

Views Through a Looking Glass

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October, the season of candy and tricks, a month full of scares and costumes, but what if costumes become the very source of controversy? What if dressing up sweet and loving pets causes questions regarding intention, awareness, and ignorance? Such possibilities of concern are directed towards a reflection of America's jarring history, causing wonder of the country's progressive direction.

October 31, 2022, Halloween night in Lake County stirred this pot, taking one costume to international news, a hot topic for debate and complaints. The Lake County Sheriff's Department is under fire for their horses' outfit, a plain white sheet, with holes cut for the eyes and mouth, to create a ghost; however, it's become clear that the low effort costume led to some major issues, as that innocent little outfit closely resembles those of the notorious organization called the Ku Klux Klan.

First, it needs to be stated that the Lake County Sheriff's Department has apologized for the situation and had no intentions for the resemblance, as published on Fox 8, "There was never any intention to be insensitive to the negative perception some people took in the image of the ghost horses, and we apologize if any person was upset" (Gallek).

Originally a post was uploaded with two horses dressed in their ghost costumes on either side of the sheriff car, there was an immense amount of positivity, but there were also multiple comments on the resemblance to the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). For instance, according to Fox 19, quickly after the post was uploaded, the account Black Lives Matter Lake County expressed the resemblance and viewpoint of the public, "While some may not understand the impact this has on others. We must learn to see things through the lens of the oppressed, disenfranchised,

wealthy, poor, etc. etc. Perspective is key. We must do better Lake County at recognizing the perspective of all people” (Williams). In order to avoid any further misconception, the post was removed within two hours. Again, however, a student at Perry High School who prefers to remain anonymous, feels this shouldn’t reflect the department as an entire, “because the fact is that it wasn’t intended to hurt anybody, but I understand...but in this [event] the sheriff said specifically that it was for the community to come and see the horses.”

The sheriff, Frank Leonbruno, further adds that the costume is based off of many other versions online, many of which are sales directed for horses, “...if you scan the internet on ghost horses at Halloween you will find many similar pictures and costumes sold to make horses appear as ghosts”(Williams). Again, apologizing for any misperceptions of the representation. The undisclosed student also adds that they agree with Leonbruno’s decision of immediately addressing the situation before it became uncontrollable, rather than deciding to let it burn itself out, “...the sheriff did the right thing apologizing to those who were hurt by the post and the community, along with taking down the post. I also don’t feel the public was trying to be abrasive and try turning this into a racial thing, I want to say they were just trying to bring-forth awareness and project the possibilities of the situation.”

Now, a big factor of this situation is determining the negative connotation the KKK set in history. The Ku Klux Klan is known as a white supremacy/hate group and domestic terrorist organization that was founded circa 1865 in Pulaski, Tennessee, by a small group of confederate veterans (“KKK Founded”). These men created the organization with the intention of reversing the “federal government’s progressive Reconstruction era-activities in the South” (History), as well as policies that were directed to elevate the rights of the colored population, they also opposed Catholics, Jews, and Southern European immigrants (“1920’s Rise of the KKK”).

Former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest was the first head leader of the KKK, often being referred to as Grand Wizard by the members. However due to the rapid increase of excessive violence, he grew critical of the group's disbandment in 1869, which became futile ("KKK Founded"). This aggression began to rise after the 14th and 15th amendment and federal laws were established, as newly freed individuals began to exercise said rights. However, the Klan expanded majorly in a second wave within the 1920s and 30s, after the Ku Klux Klan promoted a popular 1915 film called *The Birth of a Nation* ("1920's Rise of the KKK"), a silent film that dramatizes the lives and events of two families leading up to and through the Civil War. During this time, the group rapidly grew, where it peaked in the 1920's with an estimate of 4-5 million members nationally ("1920's Rise of the KKK"). Although, in the 1960s, there was a surge of KKK activity, which primarily included the bombings of Black schools as well as increased violence against Black and White activists ("History"). Such events are responsible for famous publishings and screenings such as, "The Ballad of Birmingham" by Dudley Randall.

Throughout the south, though not supported by the majority, the KKK engaged in various inhumane methods of "reforming" the nation. Intimidation tactics such as: lynching, hangings, floggings, mutilations, tarring and featherings, kidnapping, acid brandings, as well as new approaches like cross-burning ("KKK Series") were quite prevalent during the Klan's domination. In addition, KKK would secretly harm and murder formerly enslaved African-American men to prevent them from voting, so those who were voted into office were their main targets ("The Klu Klux Klan"). Furthermore, at least 10 percent of legislators who were African-American elected during the 1967-1968 Constitutional Convention became victims to attacks, including seven which were killed (History). This also meant that in many regions

where Klan activity was prevalent, local law enforcement officers were members or associated with the Klan, or denied acting against them. There were even instances where those who had arrested accused klansmen would struggle with finding individuals willing to testify against them (“History”).

Understanding the history of our nation is important, and it’s understandable that there can be unintentional accidents, for instance, the Lake County Halloween-KKK controversy. The sheriff’s department meant no harm, despite how unruly the situation may have appeared, they’ve apologized and although they cannot undo the mistake, it can help decision-making in the future to avoid other misperceptions.

Works cited

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