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A FAMILY HISTORY PROJECT

Presented To

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Course Requirements of

Social History of U.S. Since 1865

Towson State University

By

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May 13, 1977
INTRODUCTION

The two years following 1896 were perilous ones in North Carolina. The new system of local self-government resulted in Negro control in most of the eastern counties and towns. Wilmington, the state's leading city, with a population of 8,000 whites and 17,000 blacks was completely under Negro rule . . . . The whites were determined to put an end to this Negro rule and just as the Ku Klux Klan had come into existence in the state in 1868 to put the Negro "in his place", the Red Shirts now became prominent. The members of this secret organization wore red shirts and "represented the fixed determination of the whites to put an end to existing conditions . . . . " Ordinarily they did not resort to extreme measures. A few Negroes were killed, however . . . .

A proud race, which had never known a master, which had never bent the neck to the yoke of any other race, by the irresistible power of fusion laws, and fusion legislation, has been placed under the control and domination of that race which ranks lowest, save one, in the human family.

The business of two of the largest and most prosperous cities in the state have been paralyzed by the blight of Negro domination.

In another city, the white majority had been discriminated against in favor of a black minority.

White Woman, of pure Anglo-Saxon blood, has been arrested on groundless charges by Negro constables and arraigned, tried and sentenced by Negro Magistrates. . . .

NEGRO CONGRESSMEN, NEGRO SOLICITORS, NEGRO REVENUE OFFICERS, NEGRO COLLECTORS OF CUSTOMS, NEGROES in charge of white institutions, NEGROES in charge of white schools, NEGROES holding inquests over the white dead. NEGROES controlling the white finances of great cities. NEGRO CONSTABLES arresting white women and white men, NEGRO MATISTRATES trying white women and white men, white convicts chained to NEGRO CONVICTS, and forced to social equality with them. . . .

Before this overwhelming array of evidence, the weak and puny wall set up by the apologists of Negro rule, crumbled away, then came the collapse. They had seen the handwriting on the wall. Everywhere they went in the face of the brave and chivalrous white man of the state a cool, calm, fixed resolution and determination that these things must stop; that hereafter, white men should make and administer the laws; that Negro supremacy should forever end in North Carolina.

The battle had to be fought. The victory is within our reach. North Carolina is a White Man's State, and White Man will rule it, and they will crush the party of Negro domination beneath a majority so overwhelming that none will ever, again, dare to attempt to establish Negro rule here. . . . (News and Observer, November 3, 1898).

Wilmington, November 10, 1898

Wilmington has been all excitement today, though comparative quiet reigns tonight. Yesterday, a large mass meeting of business men demanded of the Negroes that the plant and editor of The Daily Record, the newspaper which
recently printed the vile slander of white women of
the state, be removed from the town by 7:00 this morning.
The demand was not acceded to by the Negroes, and at
8:30 o'clock, 600 armed white citizens (Red Shirts) went
to the office and proceeded to destroy the printing materi-
al. While this was in progress, in some unaccountable
way, the building took fire and was burned to the ground.

Incensed at this, a number of Negroes assembled and a
clash between whites and blacks. . . . (News and Observer,
November 11, 1898.)

Wilmington, November 12, 1898

The new city government has thoroughly established law
and order. Under Mayor Walder's direction, order has been
brought out of chaos and a military patrol is to be dis-
pensed with Monday. Negroes who fled in droves Thursday,
and have since been in hiding, are coming back to town,
many of them in a famished condition. Many of them, however,
are still leaving on their own accord. Ex-Mayor Wright
left the city today. He bought a ticket to New York City
and it is not believed that he will ever return. Others
will follow.

Negro rule is at an end in North Carolina and forever.
The events of the past weeks in Wilmington and elsewhere
place that fact beyond all question. . . . (News and Observer,
November 13, 1898).

