

The Forgotten Tennessee Kids:
Race, Patriotism, and A Tennessean Man's Supremacist Youth Movement

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Abstract

The Cold War was a tumultuous time for many American citizens and coping mechanisms varied based on the region and person. While most students were forced to watch the 1952 film *Duck and Cover*, a man in West Tennessee named Cecil Lewis Parris took the Cold War preparations to another level by establishing the Kadets of America program. His intentions were to teach patriotism and military-style discipline. By forming an organization that puts into practice the examples from *Duck and Cover*, a Southern man produced a nationwide anomaly. The short lifespan of the Kadets of America was filled with many programs and had a group in almost every state, yet was usually always attached to a military affiliated institution, and usually always white. The following thesis will attempt to contextualize how, despite good intentions, this organization spawned from the Cold War fear became an institution that upheld white supremacist values.

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Chapter One: Origins

Traditional histories of the rise of white supremacist groups focus on sharing how the groups instill racial terror practices and techniques in an attempt to produce effective and immediate political and economic results. In the past, historians largely agree that white law enforcers, official and otherwise, were participants in the white supremacy movement after the Civil War, especially during the periods of Reconstruction and later when Jim Crow laws were enacted. Throughout this time, law enforcement and legal systems left the interpretation of the law and justice system in the hands of its white citizens.¹ Terror groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) founded in 1865, along with groups named the Knights of the White Camellia, the White League, and the Red Shirts, which all formed within the following 10 years, enacted what whites termed as justice.² Acts of terror were displayed in the forms of lynching and the burning of Black peoples' homes, churches, and businesses. While those upholding the law legally could not conduct these cruel actions while in uniform or more importantly, while publicly showing their faces, they also did nothing to prevent these terrors from taking place.

The threat of Black's freedom and their ensuing economic independence propelled the creation of white supremacist groups. However, a closer examination of how these groups have evolved since the end of Jim Crow shows the adaptability of white supremacist groups to modern political, and often religious, realities. The rise in racial terror by whites during controversial American tragedies like the Cold War and the major wars and movements that occurred during that period like the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement, allowed for the creation of modern white supremacy groups which included children and young adults. The establishment of these

¹ George Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

² Milton Kleg, *Hate, Prejudice and Racism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 185-220. <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=7932&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

new ensembles helped transition the goals and strategies of organized, extremist white supremacist groups into a new era.³

The Tennessee based group the Kadets of America is one of those nationwide Cold War era organized groups that targeted the younger population and, in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, turned to the rhetoric of white supremacy. While the Kadets of America focused on teaching young boys and girls discipline, patriotism, and love for country, they eventually turned into a show unit participating in Civil War Centennial parades, United Daughters of the Confederacy events, and pony shows with the Red River Raiders (RRR). The children dressed and paraded in Confederate military uniforms and outfits. The RRR were a popular show group known for being active participants in multiple reenactment events that involved Tennessee succeeding from the United States successfully.⁴

Such actions illustrate how the ideals of white racial supremacy are malleable and could be reshaped to oppose growing public and political support for Black legal, political, and social equality. While these newer children's groups could not hope to fully effect the gains made by the KKK and its contemporaries during Reconstruction, or other periods of time when Blacks protested and rallied for their basic rights, they could still unite and nurture an extremist ideology capable of keeping the white supremacy movement in the public eye. One aspect of this paper will aim to provide a well-rounded and easily comprehensible explanation of how and why the early formation of these white supremacist groups has caused a movement that has branched out to encompass not only adults, but children and teens as well.

How did America reach a place where in the twentieth century white people were still being taught that races of color were inferior? It began with the myths about the nation's

³ Mary Frances Berry, *Black Resistance: White Law: A History of Constitutional Racism in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995).

