Its Last Battle?—The Decline of the Ku Klux Klan after the Murder of Vernon Dahmer

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Introduction:

Mississippi, located in the Southern United States, was called by many scholars the most racially violent state in America. The state had been infamous for white people's lynching of African Americans. According to figures in 1956 compiled by the department of records and research at Tuskegee Institute, Mississippi at that time outranked all states in the nation in the number of lynchings. The Institute said 577 lynching had been recorded in Mississippi between 1882 and 1956, followed by Texas with 493 and Georgia with 491. Throughout the Civil Rights Movement, many African Americans were lynched and even killed by local white people especially white supremacists. The number of deaths of African Americans, those who were lynched and murdered by white supremacists, was the biggest compared with other southern states during the movement. The most notorious lynching and murder cases in Mississippi at that time included the lynching of teenager Emmett Till in 1955, the murder of civil rights field secretary Medgar Evers in 1963, and deaths of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner in 1964. In this thesis, I am going to talk about the murder of Vernon Dahmer, the leader of the Forrest County branch of the NAACP, who was murdered in 1966 by a firebombing carried out by the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

The Ku Klux Klan was the most dangerous and violent white supremacist force during the Civil Rights Movement. Among many chapters of the Ku Klux Klan, the

White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan was considered to be the most militant and violent. Originating in Mississippi in the early 1960s, the White Knights of Ku Klux Klan were responsible for many bombings, church burnings, lynchings and murders of African Americans. A member of the White Knights, Byron de la Beckwith, murdered Medgar Evers; and the former Imperial Wizard of the White Knights, Sam Bowers, ordered murders of the three civil rights workers and civil rights leader Vernon Dahmer. The murders of Medgar Evers and the three civil rights workers attracted the whole country and even the world's attention. The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi was not only confronted with racial violence from the White Knights, it also had to deal with legal oppression by local authorities and law enforcement agencies. It was proved that there was improper judicial behavior in the prosecution of Byron de la Beckwith; and local police force conspired with Klansmen in the murder of three civil rights workers. In the end, Beckwith was tried twice, but both trials ended in mistrials with all-white and all-male juries; and none of the Klansmen who murdered the three civil rights workers was charged of murder. Obviously, the local authorities and law enforcement agencies encouraged the Klan's racial violence against civil rights activists. Worse, the Klan seemed to have infiltrated local authorities and law enforcement agencies, causing more obstacles to the local civil rights movement.

By the time the Voting Rights Act was enacted into law in 1965, the local racial atmosphere in Mississippi was already improving. This was mainly displayed in the following several aspects: Black civil rights workers began to receive more attention

from white community; many local white people, who supported the Ku Klux Klan before and didn't care about the intimidation of civil rights workers, began to hate racial violence performed by Klansmen; local government and many segregationists, who used to condone racial violence, began to denounce the Klan and even demand punishment for Klansmen who committed acts of violence.

The changed racial atmosphere was driven by both outside forces and forces inside Mississippi. On September 2, 1964, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) launched a highly secretive and extra legal domestic covert action program called COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, which sought to "expose, disrupt and otherwise neutralize" Ku Klux Klan groups in the United States.[1] In the first half of the 1960s, the FBI had been playing softball with the Klan and was partly responsible for the racial violence against the civil rights movement conducted by Klansmen. It cooperated with southern police departments and failed to prevent Klan attacks on Freedom Riders. One informant of the FBI who infiltrated the Klan also participated in the Birmingham church burning. "To local black people and civil rights activities who complained that the harassment and beatings they routinely received from white terrorists seemed immune from prosecution, the FBI repeated that it was not an investigative but a law-enforcing agency".[2] However, this situation changed in the beginning of 1966, when an accelerated campaign of disruption involving "notional" communications, "snitch-jacketing" operations that framed effective Klan organizers as spies, and the use of informants further aggravated internal factionalism in Klan

[1] "Director to Atlanta et al—COINTELPRO: The Counterintelligence Program of the FBI," Sept 2, 1964.
[2] Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer (*New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 72.

organizations.[3] The use of these operations undoubtedly caused frustration and fear among the Ku Klux Klan, which led to the loss of many members. Dahmer's death also irritated white leaders and law enforcement officials in Jones and Forrest counties. Tired of the Klan's violence and lawlessness, they gave the FBI carte blanche to wipe out the White Knights.[4]

Apart from the FBI's covert operations against the Klan, a change of political climate in both the country and the state encouraged a less oppressive racial atmosphere in Mississippi. On the one hand, the President was reluctant to intervene in state politics in the South, which meant that Southern states themselves had to deal with their racial problems. On the other hand, in the second half of the 1960s, the relationship between white liberals and the civil rights movement became increasingly tense inside the state. As more black people began to enjoy their voting right, white Southern politicians had to accept the fact that they had lost the battle of segregation and to adjust themselves to a society with new orders. Therefore, the existence of the Ku Klux Klan became a threat to the development of the state. As Belknap argues in his book *Federal Law and Southern Order*, faced with pressure from the federal government and local civil rights movements, individual Southern states were more willing to take steps to deal with racial problems and come to terms with the new situation, instead of waiting for the federal government to push them. Only in this way could Southern states limit the amount of federal intervention in their internal affairs. It could be seen that in order to secure the development of the state, local state

[3] John Drabble, "The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Decline of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in Alabama, 1964-1971," *The Alabama Review* 61.1 (2008): 3-45.
[4] Marsh, *God's Long Summer,* 72.

governments had to change their attitude towards the Klan and suppress the Klan's racial violence.

Based on the facts mentioned above, we could see that the murder of Vernon Dahmer seemed to be the Klan's last battle against the civil rights movement on the fringe of their decline. It intended to aggravate the local racial atmosphere one more time with cruel violence. However, the murder of Dahmer actually encouraged Mississippians to adapt to a changing racial atmosphere and to a two-party politics, which brought profound influence to the decline of the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan as well as to Mississippi politics in the late twentieth century. Given the racial situation and political changes at that moment, Dahmer's death gave rise to questions such as, why did the Ku Klux Klan still commit the murder of Dahmer when it was losing support? Did the investigation of the murder of Dahmer indicate that the FBI had moved into a new stage of investigation of racial crimes? What role did the FBI play in suppressing the force of the Klan? How did the federal government and local government of Mississippi respond to the murder of Dahmer and what changes did they take to strike the local chapter of the Klan? Did Dahmer's death provoke any further racial and political changes in Mississippi and if so, how?

To find out the relationships between the murder of Dahmer, the decline of the Klan, and the changing racial and political atmosphere in Mississippi, I will base my research on both national and local newspaper sources, oral history collections, documentaries, an FBI database, and secondary works. The first chapter will look into the murder case of Vernon Dahmer and analyze its difference with former civil rights

cases specially with the murders of Medgar Evers and the three civil rights workers; the second chapter will be dealing with the roles that the FBI and the Federal Government played in the murder case and their influence to the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. The third chapter will analyze the influence that Paul Johnson's administration brought to the local racial atmosphere.

Chapter 1: A Changing Racial Situation

When they killed Medgar Evers and the three civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in 1963 and 1964, the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi probably didn't expect the coming success of blacks in the civil rights movement. In the first half of the 1960s, when Mississippi was still under the tense racial atmosphere of white superiority, the state was led by a staunch segregationist, Governor Ross Barnett. It was not uncommon in Mississippi at the time for local police forces to conspire with the Klan to persecute civil rights workers; indeed, the Klan often infiltrated local government and law enforcement forces. Local white people would not bother to pay attention to racial violence carried out by the White Knights. The FBI was also said to have been weak in striking the Klan in Mississippi and they never really put the investigation of the Klan on their agenda. The whole situation and people's reaction to it provided a lawless racial atmosphere under which the Klan was encouraged to persecute black people and to disrupt the civil rights movement. However, after 1965, it appeared that the racial atmosphere in Mississippi began to change. Not only had the FBI strengthened its investigation into the Klan, but also many local segregationists were in favor of the Klan being punished for its crimes. In the beginning of 1966, when the Klan again murdered a civil rights leader, Vernon Dahmer, the change of local racial atmosphere was completely exposed. The murder of Vernon Dahmer triggered local people's indignation toward the Klan's racial violence, which led the local community to denounce them in public and foreshadowed the collapse of the Klan in a changing Mississippi.

Vernon Dahmer was a member of the Shady Grove Baptist Church where he served as music director and Sunday School teacher. He was also the owner of a grocery store, a sawmill, a planing mill, and a 200-acre farm. Another identity of Dahmer was as a leader of the National Association for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the Civil Rights Movement. He served several terms as president of the Forrest County branch of the NAACP and led voter registration drives in the 1960s. Dahmer kept a voter registration book in his store in late 1965 to make it easier for African Americans to register. He encouraged local African American population to pay a $2 poll tax—itself a device intended by segregationists to hold down black voters—in his store for the right to vote. Dahmer's mantra was "If you don't vote, you don't count". On his deathbed, Dahmer told a friend, "People who don't vote are deadbeats on the state. I figure a man needs to do his own thinking. What happened to us can happen to anybody, white or black. At one time I didn't think so, but I have changed my mind".[5]

When he was alive, Vernon Dahmer enjoyed a high reputation among local people in Hattiesburg. He was said to be one of the most respected and prosperous black men in the county. According to another civil rights activist in Forrest County, Jimmy Carter Fairley, Dahmer "was just a wonderful man in every respect".[6] In his interview with the Mississippi Oral History Program, Fairley described Dahmer as a very generous man who would help anybody regardless as to who they were. Dahmer

[5] Ibid., 71.

[6] Mike Garvey, "Oral History with J. C. Fairley" (1999), 58; http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/ref/collection/coh/id/14480

was a man with high ideals and he liked to see his people prosper. Because of the need of his business, Dahmer would hire white people just like he did black people. He was independent because of his own business and associations, therefore he didn't have to change his attitude or compromise when dealing with Klansmen. Some newspapers commented that Dahmer was the kind of Negro that Southern poor whites had been taught to fear and hate. Besides, Dahmer was said to be really set on registering to vote and becoming a citizen. The above facts about Dahmer's independence and prosperity, and the fact he was very active on voting registration, could be the main reasons why he was targeted by the Klan.

