

## **Globalization, Identity, and the Florida Realm of the ORION Knights of the Ku Klux Klan: Landscapes of Resistance in Immokalee, Florida**

Thomas Chapman

As places across the globe have become increasingly interconnected, people are experiencing a 'speeding up' of the pace of life, in which barriers in space are rapidly broken down by a globalizing economy. There is a feeling that the world is shrinking, and even that it will collapse in upon us (Harvey, 1989). This process and their associated feelings are not new, but are deeply embedded in the history of capitalism and the relentless drive towards newer and newer modernities. In the twenty-first Century, these dualities of time and space seem to have taken on a new 'hyper-urgency' in overcoming spatial barriers and accelerating the pace of economic and social life. This compression of time and space can indeed instill a sense of incoherence, where a 'crisis of identity' has created a profound sense of disconnectedness between the global and the local (Gallaher, 2000). These feelings are especially threatening to those involved in racist movements, where people build trenches of resistance on behalf of God, nation, and race, and in which they feel they are under assault from these techno-economic global processes that are beyond their local control (Castells, 1997; Gallaher, 2000; Flint, 2004).

Even as people realize the interdependent nature of their world, they are unable to feel an active agent in it. Interconnectedness of places is undeniable, yet simultaneously uncontrollable, and therefore somewhat mysterious (Gallaher, 2000). This phenomena, which scholars see as beginning in the 1970's, has resulted in the re-emergence of hate group activity, primarily as a response to threats of

*Thomas Chapman is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Geography at Florida State University.*

job loss by “Americans”. This economic polarization is in part a direct result of the globalization process that continues on into the new millennium, especially where large-scale migratory movements in search of work have profoundly affected social reproduction at the local level (Harvey, 1989; Gallaher, 2000). These economic frustrations, combined with a racist agenda can sometimes result in territorial conflicts that manifest themselves as a process of global space played out within a contested local landscape. Such was the case in Immokalee, Florida in September 2003, when members of the local Ku Klux Klan made an appearance to protest against the mostly Hispanic migrant farm workers that dominate the local labor force. I will begin this discussion by placing the activities of the Ku Klux Klan within a general geo-historical context, including a review of other geographer’s work on linking globalization processes and identity to spaces of hate and racism. I will then illustrate how transnational flows of immigrant farm labor (a seemingly permanent fixture of the late stages of capitalism) are linked with the spaces of Immokalee, Florida in the context of the rhetoric of the local Ku Klux Klan. In demonstrating how modern global hegemonic processes are used to contest this Florida landscape, I will discuss the role of geographical scale, and how it is used to establish the collective identity of both the local Klan and the local immigrant farm labor rights group, formed to challenge domination and oppression of farm workers in the region.

### **A Twentieth Century Geohistorical Interpretation of the Klan**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century Klan claims its revival in 1915, beginning with an event atop Stone Mountain in Georgia, coinciding with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the civil war. Klan members proposed a large-scale relief sculpture atop Stone Mountain, of a group of hooded reconstruction-era Klansmen, to remind Southerners of the debt they owed “to the Ku Klux Klan which saved us from Negro domination and carpet bag rule”. Geographies of memory sought to glorify the Confederate cause, legitimating a related narrative of intolerance through public iconography (Medlicott, 2004). The twentieth century Klan was not just a feature of Southern life, however, as strongholds were common outside southern states. Membership in-

creased dramatically in the 1920's, peaking at about four million members.

From the 1920's and onward into the new millennium, Ku Klux Klan activities and acts of protest motivated by hate can be linked to various stages in America's dominant role as purveyor of cultural, economic, and political influence across the globe. These protests are played out through space and time, and provide insight into how members of the Klan express their local dissatisfaction with these global hegemonic influences. With each succeeding phase in America's geo-political and economic discourse, new American 'ways of life' took shape, and continued to further marginalize pre-modern traditional ways of life that provoked violent, racist, and xenophobic reaction. As a result of these various stages of American hegemony, Klan activities began taking on different roles and targeted new victims. As such, new "geographies of hate" were formed as they played out across various landscapes at various times. For example, the Klan's mission expanded from an almost exclusive anti-black message in the early twentieth century, to pro-American, anti-Catholic, and anti-Semitic rhetoric by the end of the 1920's. The Klan also began an all-encompassing moral crusade attacking bootleggers, adulterers, corrupt businessmen, and just about anybody deemed to be acting outside of community norms. Women comprised about half the membership in some states (Flint, 2001).