So it was in 1898, in Wilmington, North Carolina, birth-
place of my father, and the origins of my family. On that night,
of November 10, 1898, my father was only five years old. Yet
that evening is a vivid memory of his. So often he told us of
how the Red Shirts of Wilmington, the white supremacists, rode
into the black residential areas of Wilmington, burning, shooting,
raping, beating. He recalls how his father, my grandfather, was
hidden in the walls of the house to escape death in the hands
of the Red Shirts. And as the article in the News and Observer
says, many of the blacks did leave Wilmington and never returned.
sonnel in one of America's largest insurance companies, another
a graduate of Simmons College, a prestigious women's college
in Boston, Massachusetts, with a Master's Degree in Library
Work, and married to a municipal judge? And myself, an officer
in the military. How could he have accomplished this? And
understand how he obtained a value system, the perseverance,
and the need to indoctrinate his children in a manner that would
lead us to what we are, and how could he raise a middle class
family in the middle of a ghetto, recognized as one of the
worst in the Northeast, the ghetto of Roxbury? Why, those fam­
ilies that were living right next door to us or on the same
block, never made it. They're in jail, in sanitariums, or
they're still sitting on the same block, sipping wine or shoot­
ing up. What caused this difference? What in my father
made us so different from the rest?

I have known and have seen others from North Carolina but
not like my father. They didn't speak like him, they didn't
behave like him, they didn't hold the same values, they didn't
see the same visions, and their concept of the world and under­
standing of the world was totally unlike my father's. The answer
to these questions and mysteries I felt lay in Wilmington of
the 1800's, birth place and origin of my family.

It was this history project plus the TV movie and book
Roots and my sister's insistence on returning to Wilmington that
prompted me to arrange a meeting with my father, my sister, in
Wilmington, North Carolina. And we did. And there the story unraveled, and I discovered what I am, who I am, and most important, why I am.

I guess it could be ego-destroying to find out that you didn't make yourself, and in fact, there is most likely no such thing as a self-made man. It could be for some. But for me to find out that I am a product of the past, a sum total of the coming together of the life experiences of my ancestors, makes me feel greater than before, because it means that I am not alone, I am part of a greater whole. For through my past, I unite with the whole of the history of the human race. I am not alone, I am part of the world.