⁴ "Confederate Cavalry Troop To Show At Fair On Opening Night," *The Park City Daily News*. August 13, 1961. Accessed April 24, 2022. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/661183242/?terms=red+river+raiders&match=1>.

beginnings. With the immigration of Europeans coming to America seeking refuge from religious persecution and a dictatorial government in the seventeenth century, the voyage over the sea was not free. In fact, it was insanely costly and many of the new arrivals were forced into indentured servitude to pay for the boat fare from Europe.⁵ However, the need for hired labor increased, along with the demand of land, accompanied by the growth in population, indentured servitude was no longer profitable or reasonable to the colonizers and they sought another solution. Thus, the introduction of chattel slavery.

During the early seventeenth century and the following eighteenth century, the colonies heavily relied on slavery to support their way of living. Millions of Africans were captured, kidnapped, and forced to endure a treacherous transcontinental journey in the cramped quarters of boats.⁶ These enslaved peoples largely worked in the cotton, tobacco, and rice fields. Most African women and children were forced into domestic roles within the homes and were required to keep house, cook, and launder. Understanding the shift from indentured servitude to chattel slavery helps us understand the beginnings of the racial hierarchy ladder.

With slavery as their primary source of that labor, the ideals the new settlers were attempting to instill were put to the test. It was easy for the European colonizers to disregard the ideals of religious tolerance, right to life and liberty because the economy was booming thanks to African labor.⁷ According to Thomas Ward, an African American historian, the social acceptance of slavery lightened the reality of the terrors and ramifications of enslaving people. Ward argues that at the time, society saw slavery as a natural occurrence, and since it was natural, it could change, or adapt, due to the changing social morals of a community, religious

⁵ Jonathan Scott Holloway, *The Cause of Freedom: A Concise History of African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 7-9. Accessed May 9, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶ Holloway, 7.

⁷ Hans Erich Bodeker, Clorinda Donato, and Peter Reill, *Discourses of Tolerance & Intolerance in European Enlightenment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 53-54. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlbek&AN=468813&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

influences, or economic environment.⁸ In his work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke spoke on the association of ideas, meaning a person can have two separate ideas that do not pertain to each other but can be linked because they were experienced together. He argued that the psychological tendency “to associate ideas through experience has important implications for the education of children.”⁹

The white supremacy movement has long practiced this ideology of racial hierarchy, and deemed themselves as belonging at the top. The documented start of slavery in the 1600s, along with the Civil War, Reconstruction era, Jim Crow, and modern times, which according to Civil Rights lawyer and scholar, Michelle Alexander, could be classified as the “new Jim Crow,” highlight this hierarchy.¹⁰ In his book *Ghost of Jim Crow: Ending Racism in Post-Racial America*, F. Michael Higginbotham, explains how laws established in the 1600s governing new enslaved peoples and their masters were created based on the needs and expectations of slave owners. As the population of slaves increased in the colonies and labor results were turning a profit, the legislation governing the enslaved became stricter and prevented enslaved peoples from owning lands and created near impossible conditions for enslaved peoples to buy their own freedom.¹¹ The ability to create laws at will and skew them towards one group’s advantage are prime examples of the power and social imbalance between whites and Blacks.

The start of the nineteenth century marked a wider acceptance of the scientific and biological classifications of race. By being classified as white, one had unquestionable rights in

⁸ Thomas Ward, *Coloniality and the Rise of Liberation Thinking During the Sixteenth Century*. Mesoamerica, the Caribbean, and South America, 700-1700 (Leeds: Arch Humanities Press, 2020), 79-80. <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2702447&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁹ John Marshall. “Locke’s Moral and Social Thought 1681-1704,” in *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 315-317.

¹⁰ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2020).

¹¹ F. Michael Higginbotham, *Ghosts of Jim Crow: Ending Racism in Post-Racial America* (New York: NYU Press, 2013). <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=536149&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

society while being Black, meant the exact opposite with the addition of unwarranted attacks and other verbal and physical abuses. When President Abraham Lincoln legally ended slavery in the occupied Confederacy through the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the nation begrudgingly began the transition of shifting its economic reliance from slavery. By 1865, the 13th Amendment officially abolished slavery. However, after more than 250 years of holding Blacks captive and prisoners of slavery, white southerners would not relinquish their privileges so easily. The racial hierarchy ladder continued to influence how people transgressed with one another and the laws governments enacted on newly freed Blacks.