In the early hours before daybreak on January 10, 1966, several members of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, ordered by white supremacist Sam Bowers, drove two automobiles to Vernon Dahmer's home in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. They tossed a firebomb into the windows of Dahmer's home. As flames engulfed the house, Klansmen opened fire on the windows and the porch. Mrs. Dahmer and two children escaped the burning house. But Dhamer was on the porch; he came out and tried to shoot the retreating cars with his shotgun. He had inhaled too much smoke which caused fatal damage to him, although he managed to drive his wife and children to a hospital in Hattiesburg before collapsing. Dahmer died thirteen hours later in hospital. His ten-year-old girl was severely burned. His house, nearby grocery store and car were all destroyed. For years, Dahmer and his wife had slept in shifts so that one of them could watch for uninvited visitors. But with the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the frequent death threats they received had subsided and the Dahmers

had let down their guard.

Within two months of the murder, the FBI arrested 13 suspects, most of whom were members of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Sam Bowers, the former Imperial Wizard of the White Knights, was identified as a 14th suspect and the mastermind who ordered the murder. He turned himself in several days later. The thirteen men were charged under two laws, a Reconstruction Act and the 1965 Voting Rights act, with violating the civil rights of Dahmer. Eight were charged with arson and murder. Four were convicted and sentenced under federal law. And one, Billie Roy Pitts (Sam Bowers' bodyguard) entered a guilty plea and turned state's evidence. Three were sentenced to life terms, each serving less than 10 years. Bowers later tried four times, but each trial connected with the Dahmer case ended in a mistrial. In the end, he was not convicted in connection with murdering Dahmer, but with his role in the 1964 killing of the civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner. He had to serve six years in prison for the 1964 killing. None of the suspects in the Dahmer case were charged with homicide. In 1998, Forrest County District Attorney Lindsay Carter reopened an investigation into the murder of Dahmer. New evidence which showed Bowers' jury tampering in earlier trial was obtained by state and federal authorities. On May 2, 1998, Bowers was tried before a state court jury consisting blacks, whites and an Asian. This time, Bowers was finally sent to prison with a mandatory life sentence and he died in prison after 8 years.

The trials of Bowers in the 1960s revealed dark secrets of the Klan and local

authorities in Mississippi. An article published on *The Clarion-Ledger* named "Vernon Dahmer Firebombing in Hattiesburg", by Jerry Mitchell and Beverly P. Kraft, recorded the trials in details. It was shown that at the trial, the jury was deadlocked at 9 to 3, without saying whether for conviction or acquittal. The second time the deadlock was 10 to 2 and there was no further count later. Bowers told an FBI informant that he tampered with a jury to ensure he never went to state prison for ordering the firebombing of Dahmer's home. Notes taken from FBI files show that an FBI informant reported on June 17, 1968—about a month after Bowers' arson trial—that the imperial wizard told him Klansmen "had contacted three jurors".[7] "One juror said 'no', the other said… 'doubtful', and the third said 'yes' to fixing the trial".[8] The notes were turned over to the Forrest County district attorney's office. In the end, the juror who said he was doubtful became the eventual holdout in the case. The notes say: "Bowers told source that the third juror chickened out". The documents' description of juror contact is just one example of possible improper behavior connected with Dahmer's murder case. Jurors from Bowers' first trial said that a deception by a lawyer in court proceedings took place, enabling Bowers to go free, even though jurors agreed that he was guilty. In Bowers' second trial, jurors reported that the two holdout jurors refused to discuss the evidence in the case. Both trials ended in a hung jury and Bowers was released.

One of the jurors in Bowers' trial, Douglas Herring, said the imperial wizard should be retried. "It's obvious that justice was not done. I believe with all my heart

[7] Jerry Mitchell and Beverly P. Kraft, "Vernon Dahmer Firebombing in Hattiesburg," *The Clarion-Ledger*.
[8] Mitchell and Kraft, "Vernon Dahmer Firebombing in Hattiesburg."

and soul that the Klan had infiltrated the jury with one of their sympathizers, which ended in this mistrial."[9] However, Bowers' lawyer at that time, Lawrence Arrington, denied that tampering took place in any of the trials connected to the Dahmer killing, "Boy, the FBI was watching," he said, "They combed that thing right and left. There was never any proof of jury tampering".[10] The two holdout jurors wouldn't discuss any of the evidence in the case. FBI documents confirm the story: "We have been advised that during deliberation by the jury, these two individuals refused to discuss any portion of this trial, refused to review any facts and stated from the outset that their minds were completely made up. This would give indication that the two jurors who voted for acquittal were possibly compromised or had sympathetic tendencies toward the Ku Klux Klan."[11] Former FBI agent Jim Ingram, who arrived at the Dahmer home while it was still smoldering, recalled Klan attempts at thwarting justice: ''In the '60s, it was not unusual that when a jury was selected, the Klan would begin their work also, making sure that certain contacts were made with relatives and other friends of those jurors.''[12] County district attorney Chet Dillard said that the Klansmen always tried to have at least one member on the jury. "They have signals they could give to communicate."[13] Former Jones County prosecutor Charles Pickering confirmed in one instance that it was reliably reported that a Klansman contacted grand jurors to successfully block a reputed Klansman's indictment.

As Vernon Jr., Vernon Dahmer's son, said: "I feel that if there had not been

[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

efforts to tamper with the juries in trials, the outcome would have been much different".[14] However, jury tampering was not the only factor that influenced the trials of Sam Bowers. The protection of law enforcement agencies and other authorities in Mississippi also contributed to the racial violence of white supremacists. As Adam Nossiter said in *Of Long Memory*: "the suppression of dissent, the racial ideologues who ran state government, the police force that served racial aims—all were facts of daily life".[15] The opening of the secret files of the State Sovereignty Commission in the late 1980s provided the evidence of "the dirty war that official Mississippi waged to maintain segregation".[16] The "dirty war" in which local government officials, lawyers and police force colluded with white supremacists and persecute civil rights activists was not only displayed in Bowers' jury tampering, but was also shown in other authorities' behavior concerned with the Dahmer case.

In 1989, the state of Mississippi unsealed more than 124,000 pages of the secret Commission files which recorded the use of spy tactics, intimidation, false imprisonment, jury tampering and other illegal methods to thwart the activities of civil rights workers during the 1950s, 60's and early 70's. These files displayed very clearly that the state was determined to maintain Jim Crow segregation at all costs. For example, in one 1959 memorandum, a commission investigator Zack VanLandingham, on the issue of a black man who tried to desegregate Mississippi Southern College in Hattiesburg in the late 1950s, told Hattiesburg lawyer Dudley

[14] Ibid.
[15] Adam Nossiter, *Of Long Memory—Mississippi and the Murder of Medgar Evers* (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994), 67.
[16] Nossiter, *Of Long Memory*, 67.

Connor: “If the Sovereignty Commission wanted that Negro out of the community and out of the state they would take care of the situation. The Negro’s car could be hit by a train or he could have some accident on the highway and nobody would ever know the difference”.[17]

As the most uncompromising segregationist on the Federal bench, Judge Harold Cox of Jackson indirectly assisted the “dirty war” against black activists. Without any hint of warning, Cox canceled plans to summon a grand jury in Jackson to look into the murder case of Dahmer one month before the plan. The thing that set off Cox was the Johnson Administration’s decision, under liberal-labor pressure, to reverse itself and refund the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), a head-start program controlled by Black Power advocates. Therefore, Cox called a Justice Department lawyer into his room and presented him with the proposition—I’m not going to call any grand jury in the murder case until the Justice Department requests a grand jury to investigate CDGM. In this case, Cox’s intransigence undermines cooperative efforts between the Federal Government and Governor Paul Johnson’s Administration to make clear that murder is a crime in Mississippi.

Cox was not the only authority who showed the outside world partial racial justice in Mississippi from the Dahmer case. Governor William Waller also encouraged Klansmen’s racial violence. Charles Clifford Wilson was one of the Klansmen who participated in the murder of Dahmer. After being convicted, Wilson was freed under a work-release program inaugurated by the Governor. He was then

[17] Kevin Sack, “Mississippi Revels Dark Secrets of a Racist Time: Files of an Agency,” *New York Times,* March 18, 1998.

assigned to the Southern Mississippi State Hospital, a charity institution that chiefly served poor blacks in his town of Laurel. He was even permitted to go home at night to be with his family and to oversee his business in artificial limbs and braces. Governor Waller defended Wilson's release on the grounds that his skills as a maker of artificial limbs were sorely needed in Laurel and that his wife and three children needed him at home. He said: "Indications are from the people who have been associated with him at Parchman that he is well-balanced, without psychosis, even-tempered, mild, timid and nonviolent."[18] Wilson spent in total only part of the last three years in prison because of special leaves granted by Waller and his predecessor, Governor John Bell Williams, before the work-release program was started. When Wilson started his work-release, it was the ninth time he had been freed from Parchman on leave. Waller gave him two consecutive 90-day leaves.

However, to Mrs. Ellie Dahmer, who just lost her husband, Waller's generosity to Wilson seemed unreasonable and not fair: "Of course, if their father and husband is living, they have more hope and more to look to than we have. All we have out there is a tombstone and a grave. And with Wilson back on the ground again, encouraging the Klansmen like that, we have to live here with fear."[19] Many blacks and a few whites joined Mrs. Dahmer in protesting Wilson's release. Blacks accused Waller of openly flaunting his political power and of giving violent whites a license to kill black citizens. Some people accused Waller of making a deal with Klansmen to release Wilson and others. Both as Wilson's defense lawyer and as governor, Waller used his

[18] Roy Reed, "Release of Klansmen, Jailed for Killing Black Leader, Is Decried in Mississippi," *New York Times*, December 24, 1972.
[19] Reed, "Release of Klansmen, Jailed for Killing Black Leader, Is Decried in Mississippi."

power to give Wilson particular generosity, which made people doubt the equity and justice of the legal system in Mississippi. It's not difficult for people to see that white authorities in Mississippi couldn't remove their racial prejudice toward blacks when working on cases concerned with whites' interests.

