

New Life for the Klan

CHANNELVIEW

James Stansfield hadn't had an excuse to light a cross — at least publicly — in more than a decade.

But what David Duke's run for the White House couldn't do this past spring, a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling did. It brought Stansfield, once one of Texas' most active Ku Klux Klan organizers, back into the fold.

On June 22, the high court ruled that cross burning was a protected form of free speech and that it is unconstitutional for state legislatures to single out hate crimes for special prosecution.

The occasion was enough to bring tears of joy to Stansfield's eyes. The Imperial Wizard of the Texas Confederate Knights spent an entire Saturday afternoon in his swampy back yard, known as "Klan Island" in this Houston suburb, crafting a 25-foot cross for a celebratory lighting.

Several hours before he donned his hooded red satin robe and lit a torch, Stansfield stood on the deck of his double-wide trailer and took a moment to reflect. As he gazed out over his private lake at the petrochemical plants of the Houston Ship Channel, he confessed that the big event was giving him a case of the jitters.

"It's like going on your first date or something," Stansfield said. "The emotions are great. I'm nervous. I don't know who will show up."

While Stansfield didn't exactly get stood up, his highly publicized rally for "whites only" turned out to be a bust. Only about 20 supporters, mainly curious onlookers, showed up. The local media outnumbered spectators two-to-one. The event appeared absurd at times.

A Rottweiler pup, unaccustomed to seeing his master in such a getup, yapped and ran in circles during the solemn proceedings. Stansfield and two other robed Klansmen seemed to lose their places several times during the ceremony. Beads of sweat could be seen dripping from their brows as they posed, for what seemed to be an inordinate amount of time, in front of the flaming cross.

Throughout the state that same weekend, Klan members staged similar cross lightings to celebrate the Supreme Court ruling. In one of the biggest cross burnings, about 200 white supremacists gathered on a private ranch near Hico to witness a Klan wedding and an address by National Knights director Thom Robb.

Michael Lowe, Grand Dragon of the Texas Knights of the KKK, said the Hico gathering was initially planned as just an annual rally and membership drive. The Supreme Court ruling made the celebration more festive, he said.

While some observers were quick to blow off the spectacles as innocuous dog and pony shows, anti-defamation officials and professional Klan watchers say the events have insidious implications. "What you're seeing is a recruitment



GAYLON WAMPLER

Imperial Wizzard of the Texas Confederate Knights, James Stansfield, left, and Klansman Don Hartless

effort," said Joe Roy, chief investigator for the Klanwatch Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Ala. "These people who are marching around and acting silly may not seem like a threat to you when they are out there in front of you where you can see them. When they go underground is when this country has a real problem."

Covert activity is nothing new for the Klan. The organization has been cloaked in secrecy since its inception more than 125 years ago.

The KKK, like 50 other white supremacist groups that Klanwatch has identified in Texas, thrives under the cover of darkness. Even dues-paying members are not always privy to "inner-circle" meetings where paramilitary activity and strategy is planned.

For that reason, membership is difficult to quantify. But based on intelligence gathering efforts from law enforcement officials, Klanwatch estimates there are 6,000 KKK members nationwide, with the most active groups in Gulf, North Carolina, and Harrison, Arkansas.

Klanwatch, however, is careful not to use membership figures — which they say the Klan frequently inflates — to gauge a particular chapter's potency. Criminal activity, they say, is a more effective barometer.

If lawlessness is one benchmark of power, then Stansfield, in his heyday, was a force to be reckoned with. In 1981, Stansfield and former Klan Dragon Louis Beam led one of the state's most aggressive KKK chapters in a violent effort to keep Vietnamese immigrants from fishing in

Galveston Bay.

The demonstrators, many of them trained in KKK psychological warfare, ambush and reconnaissance patrol, harassed the shrimpers by manning armed boat patrols around Kemah and Seabrook and displaying weapons and effigies of Vietnamese fishermen.

While Beam and Stansfield were ultimately acquitted of numerous civil rights, racketeering and seditious conspiracy charges, both men dropped out of sight for more than a decade. Stansfield, however, said he felt compelled to come forward again because he senses a new national mood, a disenchantment with the status quo. Hence the Confederate Knights in Channelview was born.

"The Supreme Court ruling is enough to bring me back," Stansfield said. "It's like CPR. It's a new breath of life."

Barbara Harburg, director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in Houston, says the nation's grim economic indicators will likely spawn more KKK chapters and more people like Stansfield will come out of the closet. "When there are hard times people look for somebody to blame," Harburg says. "That's when Klan membership seems a bit more attractive." As the unemployment figures swell, typically so does membership in KKK supremacy movements, said Roy at Klanwatch.

"It not only explains David Duke's (success) and Ross Perot but anyone else who professes to have the answers," Roy said. "The real danger of people like Stansfield right now he's probably

a conduit for would-be members who are sympathetic toward these views. People who feel they've been victimized by affirmative action or who have lost their jobs or are worse off now than a couple of years ago are looking for somebody to blame. And they turn to these groups."

That was evident at a Duke rally in League City earlier this year during the height of the former KKK leader's Republican presidential bid, when nearly 700 blue-collar workers in gimme caps and camouflage jackets filled the civic center to capacity to cheer Duke as he slammed affirmative action programs, the welfare system and homosexuals.

While Duke's primary bid fizzled, experts say Klan membership didn't suffer a similar fate. "In reality his campaign and defeat were probably an asset to them because they learned how to become publicly accessible and how

to manipulate to the media," Roy said.

Even Stansfield, after lying dormant for nearly a decade, has learned to play the part of a media darling. At his coming-out party, he gave lengthy interviews, offered reporters Kool-Aid, and posed obligingly for pictures.

