

Reconstruction and the Ku Klux Klan



ABOUT THE READING In the years following the Civil War, the Freedmen’s Bureau and the white Republicans who moved from the North to govern the former Confederate states faced increasingly violent opposition. The Ku Klux Klan rode through the countryside by night, beating their victims and destroying their homes to frighten African Americans and white Republicans away from the polls. As the terror mounted, sworn statements like this one flowed into the Freedmen’s Bureau and the offices of elected officials such the Republican governor of North Carolina, William W. Holden.

VOCABULARY

endeavored tried

persecuted harassed

sensible aware



As you read think about the effect that this attack might have had on the local African American community.

Statements, depositions, and other records submitted by Gov. William W. Holden relating to crimes of the Ku Klux Klan against citizens of North Carolina, 1869–1871

Wyatt Prince, Colored

Being first sworn to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, says he is a citizen of North Carolina, and a resident in the County of Chatham.

In the month of July, while at home with my family, and all in bed asleep, a company of white men, masked, approached my house, and without giving any warning, burst the door in and one of the number struck a match, and from the light thereof saw where I was lying and exclaimed, “there he lies, come in boys, come in,” and immediately

Members of the Ku Klux Klan typically wore white masks and flowing white robes.

Source: *Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General, 1870–1880 National Archives.*

the house was filled with men who gathered around him. I attempted escape/d/, when one of the number exclaimed, “. . . Shoot him boys! Shoot him.” Whereupon they commenced shooting with pistols and wounded me in the right arm, left side, left thigh, and below my left knee. During this time I had moved from my first position and they missing me, they **endeavored** again to strike a match, and not succeeding, I made my escape through a window and fled to the woods. For several weeks I was bedridden with my wounds. I am now a refugee from my home, and cannot return for fear of losing my life. These Ku Klux frequently visit my house of a night and have declared that if they ever catch me, they intend to cut me open and fill my body with rocks and sink it in the river. My family are still in Chatham, I cannot go to them, nor can they come to me. My corn crop still stands in the field ungathered and my cotton has been gathered in part by one of my enemies and appropriated to his own use. I believe I know four of the persons who made the attack upon me.

His family was forced to flee after the attack.

Alvin Nash, colored, who brought the information of the outrage upon me to Raleigh has been **persecuted** for the part of friendship he showed to me. His liberty has been taken from him, and he is under arrest under false charges.

I am not **sensible** of having done anyone a wrong—I attended to my own business, and only have given offence by being, or I believe, a true Republican.

Wyatt (X) Prince

Sworn and subscribed before me this the 21st day of December, 1870.

W. Whitaker, J. P.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Why does Prince believe that he was attacked?

2. In what ways has the attack affected Prince, his family, and friends?

3. What does Prince's statement that he knew the identity of his attackers suggest is the Klan's main reason for wearing masks and striking at night?