In order to respond to the criticism, Waller took steps to place a convicted black murderer on the same work-release program. The black man was convicted of killing a white service station attendant in a quarrel over a segregated drinking fountain in the 1960s. The Governor was said to feel that releasing the black man was a favor to blacks that would balance his release of Wilson. He also appointed a black assistant superintendent of Parchman Penitentiary. The release of Wilson didn't offend many whites in Mississippi. Some observers saw this as illustration of the political power that the Klan and those sympathetic to its segregationist point of view still had in spite of the Klan's decline in membership.

All in all, Wilson's release exposed the dirty cooperation between Klansmen and law enforcement agencies and authorities in Mississippi. Governor Waller's partial behavior showed the outside world how racial violence was integrated in the legal system from the following two respects. The first was that a white Mississippi governor decided to release Wilson because of Wilson's personal interests, but the governor intentionally ignored the fact that Wilson had committed a crime. The governor even allowed another black criminal to go on work release in order to make blacks think it was a fair thing to release Wilson. He was actually trying to mix the concepts of justice and crime and indulging racial violence. The second was that the

Klan's intimidations which resulted in negative political effects were displayed in the whole case. One former Klansman said that in the last election campaign Mr. Waller and his opponent were out-promising each other on how fast they could get the three convicted Klansmen out of jail. This Klansman said that he didn't think the governor had gone far enough and Waller should have freed all the convicted Klansmen, not just Wilson.[20]

Some observers commented: "If Wilson were black, had murdered or raped a white woman, and were released so often and so casually by state authorities, the outcry would be deafening. But Wilson is white, his victim was black and his lawyer is now the Governor of Mississippi. The protests are few and far between from white Mississippians."[21] Therefore, it seemed that an old Mississippi lesson was played again in modern time. Killing a black wouldn't cause a white person much trouble because there were always kind Mississippi authorities who could protect this white person.

Although it seemed that the Klan was still protected by local authorities when Dahmer was murdered, the racial atmosphere in Mississippi was no longer the same compared to a few years before when Medgar Evers and the three civil rights workers were killed. One of the main reasons which facilitated a lightened racial atmosphere was the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Between 1964 and 1965, the United States Civil Rights Commission rushed into their investigations of Mississippi's racial problems. The Commission heard testimonies

[20] "Mississippi Justice," *Times Herald*, December 30, 1972.
[21] Reed, "Release of Klansmen, Jailed for Killing Black Leader, Is Decried in Mississippi."

from more than 100 whites and blacks and then urged "voices of moderation" to speak out more forcefully. "It would seem that the possibilities for improved communications between the races are better now than at any time in the past ten years", said the chairman of the Commission John A. Hannah, "Hopefully the voices now being heard after a long silence will begin speaking clearly and forcefully for a progressive Mississippi."[22] According to some business leaders, dramatic changes were underway in Mississippi's racial attitude. "One of the most wholesome signs in Mississippi is that it is no longer taboo to talk about racial problems," said Owen Cooper, president-elect of the Mississippi Economic Council and State Chamber of Commerce, "the state was beginning to realize that the Act was the law and that the habits of yesterday have to be cast aside."[23] The fact that blacks and whites were more willing to communicate gradually created a friendly atmosphere in Mississippi. After the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a situation favorable to blacks' voting right was immediately created. Approximately 250,000 African Americans registered to vote by the year's end, and one-third of them were registered by federal examiners. The rising voting tendency made the Klan see that it was losing its battle. Therefore, even if Dahmer was registering votes within the law, the Klan didn't hesitate to stop him, which also led to a continuous dislike of them in Mississippi.

Local people's reaction toward Dahmer's death could prove how much support the Klan had lost. Lynchers of a Negro could once generally count on quiet approval. However, the murderers of Vernon Dahmer found themselves denounced.

[22] Andrew J. Reese, "Rights Probers Report Mississippi Changes: Changes Under Way Statement Presented," *Times Herald*, February 21, 1965.
[23] Reese, "Rights Probers Report Mississippi Changes: Changes Under Way Statement Presented."

Bowers ordered the firebombing of Dahmer's house just like how he killed the three civil rights workers in 1964. Under the new racial situation in Mississippi, Bowers had gone too far with his violence. "Most white Mississippians were beginning to find him and his White Knights a disgrace and an embarrassment".[24] The former district attorney in Laurel explained: "We were becoming aware of ourselves as a lawless society".[25] The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce demanded that they be apprehended and punished. The city's three banks collected a memorial fund for the victim's family. The Hattiesburg American called the murder "a revolting, cowardly crime".[26] City, county, state, and Federal authorities all searched for the killers, which was quite rare in Mississippi before. The different authorities all held the belief that once the murderers were found, they would be convicted and punished. We can see that the intense racial ambience in Mississippi seemed to be lightened when Dahmer was killed. This was already proved a few months earlier when a white Forrest County jury startled the nation by convicting a white man of the rape of a Negro girl.

In the second half of 1966, after the Dahmer case took place, another incident in Philadelphia Mississippi showed "the most striking changes in attitude"[27] of Mississippians toward the racial violence of the Klan. During the school year between 1966 and 1967, about 100 business and civic leaders issued an ultimatum for racists to stop harassing School Superintendent J. E. Hurdle because of desegregation of the city school. In the words of one, they were "not going to let a handful of nuts harass

[24] Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 71.
[25] Ibid., 72.
[26] Roy Reed, "Dahmer Murder Enrages Whites: Reaction to Slaying Reflects a Changing Hattiesburg," *New York Times*, January 22, 1966.
[27] Jack Nelson, "'Klan Assasination' Trial Opens Today in Mississippi," *Times Herald*, October 9, 1967.

our Superintendent".[28] According to a local newspaper, community leaders had taken, for the first time, an open and organized stand for law and order. The harassment stopped immediately.

The murder of Dahmer also reflected the fact that the attitude of white Mississippians toward civil rights activists had changed greatly since the first half of the 1960s. For example, when they heard Medgar Evers's name, whites felt hatred and fear; after he died, many white Mississippians were glad with the news and showed their favor to white supremacists. When the three civil rights workers died, white Mississippians barely paid any attention to it. However, Dahmer's death irritated white Mississippians, especially middle-class whites. They were determined to fight against racial violence. The middle-class white leaders of Hattiesburg, out of a combination of respect for a fellow leader and a fear of what his murder might do to the town's reputation, made it clear that racial terrorism will not be condoned.[29] Besides the reason of a lightened racial atmosphere, Dahmer's good reputation also caused many whites to resent his death. Before he died, many of white leaders in the Forrest County could speak of him, without apparent self-consciousness, as "Mister Dahmer"; while normally whites refused to address black men as "Mr."

The murder of Dahmer did give rise to a certain uproar in Hattiesburg and deepened people's resentment of the Klan. Local civil rights activist Clarence Magee concluded that the killing affected the community seriously. It caused not only anxiety but also hurt in the community. Therefore, the Klan did achieve their purpose which

[28] Nelson, "'Klan Assasination' Trial Opens Today in Mississippi."
[29] Reed, "Dahmer Murder Enrages Whites: Reaction to Slaying Reflects a Changing Hattiesburg."

was to instil fear in people and setting controlling factors in the battle against the civil rights movement. However, they didn't realize that they themselves were falling into a gradually helpless situation because of the lightened racial atmosphere. Killing Dahmer actually made local Mississippians more aware of the significance of the civil rights movement. They realized the cause that Dahmer was struggling for at that time. Therefore, local people "probably benefitted greater after his death because of the awareness that was made to the citizens".[30] Besides, the murder drew great attention from the Federal Government and the FBI. It was the first time that the FBI seriously investigated Klansmen. As some critics said, the investigation into the Dahmer case symbolized a new stage of the FBI in dealing with civil rights crimes. It seemed that the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan was cornered step by step not only by a changing racial situation, but also by the FBI.

[30] Mike Garvey, "Oral History with James Cohen" (1976), 14; http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/coh/id/1065/rec/1

Chapter II: The Pressure from the FBI

The ten years between 1960 and 1970 not only saw the conflicts between the civil rights movement and the Ku Klux Klan, but also witnessed the fights between the FBI, the civil rights movement and the KKK. While the rest of the world, during this period, was busy with recovering from the Second World War or going through revolutions, the United States had to negotiate with the three forces for a better future for blacks. Fortunately, the result of the negotiations seemed to have satisfied most people. Blacks finally attained the right to vote and their political influence had increased enormously by the end of the 1960s. The racial power of the KKK, especially the White Knights of the KKK, gradually faded away under the pressure of public opinion and the government. Although they still occasionally stirred up social insecurity through bombings or killings after the 1960s, they had ruined their reputation and lost popular support. The FBI also went through changes, and its covert operations during the 1960s led to the questioning from the outside world after the 1960s. A Counter Intelligence Program, under the code name "COINTELPRO", was initially launched by the FBI to disrupt communist power in the States with the program name "The Communist Party, USA" (1956-1971). By the middle of the 1960s, with an increasing number of racial violence crimes committed by the KKK, the FBI launched another branch of covert operations—under the name of "White Hate", with the aim of destroying the Klan. The murder of Vernon Dahmer in 1966 provided the FBI with an opportunity to prove its determination to eliminate racial violence; and the investigation of the White Knights after the case marked the climax of the fight between the FBI and the KKK.

