to the question why the order exists, and what its purposes, are, will be found by inquiring what are the ends which the Southern leaders in the war still desire to secure. While for various reasons of pride and obstinancy few who were rebels acknowledge that secession and rebellion were wrong, all readily concede that secession was a mistake, and they frequently say: ‘We should have fought under the flag, not against it.’

“The Southern leaders will never again attempt secession, but it is certain they have never ceased to contemplate the possibility of their reinstatement in political power, and their ability to undo nearly all that the war accomplished. They continue to hope for the disfranchisement of the negro, for payment of the rebel war debt, and for compensation for the slaves emancipated. These, in the Southern mind, are not only hopes, but they seem tangible and capable of realization. To these ends the success of the Democratic party on a reactionary platform is an essential and first step. The follies and mistakes of the Republican party have at last appeared so to weaken and divide it that their opportunity seems
They hoped for this in 1867, and then organized the Ku-Klux; they feel sure now, and the order has spread over the whole South.

“With a closely contested election in prospect, turning perhaps on the vote of the electoral college of one small State, the temptation to control the elections all through the South by means of intimidation, force, and fraud, is irresistible, and the chances of success are great. Neither the Constitution, nor any law under it, provides for any method of contesting the result of an election for President. As the electoral colleges send their votes to the Senate so they are counted.”

In this connection we present an extract from the Post’s correspondent, in relation to the extent of the order. He says:

“The (Ku-Klux) order is known to exist and flourish extensively in every part of Tennessee, in Middle and Southern Kentucky, in Louisiana, Texas, Northern Mississippi and Alabama, Northwest Georgia, Middle and Western parts of the North and South Carolinas. In smaller numbers, but still sufficiently great to be worthy of notice, it exists in Arkansas, Middle and Southern Alabama and Mississippi, the remainder of Georgia and parts of Florida, the remainder of North and South Carolina, and to some extent in Southern Virginia. In one town of about fifteen hundred inhabitants in Western South Carolina, there are ten Klans, with an average of twelve members each. In the same county, in one township more than three-fourths of the white voters are members of the order. In a neighboring county, a gentleman of character, who, though denying membership, was certainly not such an enemy of the order as to exaggerate its numbers, testified before the Congressional Committee that he believed that there was not a respectable unmarried white man in the county town who was not a member of the Ku-Klux order. During the election riots in Laurens, one prominent man in that town was able, in less than ten minutes after the first shot was fired, to go from the court-house among the crowd in the street and put seventy men in line, fully armed and organized, while within the succeeding twelve hours over twelve hundred men assembled at the town, and showed from the first every evidence of thorough organization. When the negro prisoners were taken from the jail in Union and murdered, five hundred Ku-Klux, perfectly organized and in admirable discipline, as shown by their conduct, were engaged in the outrage. They are known to have assembled upon notice sent to the neighboring counties, and to have come from twenty-five to thirty-five miles, over winter roads, from every point of the compass, between Saturday morning and Sunday night, meeting in Union county at the appointed hour—midnight on Sunday.

“The best informed persons in the most disturbed districts in this State estimate that from two-thirds to three-fourths of all the white men, between the ages of sixteen and fifty, are members of the Ku-
Klux order; and that of the young unmarried men six-sevenths are members. The members of the order claim even a larger membership than this."

Each klan of the Ku-Klux organization consists of from ten to eighteen members. The chiefs of neighboring klans are in correspondence with each other. A district has one chief and two assistants, and is composed of convenient members of klans. From three to five chiefs of klans form a council or military court, charged with the trial of offending members, and rendering final decisions. The rules of the order are intended to be rigidly enforced in the different klans, districts, and divisions; but circumstances doubtless often permit of their being relaxed.