The story of the Clarks in Wilmington begins with the birth of my grandfather, Edward Clark, born at a time and place unknown. But he worked as a slave for a man called J. E. Kidder. While a slave to Mr. Kidder, my grandfather became a wheelwright and cooper. Mr. Kidder told my grandfather that if he worked hard and well, and brought in money, that my grandfather could keep a portion of the money that he made as wheelwright and cooper for the Kidder family industries, and he could buy his freedom. Edward Clark, my grandfather, did just that - bought his freedom. Upon buying his freedom, he opened his own shop, making wheels and working in the Navy shipyards in Wilmington, as a cooper, where he earned enough money to buy his wife's freedom - Charity, my grandmother. After the War, "Edward the Cooper", my grandfather, bought a piece of land from J. Edward
Kidder and a house - a large house, a six bedroom house. The house and land was purchased in December, 1885, from Mr. Kidder, for $125.00. This house was on a piece of land on a hill overlooking the city of Wilmington. This hilltop land was owned by Kidder; thus it was called Kidder Hill. On Kidder Hill lived not only my father, of course, but a grouping of Negroes. Called by the black and white residents of Wilmington the "Kidder Hill Niggers", these Kidder Hill Niggers were a different breed of reconstruction blacks. They were the tradesmen, the foremen, the clerks, that had learned these trades during the time they were slaves, and after the War used these skills they had learned to set up businesses. It is also said that most of them, or many of them, were mulattoes, who had been called in the past the "Big House Niggers." Often they were illegitimate children of the masters. Thus, right after the war, in Wilmington, you had an extremely large group of blacks who were holding most of the skilled craftsmen's jobs, who were the foremen in the larger industries, the lumber industry, the dockyards, the cotton press, and some of the railroad lines in the city. Not only were they holding these blue-collar jobs, but they were also holding white-collar jobs. They were the clerks, constables, solicitors, revenue collectors, and other public jobs. Now, of course, a lot of this movement of blacks into middle-class occupations was brought on by the Reconstruction government, but what accented it in Wilmington more than in many other places, was the fact that prior to the war there
wasn't any middle-class white society of any large stature in Wilmington. Prior to the war, you had the aristocracy, (the slave owners), and most of their middle-class occupational requirements were accomplished by their black slaves (both blue and white collar occupations). The other whites were what were classified as 'Poor White' and I use that term because that is the term that the interviewees that I spoke to used. They were in effect the dirt farmers, and the laborers. Thus, the Confederate veteran who had returned home to Wilmington found that if he wanted a job, he often ended up working for a foreman who used to be the black slave. For example, I interviewed the daughter of the editor of the Afro-American newspaper publishing in Wilmington in the 1898's, the Daily Record. This was a newspaper which printed the "vile slander on the White Woman" which precipitated the attacks on the blacks by the Red Shirts. She told me that her father, A. L. Manly, who established the first Afro-American newspaper in the U.S., became so well-to-do that he bought his master's plantation. He held onto this plantation until certain white interests in the town came to him and said, "Hey, look, Manly, of course you have a right to own this plantation, but it's just too showy. And certain white elements just can't handle the idea of a black owning a plantation. Would you please sell it and move into a smaller house?" Manly did sell the plantation and move into a smaller house, and when I interviewed his daughter, she was living in that same house.
So, we have here a group of blacks, former slaves, with middle-class skills and occupations, who are impressed with a value system which was very similar to their aristocratic former slave owner, but modified, humbled if you will, by their former slave experience. They were enthused with a desire to excel, for to excel means to gain money and economic superiority, and thus ensure a place in America for themselves and their children. An example of this grouping of "Kidder Hill Niggers" came, the first black MIT graduate, the first black Federal judge, and the first editor of an Afro-American newspaper in the United States. This group of Negroes helped establish and operate Shaw University of North Carolina, where they sent most of their children, established the Peabody High School, where they educated their children for a college education. Those that graduated from Shaw were sent north to Boston and New York, where they received higher degrees in northeastern universities. In interviewing those of the Kidder Hill Negroes who remained in Wilmington, I found that they were still enthused with the belief given to them by the reconstruction period, which said if you educated yourself, you were moral, God-fearing, righteous, dressed and behaved properly, and worked hard, you could be completely accepted by the white American society and would succeed in your endeavors. The women spoke softly and gently, their manners of ultimate Southern genteel femininity, their voices seeming to float and gently lay to rest on your lap as they spoke. Their dress was soft and feminine, they
were constantly aware of how they looked and behaved, even a 104 year old woman whom I interviewed. She refused to have her picture taken with my father, who, by the way, she remembered well, because her hair had not been done that day.

The "Kidder Hill Nigger" then, was a middle class community dedicated to middle class values, reinforced by the aristocratic value system of the old south, and who, as they saw it, had made a success within the system. Thus they have a faith in America, and for what it can be as written in its Constitution, as stated in the Declaration of Independence, and as dreamt of by its founding fathers. In short, they believe in the American dream, more so perhaps than any other people I have ever known and why not? Had not they come from slavery to middle class in a short twenty years? And hadn't they come this distance by adhering to that American dream by working hard, being honest, righteousness, belief in God, and being moral? Hadn't they been accepted into the American society? Yes, they believed they had. After all, they were enjoying status and position in Wilmington that I haven't seen blacks enjoy in the U.S. in this day and age. These Kidder Hill Niggers were a solidly cohesive group, whose boundary of middle-class status is sharply defined on one hand by remaining aristocracy and on the other hand by poor whites and poor blacks. They enjoy economic stability, they enjoy their accompanying social status, their future is bright. Their children are in college, or are going to college, they think they understand
and control the system, and then, suddenly, on that day, in November, 1885, when the Barbarians rode, looting, burning, killing, raping, and attempting to destroy this black middle class community. Were the Red Shirts successful? Yes, they were successful to the extent that the blacks' economic base in the community was destroyed. Did they destroy the American dream? No. The American dream as we know is a very persuasive one, but when it is so thoroughly internalized by a people as it was by the Kidder Hill Niggers and in the manner in which it was, i.e., from slavery to middle class in twenty years, nothing could destroy that dream. So the Kidder Hill Niggers were geographically and economically dispersed, but their belief in the American dream was never dispersed.