Launching the COINTELPRO-White Hate operation was mainly due to the fact that both the federal government and state government of Mississippi were under pressure from the racial violence of the KKK. Getting tired of racial terrorism conducted by the Klan, political leadership had to take measures to suppress it for a more secure domestic social situation. In his book *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972*, Kenneth O'Reilly describes in detail how the federal government, represented by President Johnson and Robert Kennedy, pressured the FBI to do something about the Klan's rising racial terrorism. As activities of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) pushed forward voter registration in the summer of 1964, the White Knights of the Klan launched an even stronger force to strike at Freedom Summer. Under this circumstance, civil rights activists were in great need of help from the federal government. The Johnson administration, which had just seen its civil rights bill pass the Congress, also realized the importance of suppressing Klan terrorism. Therefore, the FBI was urged by Robert Kennedy and Burke Marshall to "expand its coverage of Ku Klux Klan violence".[31]

According to an FBI memorandum from the Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts, with the subject name COINTELPRO-White Hate Groups, the Bureau launched the coordinated Counterintelligence Program (Cointelpro) which targeted against Klan-type and hate organizations. The purpose of the program was to "expose, disrupt and otherwise neutralize the activities of the various Klan and hate organizations, their leadership and adherents". The memorandum records several common methods

[31] Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 160.

used to disrupt the Klan in the program. One method was to send postcards with anonymous mailing to known Klan members. Each postcard carried a cryptic message such as "Which Klan leader is spending your money tonite?", "Is your job safe even after everyone finds out you're a Klansman?"[32] The postcards were aimed at creating dissension, distrust, and lack of confidence in the Klan and its leaders. The FBI found out Klan members were not well-educated and that they could be easily influenced by emotions. Many Klansmen acted on impulse to launch racial violence activities. Therefore a lengthy article was not a good choice to impress Klan members. Besides, the FBI intended to exploit the suspicion that the Klan leaders were living high and mighty off the dues being paid, to disillusion those who supported the Klan.[33] Sending postcards could also cause attention of Klansmen's families and work associates, making Klansmen's violent secrets exposed to the public and getting themselves into public condemnation.

The FBI also founded the National Committee for Domestic Tranquility (NCDT) to send Klansmen periodical anonymous newsletters which included imaginative proposals regarding striking racial violence subjects, creating an illusion to Klansmen that another force of attacking the Klan was raising. The NCDT newsletters were meant "to provide a ready vehicle for attacking Klan policies and disputes from a low-key, common sense, and patriotic position".[34] The memorandum points out that the newsletters might be most productive for the FBI to develop informants inside the

[32] "Memorandum, Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts—White Hate Groups," Section 1: 157.9; http://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/White%20Hate%20Groups/cointelpro-white-hate-groups-part-04-of-14
[33] "Memorandum, Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts—White Hate Groups."
[34] Ibid., 120.

Klan. Sometimes the NCDT issued special newsletters which were directed against Klan leaders. A typical example was the trick that the FBI made on Klan membership cards in the newsletter. As a Klan membership card contains letters AKIA, meaning "A Klansman I Am", the FBI changed it to AKIW, ACIA, with a respective meaning "A Klansman I Was, A Christian I Am".[35] In this way, the FBI was hoping to influence those Klansmen who were deeply religious. The results of sending postcards and newsletters were impressive. As many Klansmen didn't want their identity to be revealed, the postcards and newsletters not only exposed their identity but also embarrassed them in front of people who knew them. Some prominent businessmen and public officials who used to be secret sympathizers of the Klan were also humiliated. The postcard and newsletter operations led to confusion inside the Klan and disrupted Klansmen's will of carrying out racial violence to some extent. The White Knights were thereby weakened and the United Klans of America (UKA) had difficulty in controlling the situation.

Besides sending mails, the FBI also developed other techniques to cause disorder within the Klan. Finding out that the Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton of the UKA used a stamp which bore his signature to sign communications and that he had a stenographer to typewrite his letters, the FBI decided to reproduce an exact replica of Shelton's signature stamp and the common letter paper Shelton used to direct Klan letters on a highly selective basis. The FBI hoped that in this way dissension could be caused within the leadership of the Klan and Klan members could be alienated. The

[35] Ibid., 104.

mass media program of the FBI, discrediting Klan members by utilizing the press, was also part of COINTELPRO-White Hate mission. The Bureau's use of the news media was mainly in two forms: "placing unfavorable articles and documentaries about targeted groups, and leaking derogatory information intended to discredit individuals".[36] The FBI sent anonymous letters, which contained information about a Klan individual that the Bureau wanted to discredit, on many occasions to editors, broadcasters, commentators, and columnists around the country. They paid journalists who were "amenable" to disseminate anti-Klan information supplied by the Bureau in order to get the truth out and thus form "a proper picture of the FBI's jurisdiction, its activities".[37] News media helped the FBI to publicize Klansmen arrests and identify Klan leaders. To complete the program, the FBI developed a special correspondence list, which consisted of individuals who had requested various FBI publications. They were kept on a continuing list and could get FBI publications through mails. Special agents were also assigned to take charge of various field offices to establish ties with "the media, and as well business leaders, law enforcement officers, mayors, and other prominent public officials in their respective cities".[38]

Extending the group of informants was an important way for the FBI to infiltrate Klan organizations. Informants were mainly individuals who were to some extent emotionally disturbed. They were asked to present false testimony to the courts to frame COINTELPRO targets for crimes these targets did not commit. "Snitch

[36] "Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and The Rights of Americans—Final Report of The Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations," April 23, 1976.

[37] "Hearing before the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities of the United States Senate Ninety-Fourth Congress," 1:6, 88.

[38] O'Reilly, *Racial Matters,* 207.

jacketing", was another way to cause disruption inside the Klan. It made the target looks like a police informant or a CIA agent in order to isolate or alienate Klan leaders and therefore increase "the general level of fear and factionalism in the group".[39] The FBI also developed paid informants, who became "agents provocateurs" by raising controversial issues to take advantage of ideological divisions, by promoting enmity with other groups, or by inciting the group to violent acts. These informants, or FBI provocateurs, had initiated many violent acts such as forceful disruptions of meetings and demonstrations, attacks on police and bombings. Therefore, the development of FBI provocateurs was also a typical symbol of the FBI's use of extralegal methods to carry out the COINTELPRO program, which, in many critics' eyes, breached the fundamental democratic spirit of the US.

In Mississippi, FBI's informants played a significant role in disrupting White Knights. After the three civil rights workers were murdered in Neshoba County, Klansmen who were involved in the case had confided in Wallace Miller, who was the first organizer of the White Knights in Lauderdale County. However, Miller was already recruited by the FBI as an informant in the Meridian Police Department. He therefore provided the information about the murders of the three civil rights workers. Other informants such as Delmar Dennis and James Jordan who were recruited at the same time also provided important clues. Their information revealed the identity of two Klansmen involved in the murders, Cyclops Frank Herndon and Kleagle Edgar Ray Killen, and made them finally confess in court. Dennis incriminated Sam Bowers

[39] Paul Wolf, "COINTELPRO: The Untold American Story" (2001), 9; https://archive.org/stream/CointelproTheUntoldAmericanStory/COINTELPRO#page/n0/mode/2up

and quoted Bowers' words after the murders of the three civil rights workers: "It was the first time that Christians had planned and carried out the execution of a Jew."[40] In the beginning of 1965, Dennis provided Bowers' recruiter McDaniel with a list of White Knights who had become critical of Bowers, trying to increase the tension inside the Klan. Besides, as Bowers failed to provide financial help to Lauderdale and Meridian Klansmen who were also indicted in the murders of three civil rights workers, the heads of these two Klan groups Alton Wayne Roberts and Billy Birdsong were annoyed. Bowers, in the summer of 1965, began to lose large numbers of Klansmen especially most Meridian Klansmen and Klansmen who lived outside Jones County.[41] By the end of 1965, more than 15 percent of the Klan was working for the FBI.[42] Information supplied by informants enabled the Bureau to track down Klansmen who were responsible for racial violence such as burning and bombing of over twenty homes in the McComb area; the FBI could even "forestall violence in certain racially explosive areas".[43]

The COINTELPRO-White Hate program was not limited to the FBI, it was also extended to the Mississippi Highway Patrol. The cooperation between the FBI and Mississippi Highway Patrol made great efforts in suppressing the White Knights in Mississippi. In the rest of this chapter, I will analyze how the FBI cooperated with Mississippi Highway Patrol and what contributions highway patrolmen made in striking the White Knights. Looking into the Mississippi Highway Patrol also enables

[40] Douglas O. Linder, " The Mississippi Burning Trial"; http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/price&bowers/account.html
[41] John Drabble, "The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE and the Decline of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in Mississippi, 1964-1971," *Mississippi Historical Review* (2004).
[42] Michael R. Belknap, *Federal Law and Southern Order* (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), 155.
[43] Belknap, *Federal Law and Southern Order*, 156.

us to detect the political intentions of the authorities, which were represented by Governor Paul Johnson and FBI Director Edgar J. Hoover, and thereby to find out what effects these authorities' attitudes could have on the development of Mississippi's political atmosphere. The analysis of Mississippi Highway Patrol is mainly based on interviews with various individuals such as Mississippi law enforcement officer Ken Fairly, former Mississippi Highway Patrol investigator George Saxon and former FBI agent William F. Dukes and Paul B. Johnson III, the son of Governor Paul B. Johnson Jr.

As an acting state police agency for Mississippi, the Mississippi Highway Safety Patrol specializes in the patrol of state and federal highways through Mississippi to enforce traffic laws. Belonging to the Mississippi Department of Public Safety, the Highway Patrol is entitled with the power to arrest anyone who commits a crime in its presence.[44] The vicious Klansmen that patrolmen had to deal with during their cooperation with the FBI were not only from the White Knights, but also from the Universal Klan and the Original Klan. When the patrolmen were working, they didn't have to make a strong distinction between different Klan groups. All Klansmen worked together; the only differences were that they had different leaders and only some Klansmen could benefit financially from the racial violence. The reason that the White Knights was said to be the worst and the most violent group was that they killed the three civil rights workers and Vernon Dahmer, even though other Klan

[44] "An introduction to Highway Patrol", Mississippi Department of Public Safety. http://www.dps.state.ms.us/highway-patrol/

groups were not any less a problem than the White Knights.[45]

Many patrolmen's work was focused on the area of Natchez, where the most vicious Klansmen in Mississippi were. The Klan had two kinds of members, the first were those who contributed money to Klan activities; the second were the men who did most dirty work such as killings and bombings. The second kind of Klansmen were the most dangerous because there were no limits to what they would do. According to George Saxon, some blacks in Natchez kept going missing, for which he held the Klan responsible. The patrolmen had to interview black families where one of the family members had gone to work one morning and didn't return that afternoon. Most missing people never turned up. And Klansmen never admitted responsibility for such cases.