As to the rules themselves, we quote the following from the Post’s Southern contributor:

“No member of the order is allowed to appear for any Ku-Klux business except in disguise. His horse must be disguised also. The disguise is commonly a long, loose gown, fastened about the neck, hanging loosely nearly to the feet, and covering the entire person below the throat. Over the head is drawn a kind of loose bag or sack, having holes cut for the eyes, and a hole for the mouth. The voice is habitually disguised, and the language is merely an imitation of Irish brogue. All members on active duty are forbidden to speak at all except when it is absolutely necessary. These disguises are usually made of some thin cotton cloth, black and red seeming to be preferred. They are bedecked with stars, crescents, and like figures, cut out of cloth of a different color and sewn on the gown. The head dress frequently has several hours, made of cloth and stuffed. The horses are covered, head and flank, with sheets of the same material as the disguise, and similarly ornamented.

“To make the use of names unnecessary, each member of the order, as soon as he is assigned to a Klan, is designated by a number. While on expeditions, or even at other times in conversation among themselves about Ku-Klux matters, members of a Klan are forbidden to speak of a member by his name, but must always designate him by his number, so that any accidental listener could not identify the person spoken of. While the passwords, grips, hailing signs, signals, &c., are general and known to all members, they are forbidden to use them except when absolutely necessary, and are forbidden to attempt to discover by these whether another person is a member of the order, unless some substantial reason exists for knowing it. They must under no circumstances talk to any one who is not a member of the same Klan about any matter with which the order is connected, or about the order itself; and after any act is done by the Klan, no one must speak of anything connected with that act, even to another member of the same Klan, except to the chief, and only then when it is important to do so. In each Klan the members know each other and their own chief, but, except through necessity or accident, have no knowledge of what other persons belong to the order. When
individual members, or the whole of different Klans, meet for work, each member is required to avoid, if possible, knowing who any other individual is.

“Each chief and klan knows and receive orders from his district chief and his assistants, but does not, except by accident, know who the higher officers are. So district chiefs know the officers next above them in rank, but not necessarily those of higher grade. Special grips, passwords and signs, known only to the district and division chiefs and to those of higher grade, make it possible for them, when necessary, to make themselves known officially to the subordinates. It is thus possible that two men, living in the same house, may be morally certain each that the other is a member of the order; but, if put under oath, cannot swear from any positive knowledge that such is the fact. It is only the more important acts of riot or outrage that are in person directed or ordered by the higher grade of officers. In regard to other acts only general directions are given, and the details are left to the minor officers and members.”

**Ku-Kluxism and Democracy.**

Originating in Tennessee in 1867, the secret politico-military order, popularly known as the Ku-Klux has rapidly spread over the entire South, assuming various names, such as “The Invisible Empire,” “The White Brotherhood,” “The Council of Safety,” “The Invisible Circle,” etc. The labors of the Congressional Committee, as well as those of the sub committees that have visited various localities in the South, have brought to the surface and exposed to the light of day a mass of information in the shape of sworn testimony against this secret armed political organization, known by various designations, which is too minute in details and too cumulative in facts to be longer resisted by the demagogues of the party with which they are co-operating. Nor can interested demagogues, in view of the overwhelming evidences of outrage and violence to the persons and property of negroes and white Republicans, truthfully impute them to mere neighborhood prejudice and personal feud.

The sworn testimony discloses the lamentable fact that in a majority of instances the outrages and violence in question have been perpetrated through the agency of intelligent, covert, and systematic organization and direction. It is a noteworthy fact that the more active scoundrels composing the order are reserved for deeds of violence, while the more influential and reputable members make themselves useful to the order in controlling public sentiment, furnishing bail-bonds for arrested parties, securing suitable witnesses, and influencing juries. It is these so called respectable and reputable people who assure newspaper correspondents and other inquiring minds that “everything is lovely” in their region. The desperadoes of Southern society find a welcome place in the Klan, and furnish suitable working material when there is to be shedding of blood and other deeds of violence. The fraternal relations which subsist between them and the influential chiefs of this

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political brotherhood, has an effect the very opposite of deterring them from threatening the lives of
good citizens and disturbing the tranquility of our country.