Law enforcement authorities, however, didn't buy this kinder and gentler version of the Klan. A posse of Houston police officers, Department of Public Safety troopers and Harris County Organized Crime Unit members ringed the premises with surveillance equipment, keeping a close watch on the gathering throughout the night.

Stansfield meanwhile, had arranged for security of his own.

Several large men wearing denim and dusty boots roamed the premises with high-powered rifles, while one guard, from a position on the trailer deck, peered through the scope of a high-

powered rifle. A near clash occurred when a black Houston television reporter, Chris Adams of KTRK-TV, was ordered off the property before the cross was lit. The rifle-toting watchman pointed to a hangman's noose swinging from a willow tree and muttered, "It would have been all right [to stay] if he wanted to hang out on that limb."

Later that evening, as cameras whirred and the flames from the diesel-soaked cross filled the night sky, Stansfield appeared overcome with emotion.

After offering a Nazi-style salute to the burning symbol he turned to one reporter and said, "Just remember, we let you see what we want you to see. And we let you hear what we want you to hear."
—Jane Grandolfo

Jane Grandolfo is a Houston freelance writer.

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for other human rights abuses. Detainees were tortured and ill-treated by members of the security forces; one detainee allegedly died under torture. The government failed to clarify numerous cases of "disappearance" and torture documented in previous years.

Peru

Over 300 people "disappeared" and at least 60 were extrajudicially executed by the security forces or by paramilitary groups allegedly operating with their support. Dozens of cases of torture and ill-treatment were reported. Two prisoners of conscience were believed to remain in prison. The government failed to clarify thousands of human rights violations documented since 1983.

Bolivia

Dozens of trade unionists were detained for short periods and some were allegedly tortured. One peasant was reportedly beaten and killed during a police raid. No official investigations were carried out into the alleged torture during 1989 and 1990 of political detainees by security forces. Allegations of possible extrajudicial executions during a December 1990 joint operation by military and police were not investigated. Prosecution lawyers in a major ongoing trial concerning past human rights violations continued to be threatened and harassed.

Chile

At least 20 cases of torture and ill-treatment by the security forces were reported. Scores of prisoners arrested during the former military government for politically motivated offences were released, but dozens remained in prison. One journalist was detained, and several others continued to face charges, for criticizing the role of the military in past human rights violations. Military courts continued to close investigations into human rights violations on the basis of the 1978 Amnesty Law. Most cases of human rights abuses not covered by the Amnesty Law remained unresolved. One political prisoner remained under a recommended death sentence.

Paraguay

Scores of members of peasant communities involved in land disputes were detained and some were ill-treated. The torture by police of criminal suspects, including minors, continued and official inquiries into allegations of ill-treatment made little or no progress. Judicial investigations into past human rights violations continued, although no sentences were handed down. Two lawyers representing victims of past human rights violations received death threats.

Argentina

Allegations of torture and ill-treatment by the police continued, resulting in one case in a detainee's death. The authorities failed to clarify the fate of three people who reportedly "disappeared" in 1990. Human rights workers, critics of the government, judges and journalists were the target of death threats and attacks by unidentified groups. Investigations were not completed into allegations that people in custody had been extrajudicially executed, "disappeared" and tortured after an attack on La Tablada barracks in 1989. President Carlos Menem restated his intention to reintroduce the death penalty.

Uruguay

Several detainees alleged they were tortured or ill-treated in police custody and there were reports of ill-treatment in prison. At least five police personnel were persecuted for ill-treatment of detainees or unlawful killings, but other cases of torture and ill-treatment reported under the current administration remained unresolved. The impunity conferred by the Expiry Law on those who had committed human rights violations under the military government continued to prevent the clarification of the fate of the "disappeared." □

For more information, the Annual Report is available from Amnesty International USA, 322 Eighth Ave., NY, NY 10001, at a cost of \$16.75 including shipping and handling.

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✓ **BUYER'S MARKET?** The Resolution Trust Corporation will try to peddle \$65 million of prime Houston real estate during the Republican National Convention, which begins Aug. 17 at the Astrodome; the RTC's two-week sale begins Aug. 13. Delegates should have ample time to take advantage of the "Grand Investment Opportunities" advertised by fax to prospective buyers. The 53 properties from failed thrifts, including hundreds of acres of commercial, residential and rural acreage, will be sold by Kennedy-Wilson, a Houston real estate firm working for the RTC. Prices will never be better. Property No. 2, for example, a 38-acre residential tract valued at \$1,493,000 on Humble Westfield Road, is offered as "absolute," meaning there is no minimum — the highest bidder takes the title. Only \$5,000 is required to hold the property while financing is arranged. To secure other properties, some as large as 400 acres, a cashier's check for \$5,000 to \$10,000 is required.

✓ **CHECK BOUNCING** Congressman Ronald Coleman's chances for re-election are looking better as El Pasoans were reminded about his Republican opponent. Fernando Chacon, guest columnist for the El Paso Times, noted that as a TV sportscaster Chip Taberski insulted many El Pasoans five years ago when he described an upcoming high school football game between Riverside and Ysleta high schools as the "Battle of the Illegal Aliens." After hemming and hawing, Chacon wrote, Taberski apologized to the Riverside students. As the challenger to Democrat Coleman, Taberski dismissed the gaffe as being too long ago to matter and not indicative of any disrespect toward the community. He also told reporters he would not address specific Hispanic issues because he did not want to be divisive, although he supports the "English Only" movement and wants to raise admissions standards at UT-El Paso, which some fear would exclude minorities from higher education. □