To the patrolmen, their first mission of striking the Klan was to identify as many of the members as they could. Then they narrowed down the scope, trying to identify the Klan members who were doing the dirty work and then put around-the-clock surveillance on these Klansmen. The cooperation with the FBI saved highway patrolmen a lot of effort. As the FBI could buy information from informants and they were financially able to purchase surveillance equipment, it provided patrolmen with more convenience in the process of striking the Klan. Most patrolmen were paired up with one FBI agent to work together. Their close working relationship earned both patrolmen and the FBI enough credit to work in local communities. However, working together with the FBI also required patrolmen to

[45] Reid S. Derr, "Oral History with Mr. George Saxon" (1993), 21; http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/coh/id/6205/rec/1

have attended the FBI National Academy and to have been investigated and cleared. Therefore a trust could be built between the FBI and the patrolmen for better cooperation. In 1960s Mississippi, it was really very difficult to distinguish who was a member of the Klan and who wasn't. In most small cities, the sheriff's department and the city police department either had family or friends connected to the Klan one way or another. It was also common for patrolmen to be Klan members.

Right after he was elected governor, Paul Johnson put out the order that he would give those Klansmen hidden in the patrol an opportunity to come forward and identify themselves and disavow their connection to the Klan, otherwise they would be terminated. Quite a few patrolmen turned in their Klan paraphernalia and identified themselves as members. In order to clear their own self, these Klansmen were required to name everybody that they knew in the Klan, through which Paul Johnson was able to make a list of a thousand suspected or known Klansmen. When FBI director Hoover came down to Mississippi in July, 1964, Governor Johnson gave him this list, indicating that the highway patrol was interested in striking the Klan even before the FBI got interested. Those patrolmen who didn't expose their identity were dismissed or fired.

The curfew that was imposed by patrolmen in Natchez helped a lot with constraining weapons and weakening potential local violence. The curfew was in effect from ten o'clock in the evening to six in the second morning. Patrolmen checked everything that moved during the night. During the curfew, patrolmen checked a lot of vehicles and confiscated many firearms; and they helped to protect

both blacks and whites from each other. Most important, the imposition of a curfew enabled patrolmen to control Klan activities. Klansmen had less chance to "come in and ride through town and shoot up the black section"; and the blacks also had less chance to "retaliate by doing likewise" and therefore a warfare in the town could be avoided.[46] In this case, patrolmen were able to control the local security situation and suppress the Klan to a great extent.

Ordinary people in Mississippi also offered patrolmen great help in suppressing the Klan. In the interview, Saxon was surprised at the number of white Mississippians who were concerned about blacks. White Mississippians hated to see racial violence or other riots. Therefore some white people were even glad to help patrolmen collect information. Most of the informants who gave patrolmen information were unpaid. Different from the paid informants that the FBI employed, this other group of unpaid informants worked for patrolmen only out of their concern for blacks and the hope that they would never see the state torn up by riots. The rising number of informants indicated that many Mississippians in the middle of the 1960s started to get tired of the Klan violence and wanted a peaceful change to take place in the state.

In terms of the murder of Vernon Dahmer, it was the close cooperation between the FBI and Mississippi Highway Patrol that finally enabled them to break the case. Finding out who were involved in the case didn't take long; the FBI first kidnapped a Klansman Cecil Victor Sessum who was in meetings to plan a firebombing. Sessum

[46] Reid S. Derr, "Oral History Lt. Col. Billie Hughes" (1993), 12; http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/coh/id/3584/rec/1

said that he heard Bowers say: "Something has to be done with the Dahmer nigger".[47] According to Sessum, Bowers told the group that Dahmer was a "big NAACP Nigger", who was getting too many Negroes to register to vote and that some "good men" were needed to stop him. This Klansman also named everyone that was involved in the case and many details such as who drove cars, who the drivers were and who did the shooting. When the investigation started, each patrolman was paired with an FBI agent and each team was assigned to follow one of the people involved in the case. The team would keep the suspects under surveillance. As long as the team got familiar with the routine of one suspect's, they would meet him where they knew he would show up. Then the suspect would be asked questions related to the murder case; he couldn't lie or hide information to the agents because they already knew his identity and what he had been up to. After following the suspects and interrogating them, the patrolmen were finally able to arrest them. This was also how Sam Bowers was found out by the FBI and patrolmen. When a team first operated the surveillance mission on Bowers, Bowers disappeared and slipped out of the control of the FBI and patrolmen. Later the teams found another patrolman, who was believed to have helped Bowers escape the surveillance of the highway patrol. Bowers was seen by an FBI agent in this patrolman's car. After this patrolman's identity was exposed, he agreed to cooperate and finally persuaded Bowers to turn himself in.

During the process of working out the Dahmer case, both the FBI and Mississippi Highway Patrol presented their determination to find out suspects and really prosecute

[47] "Dahmer Murder and the Response of the Church—The FBI Memorandum," 3.

Klansmen by building a mutual trust and cooperating with each other. Daily, patrolmen were debriefed by the FBI, in a joint meeting, on the assignments they had for the day. They shared with each other almost all information they had in their hands. In Mississippi, it was very common that many police departments and sheriff's departments had Klan-related employees; either some people who worked there were Klansmen or they had ties to the Klan. Neither the FBI nor the Highway Patrol could totally trust local authorities. As mentioned above, even some patrolmen were Klan members. Therefore not everything was shared inside the patrol. That the FBI and Mississippi Highway Patrol shared information with each other proved a more transparent reliable cooperation which enabled them to better fight with the Klan. As Saxon comments in the interview, it was "a joint effort" between the FBI and patrolmen that finally broke the Klan in Mississippi.

The murder of Vernon Dahmer and the later arrests and indictments greatly influenced both the local community and the Klan itself. As discussed in the first chapter, unprecedented outrage toward the Klan was aroused among white Mississippians in the area. Laurel District Attorney Lindsay Carter and local mayors began to publicly denounce the White Knights. Under the severe racial circumstance caused by the Dahmer case, the head of the White Hate program, William Sullivan, recommended an escalation of intelligence and counterintelligence actions against the Klan two months after the case took place,[48] trying to put more effort into disrupting white supremacists publications, organizational finances and public meetings. During

[48] O'Reilly, *Racial Matters,* 223.

the next few months after the Dahmer case, the FBI also mailed more cartoon postcards and fake letters to members of both the White Knights and the United Klans of America, depicting "embezzlement and personal aggrandizement by Klan leaders".[49] The action of sending more postcards resulted in defections and factionalism as well as conflict between rival Klan organizations.[50] As the prestige of the White Knights was severely damaged, a lot of Klansmen quit in case any charges would put them into prison. According to the FBI Mississippi Burning Case File, within half year after the Dahmer case, the number of hardcore Klansmen in Lauderdale County had been reduced to between seven and ten.[51]

What's more, internecine violence inside the White Knights also began to affect the organization itself in 1966. John Drabble's analysis of the Klan in Mississippi shows how Sam Bowers lost his support inside the White Knights. Bowers declared that the Republican Party was ruled by the Jews when he endorsed the candidacy of James O. Eastland at a public rally, which irritated attendees who endorsed the Republican. They therefore forced Bowers to take back his words and ended his speech by threatening him with weapons. One Klansman even threatened Bowers with death if he ever returned to the area. The leadership of Bowers was severely questioned inside the White Knights. Also, the damage to the reputation of the White Knights caused by the Dahmer case was enormous. Due to the cooperation of the FBI and Mississippi Highway Patrol in disrupting the White Knights as well as the

[49] John Drabble. "From White Supremacy to White Power," *American Studies* 48.3 (2007): 55.
[50] John Drabble. "The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE, and the Decline of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in Alabama, 1964-1971."
[51] "FBI Mississippi Burning Files (MIBURN)—Jackson to Director," May 4, 1966.

denouncement of the Klan from local Mississippians, the decline of the White Knights was accelerated. In early 1966 the membership of the White Knights decreased from around 6000 to 1500; after a year, by the early 1967, this number had dropped again to only 400.[52] Disrupting the White Knights showed Mississippi to be a more law-abiding society; "for the first time that Mississippi had an efficient, professional law enforcement agency comprising the sheriff's department which began to have good staff and training".[53]

Despite the success that the COINTELPRO-White Hate operation had achieved, it cannot be ignored that the FBI, in the first half of the 1960s, was reluctant to intervene in Southern racial violence crimes. Under the leadership of director J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI never seriously put disrupting the Klan on their agenda. The murder of Dahmer was actually the first case that the FBI really prosecuted Klansmen. As a pro-segregationist, Hoover was not hundred percent willing to cooperate in the first place. First of all, he lacked sympathy for civil rights activists of any color and his hate against Martin Luther King was well known. Secondly, he connected his own political interests with carrying out the operation. As O'Reilly already analyzes, of all FBI's counterintelligence programs such as the ones against Socialist Workers and New Left activists, only the program against the Klan was initiated because of outside pressure. The pressure came from the press and the White House, from Robert Kennedy and from the civil rights movement itself. When first required by Kennedy and Marshall to strike the Klan force, Hoover "threw up a wall of institutional

[52] "The Klan's Battle Orders," *London Times*, October 31, 1967.