The Ku-Klux order claims a membership of five hundred thousand in the South. Should it be
necessary to make a liberal allowance for exaggeration, we will nevertheless find so large a portion
of the Southern people, not to say Northern Democrats, in close and active sympathy with the
organization, and ready to co-operate with it, that we may safely state its effective strength at half
a million of men, who are, to all intents and purposes, in sympathy with the Democratic party. The
testimony taken by the Congressional Committee proves conclusively that the Ku-Klux organization
has been devised and is employed to extinguish Republicanism in the South. This conspiracy is
alike horrible in its inception and frightful in its results. It has properly become a matter of public
solicitude. The accumulated and well attested facts which have resulted from Congressional
investigation show that hecatombs of victims have been immolated upon the altar of liberty and
country to this Moloch of Southern Democracy. Frightful as is the aggregate, the list is by no means
complete. Alas, that the facts compel us to say that not less than ninety-nine per cent, of the long
procession of the warned, the whipped, the wounded, and the murdered were avowed Republicans,
and were maltreated or murdered outright because of their adherence to the Republican party and
their support of its candidates, in spite of warnings and menaces!

A fearful responsibility devolves upon Northern Democrats. So long as they continue to hold
out the hope to their Southern brethren that, if restored to power, they will adopt and pursue a
reactionary policy, such as the ultra reactionists foreshadowed in the Brodhead letter and still insist
upon, just so long will the Ku-Klux Democracy strive to render itself serviceable to the common
cause. Let conscientious Northern Democrats range themselves at once on the side of oppressed
humanity and imperilled nationality, and make explicit and unreserved announcement of their
honest purposes through the ballot, thus taking a “new departure” in the best sense of the term.

THE KU-KLUX REIGN OF TERROR.

We have recently taken the pains to examine carefully hundreds of pages of the printed testimony
taken before the Congressional Committee on Ku-Klux outrages in the Southern States, whose
duty it was to ascertain the condition of affairs in those States, so far as it relates to the security
of life, person, and property. From a thorough perusal of the voluminous documents containing
the sworn testimony of witnesses from various parts of the South and belonging to both political
parties, we are irresistibly impelled to the conclusion that the Ku-Klux organization is an adjunct
of the Democratic party, established and operated with the view of effecting political results. This
seems to be the general purpose of the organization, and the direction in which all their acts point.
The substantial declaration made when Ku-Klux crimes and outrages were being committed was
that their perpetrators and those they claimed to represent did not propose to submit to negro
government and carpet bag rule.

Most of the witnesses examined by the Committee have detailed the circumstances of the outrages
perpetrated by the Ku-Klux upon themselves and a great many others during the last twelve months,
and have proved a most terrible and shocking state of affairs to exist in the late insurrectionary
States. They have declared that Republicans, white and colored, in their own locality and the country
surrounding them were in a state of inexpressible alarm and terror, and that scourgings were of
common and constant occurrence, and murders were frequently committed; that they feel no
security in their homes at night, and many are in the habit of sleeping in the woods in all kinds of
weather.

They testify that they have never known any Ku-Klux outrages to have been perpetrated upon a
Democrat, and that all Republicans fully understand that they can purchase security by openly
proclaiming themselves Democrats and voting the Democratic ticket. Some have been obliged to do
so, knowing well what the consequences would be in case of their refusal or noncompliance.

We think that these facts prove conclusively that the spirit of the rebellion still lives in the Southern
wing of the Democratic party, and that they prefer to appeal to brute force instead of to the decision
of the people through the ballot. Instead of open, armed revolt against the Government and
resistance to the execution of law and order, it seems that we are to have systematic lawlessness
and intimidation, disgraceful to humanity and belying civilization, under the auspices of the
Democratic party. Is it thus that the Lost Cause is to retrieve itself? If so, we appeal to all fair-minded
men in the Democratic party to take at once a “new departure” by voting with the Republican party
and thus refusing to co-operate with the infatuated men who have so basely prostituted their
ancient organization.

Let the freemen of the North, irrespective of party, register their decree and pronounce in thunder
tones against the organized and systematic diabolism and mob law of the Southern Ku-Klux
Democracy, who would perpetuate the rebellion in another form and snatch an unholy victory from
the very jaws of honorable defeat and surrender. At the ballot-box and in our legislative halls must
we, as friends of the Union, fix and secure the logical and legitimate results of the war, so that they
will not be upset by the reactionary movements and measures of the Ku-Klux and their allies and
abettors North and South, if we would not have them become the subjects of new and dangerous
struggles again.