The rise in Klan membership during the 1920's coincides with the end of World War I, as American social, economic, and cultural power began to coalesce and take shape as a prime 'global' modernity, in which American influences fundamentally altered the social relations of production and reproduction across the globe (Taylor, 1999). New methods of capitalist production took the form of Fordism, and new global political considerations took form in debates surrounding the League of Nations and isolationism. Economic growth that spurred immigration unsettled many Americans; and fears of 'immoral behavior' reflected massive cultural changes. Perhaps most influential to activities of the Klan during this time was the rise of American international presence that produced a reaction of isolationism. Cries of "one hundred percent Americanism" and fears of a

takeover by the Roman Catholic Church reflected fears of a loss of sovereignty. The rapid global changes, with America at the helm of cultural and economic influence, was seen as a direct threat to the “traditional American Lifestyle”, and the Klan’s supporters saw the organization as a tool to conduct “social surgery” and save America (Flint, 2001).

Specific targets of Klan activity in the 1930’s began to expand outward. Anti-Catholicism, anti-immigration, attacks upon the role of the automobile in immoral behavior, and prohibition were political attempts to stop social change. Industry and the city were geographic manifestations of these fears, as people in rural areas where the Klan was most active perceived a loss of citizen status. This rural/urban conflict epitomized a new ‘American way of Life’ that associated urbanization with progress and change. The Klan was seen as a bulwark against “the anarchy” that seemed to be destroying the settled and traditional ways of village life in the days of bootlegging, prohibition, ‘city immorality’, broadcasts by the radio and cinema, and the immoral evils of the automobile, called ‘a house of prostitution on wheels’ by some. Hence the basis of Klan activity was also a local reaction to changing urban/rural geographies associated with economic, cultural, and political changes that established new modes of ‘The modern American way of life’ (Flint, 2001).

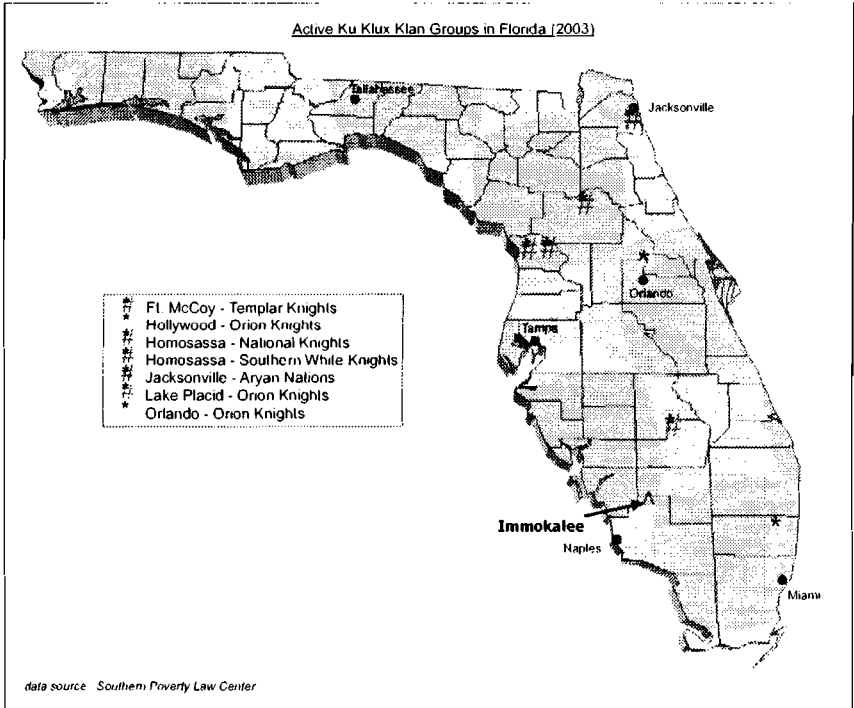
Florida had an estimated 30,000 Klan members during this period, in which Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando, and Tampa were strongholds. Although Florida Klansmen continued to terrorize African Americans, they expanded their targets to include union organizers, particularly in the citrus belt from Orlando to Tampa. During the 1940’s, a Florida Klan revival was initiated by Dr. Samuel Green, an Atlanta doctor, who formed the Association of Georgia Klan, which quickly spread to Florida and at least six other states. On election night of 1948, the Florida Klan paraded from Lake County to Wildwood, marching through several African American neighborhoods, to show support for Dixiecrat presidential candidate Strom Thurmond and attempt to intimidate black voters. In January 1949, Klansmen held a motorcade through Tallahassee, where newly- inaugurated governor Fuller Warren, a former Klansmen himself, denounced them as