[53] Orley B. Caudill, "Interview with Mr. William F. Dukes: native Mississippian, lawyer and former FBI agent" (1973), 34; http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/coh/id/1998/rec/1

resistance by sealing off the Bureau from the Civil Rights Division."[54] According to Belknap, the Bureau "was understandably reluctant to disrupt its relationships with southern police departments by pressing too hard on civil rights matters".[55] Hoover thought that the FBI should combat racial violence only by training southern police to cope with it themselves.[56]

However, no matter how reluctant Hoover was to engage with Southern racial problems, the pressure from the President Johnson finally made him compromise. After the three civil rights workers disappeared, President Johnson "took an intense personal interest".[57] He followed the case closely and personally questioned FBI officials about the progress of the investigation. Later President Johnson sent retired head of the Central Intelligence Agency Allen Dulles to Mississippi, as the president's personal representative, to discuss law enforcement issues there with Governor Paul Johnson. After the visit, Dulles advised President Johnson to send more FBI agents to Mississippi; Hoover was therefore persuaded by the President to do something down there and then decided to "open a new big office in Jackson".[58]

The fact that President Johnson agreed to send the FBI to Mississippi indicated a change in the Federal Government's attitude toward solving racial violence problems in Mississippi. In this case, the White Knights were not only fighting with the FBI; they were actually facing a changing political atmosphere in Mississippi. Only wanting to firebomb the Dahmer house in the beginning, the White Knights didn't

[54] O'Reilly, *Racial Matters,* 166.
[55] Belknap, *Federal Law and Southern Order*, 113.
[56] Ibid., 114.
[57] Ibid., 153.
[58] O'Reilly, *Racial Matters,*167.

expect the death of Dahmer; nor did they expect that their destiny foreshadowed the coming change of Mississippi politics.

Chapter 3: A Governor Who Kept Mississippi from Burning

The FBI's intervention in the murder of Vernon Dahmer not only manifested the enforced federal power in Mississippi, it also indicated a great change in Mississippi politics. Before the middle of the 1960s, Mississippi was widely known for being hostile to outsiders. James Silver famously described Mississippi as a "closed society", a "hyper-orthodox social order in which the individual had no option except to be loyal to the will of the white majority. And the white majority…subscribed to an inflexible philosophy which was not based on fact, logic, or reason."[59] This philosophy was white supremacy. Mississippi politics had been led by segregationists who had very strong faith in white supremacy. Since the late nineteenth century, Mississippi governors had all been Democrats; this situation didn't change until 1992, when the first Republican candidate, Kirk Fordice, was elected Mississippi governor after more than a century of Democratic governors in office. It can be said that Mississippi was the most southern state in America, with a firm segregation policy as its founding spirit and white Democrats as the most loyal defenders of this spirit. The most influential change of Mississippi politics took place in the 1960s. It was stimulated by the civil rights movement and laid the foundation for Mississippi's later political changes in the second half of the twentieth century. The change was, in the early time, represented by a gradually weakening segregation force and a strengthening of black influence in politics. It later fostered the growth of the Republican party, which eventually ended Mississippi's one-party politics. Paul

[59] James W. Silver, *The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, INC., 1966), 154.

Johnson Jr., as a governor who was in office in the middle of the 1960s, actually helped to push forward these political changes, which improved the racial atmosphere of Mississippi and doomed the White Knights as well.

Before the middle of the 1960s, Mississippi's being a closed society was displayed in two aspects. The tradition of segregation had prevailed in the whole state for almost a century. Many Mississippians were used to this way of living. They refused to abandon the tradition and accept a racially integrated society. Mississippi governors had been defending segregation and they even supported racial violence during the civil rights movement. On the other hand, the Federal Government had attempted to avoid intervening in Mississippi's political situation. In the late 1950s, Vice President Richard Nixon already expressed his worry that extending federal power and responsibility to southern states was "contrary to Republican tradition".[60] Faced with the problem of racial violence during the civil rights movement, the federal authorities tended to ask local governments themselves to handle the problem. The Head of the Civil Rights Division Burke Marshall insisted that "problems of protection had to be the responsibility of local law enforcement agencies".[61] If local southern governments were reluctant to deal with racial violence themselves, the federal government should persuade them to do it. The White House even replied that "the role of the Federal Government in our constitutional system is limited" when demanded to "correct the inadequacies of southern law enforcement".[62] The encouragement of segregation by local authorities and inaction by the Federal

[60] Belknap, *Federal Law and Southern Order*, 61.
[61] Ibid., 74.
[62] Ibid., 75.

Government allowed racial violence to flourish in Mississippi.

As Lieut. Governor from 1959 to 1963, Paul Johnson contributed to the defense of segregation in Mississippi. Serving under staunch segregationist Ross Barnett, Johnson showed the public his support for segregation by playing a prominent role in trying to prevent James Meredith from enrolling at Ole Miss in 1962. In 1961, a black veteran student James Meredith started applying to Ole Miss in the hope of receiving a better law education. Even though eight years had passed since the historic *Brown Decision*, no southern university had yet implemented this decision. Meredith was therefore turned down by the university two times. He later appealed his case to at the Supreme Court with advice from the NAACP. The Supreme Court finally granted him the right to attend an all-white university. On September 20, when Meredith tried to enter Ole Miss with the escort of federal marshals, he was blocked by mobs and Mississippi officials. Riots soon erupted between Mississippi protesters and federal marshals. President Kennedy sent in thousands of troops to put down the violence and also federalized the Mississippi National Guard. Though Meredith was finally able to be registered at the university, the riots caused two deaths and dozens of injuries. Therefore the riots were marked as the first armed confrontation between the Federal Government and the South since the Reconstruction in Mississippi. In the riots, Paul Johnson physically blocked federal authorities who were attempting to get Meredith through the cordon of men resisting his entrance. He also ordered the Mississippi Highway Patrol, who surrounded the campus but didn't make any moves, not to hinder the marshals but not to help them either. Later he and Governor Ross Barnett

were charged with criminal contempt by the Justice Department; they had "failed to instruct Mississippi state officials to maintain law and order".[63] Paul Johnson was also threatened with a daily fine of 5,000 dollars if he failed to show that he had complied with court orders.

However, Paul Johnson's act of physically resisting federal marshals in the riots at Ole Miss actually helped him gain a lot of political stock, proving him a determined segregationist candidate for the gubernatorial election in 1963. When he started running for governor, Paul Johnson was described as "the most extreme of the four segregationist candidates seeking the Democratic nomination for Governor".[64] Paul Johnson "pledged to continue Gov. Ross R. Barnett's militant racial policies"[65] and Barnett's massive resistance to racial integration. His winning at the Democratic gubernatorial nomination reflected Mississippi segregationists' resentment against the Kennedy administration. Governor Barnett strongly supported Paul Johnson and said that Johnson's victory "amounted to an endorsement of states' rights, constitutional government and segregation of the races".[66] According to news analysis, Paul Johnson based his governor campaign almost solely on the riots at Ole Miss; he also won votes by stating that J. P. Coleman, another moderate segregationist candidate, was the Kennedy candidate. It can be said that Paul Johnson's victory at the Democratic nomination reflected a strengthening segregation force in Mississippi. Before the governor's election in November 1963, people predicted that Paul Johnson,

[63] "Order to Fine Riot Governor in U.S.: Justice Department Request," *The Irish Times*, October 6, 1962.
[64] Joseph A. Loftus, "Lieut. Gov. Johnson is Leading in Mississippi Governor Race," *New York Times*, August 7, 1963.
[65] John Herbers, "Avid Segregationist Wins in Mississippi," *New York Times,* August 28, 1963.
[66] Herbers, "Avid Segregationist Wins in Mississippi."

if he would win the election, might bring Mississippi another four years of leadership like the staunch segregationist Ross Barnett.

After being elected governor, Paul Johnson proved people's prediction right in the first period of his administration. Just before the 1964 Civil Rights Act was signed into law, he asked white Mississippians not to "comply with the section prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations"; instead, "they should challenge it in the Federal courts".[67] Faced with the Freedom Summer, Paul Johnson was also absolutely opposed to it. He classified organizations which participated in the Freedom Summer, such as the Congress of Racial Equality and the National Council of Churches, as extremists. He also believed that the objective of the summer project was "to force a violent crisis that would bring a second occupation of Mississippi by Federal troops".[68] In terms of local law enforcement, problems also appeared. At the same time Paul Johnson was elected governor, elected local sheriffs included some of the most infamous racial terrorists in the state. One successful candidate was well known for his killing of a Negro just before the election; another one had been involved in a lynching. It is no wonder that the three civil rights workers were murdered under the conspiracy between a local sheriff and the Ku Klux Klan. Though the FBI sent people to investigate the disappearance of the three civil rights workers, Paul Johnson didn't show much willingness to cooperate and offered little help. As he said to the press: "I think that race relations would be excellent if these agitators were

[67] Claude Sitton, "How Mississippi's Johnson Sees His Task: He Denounces Civil Rights," *The New York Times*, July 5, 1964.
[68] Sitton, "How Mississippi's Johnson Sees His Task: He Denounces Civil Rights."

not in the state. I think the Negro is well off and that he knows he's well off."[69] Apparently, Paul Johnson was satisfied with segregation and didn't expect any change or improvement of the racial situation in Mississippi.

Nevertheless, what Paul Johnson really contributed to Mississippi during his administration changed his image of being a segregationist. He brought about an overall transition in the state's economy and in dealing with racial violence as well. The prediction that he would bring Mississippi the same kind of leadership as Ross Barnett did not materialize. In spite of the fact that Paul Johnson strongly supported segregation in the first year of his administration, he soon switched his executive focus to the economic development of Mississippi. In early 1965, Paul Johnson started to plan a blueprint of urbanization for Mississippi. Though Mississippi was regarded by many people at that time as a typical rural area, Paul Johnson wanted to attract industry and stimulate urbanization. He would like the satisfaction of knowing that Mississippi "had contributed something of value to our country's growth and development".[70] The governor believed that Mississippi was qualified to become "one of the limited number of regional service centers which are going to be developed throughout the nation".[71] To realize his plans of urbanizing Mississippi, Paul Johnson urged Jackson voters to approve two million U.S. dollars in bonds to finance a Mississippi Universities Center, where the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University could do research together. This research center mainly focused on applied research for industrial development and the coordination of

[69] Ibid.
[70] "Gov. Johnson Finds Mississippi Ready for Urban Planning Role," *New York Times*, March 4, 1965.
[71] "Gov. Johnson Finds Mississippi Ready for Urban Planning Role."

research programs of state agencies. Paul Johnson also encouraged vocational and technical training; many programs were initiated to provide related services.