When I interviewed in Wilmington, I found them living in the same homes as they did during Reconstruction, the values and mores of the descendant and actual residents in Kidder Hill were intact; their memories of the time glorious, sustained them, and the dream was always there, powerful and persuasive, and demanding.

So it was with my father. Inspired by grandfather and his memory of Kidder Hill, he held tight to that dream. When Dad encountered racial prejudice following the First World War, the dream held and bound him still to America. When the Depression hit, and he found he had to steal to feed his family, and they put him in jail, no bitterness. The dream held him
tight. He blamed himself for failure, he blamed others for not handling the system properly. But never did he blame, fault, or doubt, the dream. And he told us and told us and told us, over and over again, "Study hard, work hard, get an education, behave properly, speak quietly, don't drink, go to church, do these things, believe in this American dream I'm giving you and all will be well." He scraped and he saved. He was a domestic, my father. But not just a domestic - he would say, "I'm a domestic for . . . . " and he would name off the people that he was a domestic for. That sense of pride always bothered me. I didn't understand how he could be proud washing someone's bathroom. But he knew he was only doing it temporarily until the dream could be realized. Off he sent my brother to Yale University. Off he sent my sister to Simmons. And he lived through them. He would say, "My son is at Yale." "My son works for an insurance company. He's a vice president." "He's an officer, you know, a Major." I used to watch him going to work, this transplanted Kidder Hill Nigger. Pin striped suits, hats, expensive shoes (gotten from the home of the people he worked for) just like a "businessman" going to work, his head high, proud. Off to work, to fulfill the American dream. Now I no longer wonder how the dream sustained him; I no longer wonder why the dream sustained him, for the dream is self-sustaining. And why he had the dream? Because he is a Kidder Hill Nigger. And knowing that in twenty years, his family went from slavery to runners of a city and he knows in his own
dream that not only will they go from slavery to runners of a
city, but through his children and children's children, the
Kidder Hill Nigger will go from slavery to runners of a coun-
try and on to runners of the world. That's where I came from.
That's who I am. That's why I am.
FOOTNOTES

1. The City Directory of Wilmington only lists slaves by number and not names. No records of the Kidder family's slaves could be found except their number and sex.

2. There is a believable rumor that my grandfather, Edward, was the illegitimate son of Edward Kidder, his owner. The evidence shows that Edward Kidder displayed a great deal of concern and affection for my grandfather, Edward, by selling the property to my grandfather for only $125.00, and then finally giving the whole of Kidder Hill to the Kidder Hill community, and by further providing a bulk of the money required to build the church where my grandfather was a deacon. This church still stands in Wilmington today and has an active congregation. Both my father and brothers and sisters (who have all died) remembered Edward Kidder with respect and affection. It was Kidder and others of the old aristocracy of Wilmington who pressed for a peaceful settlement of the dispute between the black middle class Kidder Hill Negroes and the new enterprising white middle class who were demanding their rightful place, and who were using the Red Shirts to intimidate the blacks. The story concerning the Wilmington Riots as told us by the historian of the Wilmington Historical Society was that Mr. Kidder and others of the old aristocracy were planning to meet with the Kidder Hill Negroes to discuss a compromise concerning the article in the Record by A. L. Manly who supposedly had insulted a white woman. They were to meet with the blacks to come up with a compromise position that would satisfy both Manly and the Red Shirts. They sent a young boy with a message to the blacks' leaders. The boy never delivered the message. Therefore, the compromise meeting never took place. The confrontation at the offices of the Record did take place and the riot ensued.