"hooded hoodlums and sheeted jerks." The Klan's power was particularly strong in Orange County, where its ranks included prominent lawmen, businessmen, and elected officials: Sheriff Dave Starr was a known Klansman, as were a county commissioner and the city manager of Winter Park. Apopka and Winter Garden were particularly infested: Apopka's police chief, constable and night patrolman all belonged, as did one constable and the justice of the peace in Winter Garden. One businessman estimated that 75 percent of Apopka's male population belonged.

During the 1950's suburbia became the domestic landscape of new consumer society (Taylor, 1999). In the fashion of previous American hegemonic influences, it was a way of life to be emulated, with its image being broadcast across the world through television and cinema. The suburb was a way of life that epitomized consumerism based on Fordist wages and a gendered division of labor. Suburbia was the image and reality of American prime modernity, as the white middle class was re-establishing a sense of collective identity within the bucolic suburban setting. The message of exclusion of minorities and the "others" that lived in the city disseminated by the Klan in the 1920's became part of the suburban lifestyle that defined American modernity at the time. The message was clear: Blacks and other minorities were not welcome in these suburban white spaces (Flint, 2004).

During the 1950's in Florida, the Klan was at a crossroads. Harry T. Moore's Progressive Voters' League had registered 100,000 new black voters in the Democratic Party; NAACP branches were challenging Jim Crow ordinances over the use of public golf courses, swimming pools, and libraries; and the Florida Legislature passed an anti-mask ordinance by an overwhelming margin. The Klan responded with a rash of cross burnings and floggings from the Florida Panhandle to Miami. Florida Klan groups began trying to roll back this progress with so many bombings, or attempted bombings, that the northern press dubbed it "The Florida Terror." Into the 1960's, Florida remained a Klan stronghold, particularly in the Jacksonville area (Public Broadcasting Service, 2001).

Map 1.



## Global Change, Local Anxieties

As America enters a new phase of international globalization, it has produced a paradox, where the spatial dimensions of late American hegemony call for a need to construct a national economic base while simultaneously creating a contradictory need to diminish the importance of national borders, particularly for unskilled farm labor. This dilemma is part of the framework in the twenty-first Century that provides fuel to the established fires of American nativism, which continues today as a prime ideology of the Ku Klux Klan (Flint, 2004, Southern Poverty Law Center, 1991). Previous American hegemonic cycles have always favored a territorial defined social compact that favors white, skilled workers over non-skilled workers and people of color within the American economy. Disruption of this

compact by heavy reliance on non-American unskilled farm labor helps explain the Klan's reactions to the "others" that are taking away jobs meant for "Americans" (Silver & Slater, 1999; Flint, 2001). Political and economic realities of globalization have allowed corporations to tap low-cost labor across national borders through a vision of global free trade. Situating race within this broader political-economic global restructuring provides insight into what sort of "problem" immigrant workers in Immokalee pose to the Klan.

Immokalee is Florida's largest migrant farm worker community, located in Collier County, about 30 miles from Naples (map 1). The community is split, roughly, along the following ethnic/national origin lines: 50% Mexican, 30% Guatemalan, 10% Haitian, and 10% other mainly Central American nationalities. Virtually all workers are transitory, spending 8-9 months picking produce to be sold on the national and international market, and then migrating north during the summer to do similar work. The work itself is exhausting, and is paid in piece work: At the going rate of 45 cents a bucket, laborers must fill 125 buckets (about 2 tons of tomatoes) just to earn \$56 in a day. Some workers eventually do go on to work in other jobs in the area, mostly low income and low skilled occupations in the service and building construction trades (Coalition of Immokalee Workers, n.d.). As such, Immokalee is truly representative of a place that plays a crucial role in the exploiting of foreign workers that plays out across twenty-first Century capitalist global space.