In his book *Mississippi: A Documentary History*, Bradley Bond also points out that Mississippi, under Paul Johnson's administration, "must arm its industrial development effort with the ability to recruit labor for incoming new industry and custom-train these workers for the jobs created by the new plants".[72] As many other states had already initiated programs for similar objectives, Mississippi, in order to join the competition, must also upgrade the skills of its laborers with increased effort and get fully prepared for its industrial development. Paul Johnson also supported the work of the Mississippi Agricultural and Industrial Board (A and I Board) actively. A and I Board is Mississippi's economic development agency. It administers development and promotional programs, helping to improve the image of Mississippi in the national business community and extend the state's prestige in industrial area through advertising Mississippi's unique advantages. According to Clarence Benton Newman, a former executive committee member of the A and I Board who had worked together with Paul Johnson, Governor Johnson "was very active on the A and I Board".[73] He "was a brilliant man, a man of high principle and character, dedicated to Mississippi and Mississippians; he loved this state and he wanted to do good for the state and the people".[74] Paul Johnson always actively cooperated with committee members of the Board on solving problems and expanding the Board. Besides, he

[72] Bradley G. Bond, *Mississippi: A Documentary History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 280.
[73] Charles Bolton, "Oral History with Clarence Benton Newman" (1992), 60; http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/coh/id/5953/rec/1
[74] Bolton, "Oral History with Clarence Benton Newman", 60.

pushed the expansion of another state program—the Agriculture, Industry and Commerce Program (A I C Program), which aimed to balance the development of state agriculture, industry and commerce and keep the state economy in a healthy state.[75]

In order to get rid of low-paying, traditional industrial jobs such as poultry work, Paul Johnson also endeavored to develop a higher grade of industry for Mississippi. Another big move during his administration which proved this ambition was to pass a 130 million U.S. dollar bond issue to finance a major expansion of the Ingalls Shipyard in Pascagoula. This "shipyard of the future"[76] was located on the east bank of the Pascagoula River. Paul Johnson led his group of lawyers and realtors to meet with the Ingalls Shipyard people "to convince them that they should build a second shipyard in Pascagoula".[77] After knowing that a hundred and thirty million dollars would be needed for building a second shipyard, Paul Johnson then managed to get the support of the legislature and the voters. As news reported, building this shipyard "is the largest sale of tax-exempt bonds ever sold to benefit a specific industry and it is by far the largest such sale ever to be backed by the full faith and credit of a state".[78] Through the A and I Board, Mississippi leased the shipyard to the Ingalls Shipbuilding Corporation for 40 years. Meanwhile, the construction of the shipyard accelerated vocational training in the state. Paul Johnson's "strong interest in

[75] Bond, *Mississippi,* 281.
[76] John H. Allan, "Industry Aid: Largest Sale of Bonds Set: Mississippi Plans Industrial Bonds," *New York Times,* November 12, 1967.
[77] Orley B. Caudill, "Oral History with George A. Stevens", 44; http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/coh/id/6968/rec/1
[78] Allan, "Industry Aid: Largest Sale of Bonds Set: Mississippi Plans Industrial Bonds."

developing vocational and technical training" [79] enabled industries in the South to increase the skills of their laborers. People who would be added to the personnel forces of Ingalls Shipyard could be trained in the vocational school located right near the coast without having to be sent to somewhere else. They would be trained till they got familiar with the operation process.

Apart from the main actions above that Paul Johnson had pushed forward to develop the state's economy, he also supported legislation to encourag a more favorable business climate in Mississippi. He and his team passed technological research legislation and they helped to connect the A and I Board with the Junior College Commission of Mississippi and put more emphasis on vocational and technical training for junior college students. In 1965, Mississippi found more of its people engaged in manufacturing than in agriculture and the trend continued.[80] Paul Johnson's contribution in the economic area earned him much praise among Mississippians. Many people remembered him as being an "outstanding"[81], "very smart" governor, "one of the greatest in the history of Mississippi".[82] Paul Johnson not only helped to attract industry and provide more jobs for Mississippians, he had also been leading the state in developing world trade, encouraging Mississippi industries to become more aware of trade opportunities available to them from all over the world.[83]

The plans of stimulating the economy and encouraging employment met the

[79] Caudill, "Oral History with George A. Stevens", 45.
[80] Walter Rugaber, "Moderate Leads Mississippi Contest," *New York Times*, July 9, 1967.
[81] Charles Bolton, "Oral History with William G. Gray" (1999), 11; http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/coh/id/2743/rec/4
[82] Bolton, "Oral History with Clarence Benton Newman", 27.
[83] Caudill, "Oral History with George A. Stevens", 32.

interests of Mississippi's local business community in the middle of the 1960s. Being afraid that a chaotic racial situation could not bring a harmonious environment for developing business, local chamber of commerces began to realize that "Mississippi is not an island to itself, but is an integral and responsible part of the United States".[84] After the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, they issued a statement opposing any further resistance to federal law. As historian John Dittmer put it, "The state of Mississippi was getting a very bad name—not only nationally, but internationally. You had a great fear that if the resistance continued, that the economy of the state would be in ruins".[85] Apparently, racial violence was less and less welcome by local business community. Johnson's economic plans could bring more attention to the state development and put the White Knights in an unfavorable position.

Johnson also encouraged changes in Mississippi's race relations. As recounted in the first chapter, people in Mississippi started to get tired of Klan violence in the middle of the 1960s; even segregationists began to oppose racial violence. Besides, the Klan had also become "a serious law enforcement problem in much of the state".[86] Though being elected governor as a supporter of segregation who vowed to fight integration, Paul Johnson also could not put up with racial violence anymore and started to suppress the White Knights in the middle of the decade. His efforts in striking the White Knights brought people a more positive image of Mississippi, a state which was willing to accept the flood of the civil rights movement and to

[84] Kate Ellis and Stephen Smith, "State of Siege," http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/mississippi/e1.html
[85] Ellis and Smith, "State of Siege."
[86] John Herbers, "Gains in Mississippi: Influence of Racists is Found Waning Despite Continued Cases of Violence," *New York Times*, October 6, 1964.

change.

Interested in the Mississippi Highway Patrol, Paul Johnson always "wanted to do everything he could to improve the patrol".[87] To build a closer relationship with the highway patrol was Paul Johnson's main method of improving Mississippi law enforcement and suppressing the White Knights. According to a former highway patrolman, Colonel Hughes, the Mississippi Highway Patrol came into being "more or less a lower-key, laidback organization that had a good reputation, that did a good job"[88] until a changed political climate in the 1960s. Patrolmen responded to major crimes such as bank robberies or killings; other time they "enjoyed somewhat of a low profile, pretty easy-going life".[89] Focusing only on dangerous crimes and staying low-profile did increase the tempo and the intensity of patrolmen's job. Under the great support of Paul Johnson, the Mississippi Law Enforcement Training Academy opened, which not only changed the way the highway patrol functioned, it also helped to improve the professional level of patrolmen. The Academy offered patrolmen more time of in-service training without being bothered by other local officers. Through the training, patrolmen got more aware of what should be done to maintain and care for different weapons and other aspects of the job. They got more involved in both training and actual field operations; they also developed expertise in accident investigation and other areas of law enforcement. The Academy increased the overall professional capabilities of the patrolmen at that time. Mississippi Highway Patrol therefore evolved from "a laid-back country police organization" to a good "law

[87] Derr, "Oral History with George Saxon", 11;
[88] Derr, "Oral History with Lt. Col. Billie Hughes", 7.
[89] Ibid.

enforcement organization of professionals with modern professional standards."[90]

The construction of the Mississippi Law Enforcement Training Academy showed Paul Johnson's determination to improve law enforcement in the state. Colonel Hughes called Paul Johnson a man "for law and order and for doing what was right".[91] Law enforcement was a rather controversial problem in Mississippi in the 1960s, seeing as some Klansmen had infiltrated Mississippi law enforcement agencies. Therefore Paul Johnson found it important to improve the image of law enforcement in the state. He was very progressive in training law enforcement officers to a higher standard and required them to be clear about their job and to do it in a right way. Hoping that the public could approve and respect what law enforcement officers did, Paul Johnson meant to rebuild a good reputation and prestige for them in the state. In this way, the governor earned trust and loyalty from both patrolmen and other law enforcement officers. "He gave them the self-respect and self-esteem that they needed. He provided an esprit de corps type atmosphere. They had someone they could rely on, that would back them up in law enforcement. There was a mutual trust".[92]

It was this "mutual trust" that encouraged the Mississippi Highway Patrol to fight against the Klan violence and enabled them to cooperate with the FBI on the murder case of Vernon Dahmer. After the murder case took place, Attorney General Katzenbach at that time immediately stated that he would ask the Justice Department to assist in identifying and assisting the suspects. In June 1966, Sam Bowers and fourteen other Klansmen involved in the case were indicted by a federal grand jury.

[90] Ibid., 8.
[91] Ibid., 16.
[92] Reid S. Derr, "Oral History with Paul B. Johnson III" (1993), 10.