Members of the Ku Klux Klan appeared in Immokalee to protest a migrant farm workers rights rally, sponsored by the Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers (CIW). The coalition was formed in the early 1990's, in part as a response to the repressive working conditions inflicted on workers in the tomato fields and orange groves of Southwest Florida. Since then, the Coalition has grown into a 2,700 member organization with a staff of eight, educating migrant farm workers of their rights, and organizing labor actions. The local Klan group is associated with the Florida realm of the O.R.I.O.N. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, based in Lake Placid, FL. They waved Confederate and American flags, and held signs saying "Stop Non-White Immigration" and "Illegal Immigrants Equal Terrorists". They also handed

out fliers saying “STOP Immigration and keep Americans working” (Naples Daily News, 2003).

### **Social Constructions and Geographies of Hate**

The spaces of white, racist identity articulated by the ORION Knights in Immokalee are constructed by both race and class relations, which is often expressed at the scale of the nation-state in the form of intense nativism. This core identity is a common thread that binds white racists together. Oftentimes, these racialized constructions rely on and react to various struggles for social justice created to counter the identity politics of whiteness that perpetuate domination and oppression, and which justify exclusion (Lipsitz, 1998). The Coalition of Immokalee Workers represents such a struggle for social justice through advocating for immigrant Hispanic labor rights. In part, reactions of the Klan in Immokalee can be seen as a local manifestation of race and class construction embedded in the rhetoric of “jobs for Americans”. Calls for local labor rights from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers creates more spatial visibility for the plight of immigrant farm workers, hence racist identity constructions perpetuated by the ORION Klan have a clear (and local) target.

ORION stands for “Our Race is Our Nation”, and a visit to their website ([www.orionknights.com](http://www.orionknights.com), n.d.) reveals a historical paradigm as a white racist history, where universal religious beliefs were linked with racial constructions, and sovereignty was associated with early European (and white) Christianity. This was a period when culture was embedded in the glories of the church and the king, and political conflict was framed in religious terms (Taylor, 1999; Bonnett, 2000). By invoking “Our Race is Our Nation” as a “defense of White Christendom”, the racist ideology emanating from the ORION Klan is a pre-modern reaction to a globalized political-economy, where borders and nation-states are continually transgressed by international pools of labor and capital., and in which the spaces of Immokalee represent a materialization of such border ‘transgressions’.

To become a white racist, it is also necessary to identify with whites as a racial collective by drawing sharp socio-cultural boundaries between the white race and other races (Blee, 2004). Klan ideol-



ogy can thus be seen through a geography of racism. These geographies are detected through a textual reading of the ORION Klan's goals as stated in their website: 'White brothers and sisters are united in a *common cause*'; the struggle for 'the *common* welfare and the greater good and general betterment of *our* people'; and the 'fight for the very survival of *our* race, *our* culture, and *our* religion (emphasis added).' All of these statements imply ownership and separation of white space. Invoking the "other" as a "pot of multi-cultural foolishness" implies a direct threat to ownership and control of this white space. Thus the perceptions that migrant farm worker "terrorists" are invading the spaces of Immokalee.

'White' identity is heightened for racial hate groups such as the Klan, because they see it as a marker of racial victimization rather than racial dominance. The racial self-consciousness of white supremacists grows out of the notion that whites have endured oppression in the past and present (Blee, 2004). Examples of such feelings are invoked throughout the ORION Klan creed, as they feel a need to 'defend white Christendom against the onslaughts of anti-Christian, multi-cultural, race-mixing Babylon'. In this sense, they are threatened and victimized by the fear that whites are in danger of 'throwing away their heritage and birthright'. Rural tradition, memories of past glories, and attempts to halt change are closely held, pre-modern Klan ideals that are threatened by the economic insecurities of globalization. These so called 'threats' lead to the kind of Klan protests in Immokalee that are cloaked in rights of local economic sovereignty constructed by race and culture.

### **Legitimizing the Movement through Geographical Scale**

Increasingly, the couching of local economic power within discourses of hyper-nationalism relies on larger scales for legitimization (Gallaher, 2000). The ORION Klan protest was a local manifestation of much larger anti-immigration rhetoric that was rooted in alliances with other white supremacist groups nationwide. Thus the protest in Immokalee transcended geographical scale beyond the local to the nation-state. In this sense, the ORION Klan used extra-local anti-immigration rhetoric to justify their position locally and to legiti-

mize local power and sovereignty. This “jumping of scale” is generally viewed as a political strategy for dealing with the forces that originate from varying scales of power. Places such as Immokalee struggle to negotiate extra-local forces, often global in nature, in order to establish some sort of control over how those forces will effect the locale, which then become “spaces of engagement” (Cox, 1998; Gallaher, 2004). A protest by the Klan in Immokalee is just one example of how a local place struggles with outside forces that have created a need for cheap foreign farm labor, and are deemed a threat by the Klan.

However, this “jumping of scale” is not created in a vacuum. Using various scales to legitimize a particular movement is not only used for transgressive purposes (such as hate and racism), but is also part of a progressive strategy designed to legitimate calls for human rights and social justice, creating a socio-spatial power struggle between competing actors (Castells, 1997). For example, the migrant farm worker’s rights rally in Immokalee was but one stop along a nationwide tour that was sponsored by the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride Coalition . The coalition sponsored a “Freedom Ride”, inspired by the 1961 Freedom Rides for black civil rights. They made more than 100 stops in small towns and big cities across America to promote their reform agenda: greater workplace protections, reunification of immigrant families, and a “road to citizenship” for America’s estimated 8 to 10 million undocumented workers (Immigrant Workers Coalition). The ride culminated in a rally at Liberty State Park in New Jersey, within the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, perhaps the best known icon in the world for immigration.

Along the way, however, a variety of white supremacist hate groups took part in counterdemonstrations, picking up the same key message the local Ku Klux Klan in Immokalee had invoked: That immigrants are wrecking the economy and “stealing” jobs from U.S. citizens. The racist Klan rhetoric in Immokalee was also invoked by the likes of Hal Turner, a well known New Jersey white supremacist who called the freedom riders “slime, filth, criminals, enemy invaders, mongrels and savages who have slithered their way into this country from every cesspool Third world nation on Earth.” As more

than 50 counter-demonstrators took up Turner's chant — "Arrest the illegals! Arrest the illegals!" — They waved hand-painted signs toward the immigrant rights rally: "Illegal Invasion," "Mine the Mexican Border," "No!!! Minority White America," "I Never Asked for Diversity." The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) also met the immigration activists in Miami, and demanded federal officials arrest all undocumented workers. The California Coalition for Immigration Reform insisted the protesters were criminals, had no rights, and had to be deported immediately. In Chicago, members of the white supremacist Council of Conservative Citizens joined together with the Neo-Nazi "White Revolution", holding signs that said "No More Free Rides - No more Welfare - No More Stolen Jobs". And in Atlanta, D.A. King of the Georgia Coalition for Immigration Reduction had a similar reaction after protesting a Freedom Ride stop outside Atlanta: "I got the sense that I had left the country of my birth and been transported to some Mexican village, completely taken over by an angry, barely restrained mob. My first act on a safe return home was to take a shower." (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2003).

In order to maintain the 'purity' of whiteness, racist groups feel a need to defend themselves in relationship to 'the other'. These social constructions of 'us' versus 'them' materialize out of a desire to distinguish what is 'good, normal and pure' (and hence white), in relationship to what is bad, abnormal, and impure'(non-white). In this case, what is established as abnormal (the other) are Hispanic immigrant workers, defined by white supremacists as being 'dirty, criminal, or diseased'. Thus, these coalitions of white racists not only invoked a larger geographical field by banding together to counter demonstrate, but their targets were those "others" that would threaten "their" economic space. The rights of white nationalists help construct their 'whiteness' by "othering" the freedom riders as "dirty criminals" that were illegally taking jobs meant for Americans.

## **Conclusion**

The reality of migrant farm labor in Immokalee is but one example of how new and modern global demands for international divisions of labor can create a localized response that is rooted in hyper-

nationalism and racism. These international boundary crossings protested by the Klan threaten their sense of collective identity, as they struggle to maintain nativist social borders defined by 'whiteness'. The ORION Ku Klux Klan's racist agenda and ideologies look inward and demand purity while reacting with hate to the new global scales of social production and reproduction. Institutions of global scope embed themselves in everyday life, producing a sense of loss of local control where pre-modern constructs of Klan identity are seriously threatened.