However, seven years ago in 1959, Mack Parker, a black man who was accused of raping a white woman, was abducted by a white mob from a jail in Mississippi. Ten days later, highway patrolmen and FBI agents found his body in a river in Louisiana. Though the FBI was finally able to identify the suspects and had even obtained confessions from the mob, the federal government did not prosecute the case. IThe governor of Mississippi at that time—J.P. Coleman—tried to present the case to the local county grand jury. However, the grand jury called no FBI witnesses and did not even consider the case. Likewise, a federal grand jury also failed to return indictments for the killing of the three civil rights workers. The great contrast between the authorities' attitudes toward these cases manifested a big improvement on the part of Mississippi law enforcement in dealing with racial violence crimes.

Improved law enforcement enabled the Mississippi Highway Patrol to cooperate with the FBI and to work out the Dahmer case with high efficiency, which rarely happened before in Mississippi history; developing industries offered more Mississippians a job and transferred people's attention from racial conflicts to economic development at the same time. These were two representative transitions that took place during Paul Johnson's administration. Under his leadership, Mississippi in the middle of the 1960s also underwent other political and racial changes: a better cooperation between the state government and the federal government; the White Citizens Councils gradually lost its influence in the state[93]; more public officials began to speak out against Klan violence; the number of black

[93] Herbers, "Gains in Mississippi."

voters and integrated public places increased. Like what he said in his inaugural address: "Hate, or prejudice, or ignorance will not lead Mississippi while I sit in the governor's chair",[94] Paul Johnson "was not encouraging anything like Ku Klux Klan or militant groups, and he was not going to feed them; he was not going to tolerate them".[95] The governor cared about the image of Mississippi in a national scope; and he had "an earnest and a burning desire to do what's best for the people of Mississippi",[96] to inject something positive to the state other than racial conflicts.

Though the Dahmer case ended up a with hung jury that saved Sam Bowers from going to prison, the fact that the Mississippi state government worked hard with the FBI to solve the case and that a federal grand jury finally indicted the suspects, confirmed that Mississippi was serious in dealing with racial crimes. Paul Johnson may not have completely ended the White Knights' criminal movements, as insults of blacks still happened after his administration; but through expanding industries and strengthening law enforcement, he moved the focus of people's life from defending segregation to developing economy. "We needed progress… we needed to get Mississippi on the move on the economic map".[97] Racial violence conducted by the White Knights gradually turned to a disruption to local people's intention of making a living. They therefore became less popular in the state and the racial atmosphere was also alleviated. Paul Johnson brought Mississippi "a generally quieter period in the

[94] "Mississippi Helm Taken by Johnson," *The Washington Post*, January 22, 1964.
[95] Reid S. Derr, "Oral History with Dr. Michael Smith", 17;
http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/coh/id/6760/rec/2
[96] Bolton, "Oral History with Clarence Benton Newman", 65.
[97] John Jones, " An Interview with Paul B. Johnson, Jr" (1980), 18;
http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/coh/id/3803/rec/2

life of the state", which was different from Ross Barnett's "tumultuous" [98] administration. As Paul Johnson commented himself: "I was an honest man and did what I thought was to the best interests of the people…I gave it everything I had",[99] he did bring "a stabilizing influence" and "four years of peace"[100] to Mississippi, which helped to "keep Mississippi from burning"[101] because of racial conflicts.

[98] Orley B. Caudill, "Oral History with Russel C. Davis" (1974), 15; http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/ref/collection/coh/id/1648
[99] Jones, " An Interview with Paul B. Johnson, Jr", 27.
[100] Orley B. Caudill, "Oral History with George W. Rogers", 41; http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/coh/id/9261/rec/1
[101] Derr, "Oral History with Lt. Col. Billie Hughes", 17.

Conclusion:

In his book *Federal Law and Southern Order*, Michael Belknap shows how the relationship between the Federal Government and southern states evolved during the civil rights era. The Federal Government had been trying to keep itself away from southern disorder caused by racial violence and to let southern states solve racial problems by themselves. Though racial crimes had been sweeping the South for years, the Federal Government did not make any substantial progress in helping to restore order until the middle of the 1960s. After the enactments of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the Federal Government began to find it urgent to solve racial problems in the South otherwise the disorder could threaten constitutional rights. Yet the Federal Government, even if it had sent the FBI to the South and brought some racial crime cases to a federal grand jury, did not make the decisive contribution to the final crackdown of the Ku Klux Klan. The political climate that black voters and black political power began to transform in the middle of the 1960s "forced"[102] white Southern officials to comply with their duty of restoring law and order and protecting civil rights activists. It was the southern people themselves who restored law and order, while the Federal Government offered help and brought more attention to racial problems.

In terms of the Dahmer case, the cooperation between the FBI and local Mississippi government presented a typical example of how a southern state developed its relationship with the Federal Government during the civil rights movement. The local racial atmosphere when Dahmer was murdered was already

[102] Belknap, *Federal Law and Southern Order,* 250.

greatly improved. It was many white Mississippians' concern that law and order would be completely undermined by the White Knights. Therefore federal help could be readily accepted by local people. Besides, local officials represented by Governor Paul Johnson realized the significance of restoring the order in the state; they were more willing to cooperate with the Federal Government than formerly. The attitude of being willing to cooperate offered both sides a chance to suppress the White Knights. However, without local Mississippians' determination to combat racial terrorism, the Federal Government could not have succeeded in restoring order in the state, which reflected Belknap's conclusion that local people were the most important factor in the war against racial violence.

The Dahmer case indicated a slow but influential political change taking place in the South. On the one hand, black political power was rising as the traditional prominent segregation politics quickly faded. Driven by the civil rights movement, approximately 250,000 black Mississippians registered to vote by the end of 1965 and one-third of them were registered by federal examiners. More stores employed Negro clerks and roads and streets in Negro neighborhoods were improved. The voting situation of the whole South had also improved substantially: "Almost two-thirds of the southerners of voting age were registered in 1968, and some 14.8 million, approximately 51 percent of the voting-age population, cast ballots".[103] By the end of the 1960s, "the number of blacks in the old Confederacy who could cast ballots had

[103] Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 127.

more than doubled".[104] More than 500 blacks were elected officials and law enforcement officers.

On the other hand, the solid one-party politics in the South was finally ending. The Republican Party began to gain strength in the strong Democratic South. In *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction*, Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham analyze the situation of the Republicans' growing power in the 1960s in the South. Since the early 1960s, there had been more Republican gubernatorial and senatorial candidates and some were able to defeat Democratic candidates. For example, in 1962, a Republican T. Broyhill defeated an equally conservative Democrat Hugh Q. Alexander in North Carolina; a candy-manufacturer William E. Brock defeated a liberal Democrat Wilkes T. Thrasher in Tennessee. These gains represented "a 36 percent increase in the size of the southern Republican House delegation, the largest since Eisenhower's coattails carried four new Republican congressmen to Washington in 1952".[105] In Mississippi, Paul Johnson also met a very competitive Republican candidate Rubel Phillips when he was running for Governor. Rubel Phillips was a Democrat, but he switched parties to become only the third Republican since 1877 running for Governor. Though he failed in the end, Rubel Phillips was a powerful challenge to Paul Johnson. In Jackson he had majorities in black and upper-status white precincts, which resembled "the coalition of blacks and suburbanites that had become so common in state Democratic factional politics".[106] According to a table provided in the book *Southern Governors and Civil Rights* by

[104] Belknap, *Federal Law and Southern Order,* 238.
[105] Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction,* 101.
[106] Ibid., 102.

Earl Black, the mean republican gubernatorial vote from 1950 to 1973 was 11.3, much higher than that between 1921 and 1947, which was only 0.4.[107] In the Presidential election of 1964, the Republican nominee Barry Goldwater had great appeal to white voters in the Deep South. "He pulled all five Deep South states—Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina—into the Republican column for the first time since Reconstruction".[108]

The growing black political power and the Republican force both contributed to the increasing influence of moderate and non-segregationist politicians and the decline of strong segregationists. Based on *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, before the Voting Rights Act, from 1954 to 1965, there were 59 strong segregationists running for Governor in the Deep South area; while this number decreased to 35 after the Act between 1966 and 1973. The number of moderate segregationist candidates also declined from 41 to 12 between the two periods. Yet the number of non-segregationist candidates increased substantially from none to 54. Alone in Mississippi, the number of strong segregationist candidates declined almost half from 100 to 57. The numbers of moderate and non segregationist candidates both increased: the first from 0 to 14 while the second from 0 to 29. The changes implied that segregation gradually lost its popularity; people started to accept the tendency of desegregation.

In Mississippi, the impact of federal intervention also weakened strong segregationists and empowered local Republican force. Thad Cochran, for example,

[107] Earl Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights (*Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 247.
[108] Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights,* 106.

began to emerge as a significant Mississippi Republican candidate in the 1970s. He was first elected as a Congressman in 1972 for twelve counties in Mississippi. In 1976, Cochran was reelected to the House of Representatives. In 1978, he became the first Republican who won a statewide election for the Senate in Mississippi in over a hundred years since the Reconstruction; and later Cochran has been reelected five times. In a recent Mississippi Senate Primary runoff, Cochran defeated a Tea Party candidate Chris McDaniel by 7,682 votes in 286 most Democratic precincts in Mississippi. The voting results of the whole state proved that Cochran won "through a surge in black, Democratic turnout" [109]. The development of Cochran's political career exemplifies the rising popularity of the Republican Party in Mississippi since the civil rights movement and that more blacks began to accept Republicans.

Under a circumstance where the civil rights movement was gaining its momentum in Mississippi, the White Knights chose to express their dissatisfaction by conducting a racial crime again. Yet they did not realize that the racial situation was different from years ago, their violence stimulated Mississippians to rethink about their attitude toward racial crimes and the civil rights movement, which caused the White Knights to be finally denounced by local people. More importantly, Dahmer's death forced Mississippi to work with the Federal Government again. This cooperation not only brought the decline of the White Knights, it also broke Mississippi's status of being closed to the outside world, encouraging the development of local civil rights movement and a two-Party political system.

[109] Nate Cohm and Derek Willis, "More Evidence That Thad Cochran Owes Runoff Win to Black Voters," *New York Times,* July 15, 2014.

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