In a very geographical sense, the post-modern era of globalization gives rise to ever increasing border crossings that manifest themselves through increasing demands for low cost migrant farm labor. Reactions of hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan can be seen as a marker of racist ideology as a reaction to such border crossings. As globalization continues to initiate economic dominance through political and social influences, it plays an important role in shaping personal identity and social relations, where racism continues to be embedded in personal life politics. These identities are inextricably intertwined with capitalistic pressures toward personal advantage and materialism, and are actualized through a reflexively ordered environment that links personal identity to systems of global scope (Giddens, 1991). The presence of foreign born Hispanic migrant farm labor in Immokalee is but one example of how these personal identities are played out through discourses of hate and discrimination which are masked by economic protectionism. The reality of global capitalism continues to increase the demand for low paying, unskilled, foreign labor pools. In the case of the ORION Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, these demands created a localized response couched in hyper-nationalism and racism. Legitimizing job protectionism through othering immigrant workers as "unclean, non-white criminals" remains a viable weapon in the arsenal of hate and discrimination employed by various "anti-immigration" groups throughout the nation. Justification of these spaces of hate are also played out and justified through group alliances that expand outward into wider geographical fields. This illustrates the continuing need for proactive movements such as immigrant labor rights to combat these racialized spaces by using

their own socio-spatial constructions embedded within geographies of social and economic justice.

## References

Bonnett, Alastair. *White Identities: Historical and International Perspectives*. Prentice Hall (2000).

Blee, Kathleen. "The Geography of Racial Activism: Defining Whiteness at Multiple Scales." In *Spaces of Hate: Geographies of Discrimination and Intolerance in the USA*. New York: Routledge (2004).

Castells, M. *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Vol. II. The Power of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell (1997).

Coalition of Immokalee Workers. Website [www.ciw-online.org/1-aboutciw.html](http://www.ciw-online.org/1-aboutciw.html). (last accessed Aug. 2004)

Cox, Kevin. "Spaces of Dependence, Spaces of Engagement and The Politics of Scale, or: Looking for the Local Politics." *Political Geography* 17 (1998): 1-23.

Flint, Colin. "Right Wing Resistance to the Process of American Hegemony: The Changing Political Geography of Nativism in Pennsylvania, 1920-1998". *Political Geography* 20, 763-786 (2001).

Flint, Colin. "United States Hegemony and the Construction of Racial Hatreds: The Agency of Hate Groups and the Changing World Political Map." In *Spaces of Hate: Geographies of Discrimination and Intolerance in the U.S.A.* (ed. Colin Flint) New York: Routledge (2004).

Gallaher, Carolyn. "Global Change, local angst: Class and the American Patriot Movement". *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (2000), vol. 18. pp. 667-691.

Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford University Press (1991).

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Enquiry into the origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell (1989).

Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride Coalition.

Website <http://www.iwfr.org/default.asp>. (last accessed Sept. 2004)

Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press (1998).

Life Magazine. "Klan Marches Again in Florida". September 12, 1938.

Medlicott, C. "One Social Milieu, Paradoxical Responses: A Geographical Reexamination of the Ku Klux Klan and the Daughters of the American Revolution in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century." In *Spaces of Hate: Geographies of Discrimination and Intolerance in the U.S.A.* (ed. Colin Flint). New York: Routledge (2004).

Naples Daily News. "Ku Klux Klan members protest immigrants' rights rally in Immokalee". September 28, 2003.

New York Times. *Pictures of the Times: A Century of Photography from the New York Times*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. (2002).

Orion Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Website

<http://www.orionknights.com/gloryofstars.htm> (last accessed March 2004).

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). "Freedom Never Dies: The Legacy of Harry T. Moore."

<http://www.pbs.org/harrymoore/terror/k.html>. Last accessed November 7, 2005.

Silver, Beverly J. and Eric Slater. *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1999).

Southern Poverty Law Center. "Special Report: The Ku Klux Klan: A History of Racism and Violence", 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (1991).

Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Report. *Rough Ride: Anti-immigration Activists Confront a Pro-migrant Freedom Ride Group*. December, 2003

Taylor, Peter J. *Modernities, A Geohistorical Interpretation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1999).