Of course, southern white communities were opposed to seeing freed Blacks as anything other than formerly enslaved laborers. They continued to seek new ways of exacting their old habits, while never relinquishing their entitlement.¹² The previously established racial hierarchy created a larger divide in the South that ultimately led to the Jim Crow era, which would strengthen and motivate the white supremacy movement. During Reconstruction, and long after into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many laws would be enacted that would legally secure white supremacy. This legislation allowed white supremacist groups, like the Klan, to exact their version of justice on Blacks while law enforcers were able to publicly remain out of the fray.¹³

Before the start of the Civil War, the Supreme Court heard another landmark case of American history, *Dred Scott v. Sanford*. In 1846, Dred Scott and his wife sued St. Louis, in their local city court, for their freedom, which was being challenged. At the time, St. Louis, Missouri was a free state, meaning slavery was not legal. Eleven years later, Scott's case reached the Supreme Court, where an already exhausting case turned incredibly dour. Although Scott and his

¹² Higginbotham, 79.

¹³ Gavan Lennon, *Living Jim Crow* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020). <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat08646a&AN=mtsu.90da43a0.ef70.4c2d.9227.ef5c586c6beb&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

wife were technically free, the Supreme Court ruled in majority that the Scotts' case was invalid because in the eyes of the U.S. Constitution, but primarily the judges, Black peoples, free or enslaved, were not citizens. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney also ruled that enslaved people, based on this same founding document, were property and since they were property, they could not be taken away from their owners.¹⁴ The court's decision, at the local, state, and federal levels, along with the legal confirmation that people of African descent were mere property, edged America closer to the Civil War and would have a lasting effect that continues to severely harm the Black equality movement.

Ensuing Supreme Court cases like *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) legally authorized segregation. By law, whites could legally deny integrated services to Blacks, allot separate areas for Blacks to partake in services for businesses owned by whites, and openly discriminate against Blacks with no repercussions. The final ruling of "separate but equal" in the infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* case reaffirmed the white supremacy movement in America. Additionally, it affirmed the self-imposed segregation already practiced by many whites across the nation, but especially in the South.¹⁵ During this case, Justice John Harlan voiced "the white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is, in prestige, in achievements, in education, in wealth, and in power. So, I doubt not, it will continue to be for all time, if it remains true to its great heritage."¹⁶ The outcome of this case led to consequences that resulted in detrimental laws that gave white supremacists enough reason to continue lynching and other racially-focused violence.

Plessy v. Ferguson shifted the structure of American society and provided a rather fertile recruiting opportunity for white supremacist groups. In the 1920s the Klan movement surged

¹⁴ *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857). National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed April 29, 2022. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/dred-scott-v-sandford>.

¹⁵ *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed April 25, 2022. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/plessy-v-ferguson>.

¹⁶ Higginbotham, 90.

again and was able to gain its strength and momentum by interpreting economic, social, and political agendas to create a common cultural (white) ideology that would appeal to their target audience (also white).¹⁷ In the book, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*, Dr. Rory McVeigh considers the various periods of the Klan stating that it is evident why the group reemerged in 1915, however progress made by Blacks during the Civil Rights movements prompted a new wave of Klan activity during the 1960s. It is well known that during this time Alabama Governor, George Wallace and others were vocal about their anti-Black beliefs and promoted white supremacy. Many politicians and citizens took this opportunity to capitalize on Black resentment, which allowed white supremacist groups to last in the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries.

The strength of the contemporary hate movement is grounded in its ability to repackage its messages in ways that make it more appealing, and in its ability to exploit the points of intersection between itself and the prevailing ideological themes the movement aligns itself with at the time.¹⁸ Reconstruction had marked an active period for white supremacists as they banded together to form legislative and civic groups that would promote and uphold white people's privilege and status while oppressing Black peoples.¹⁹ According to Douglas Blackmon in his book *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, white supremacy and their hate groups became the everyday norm and reality in the South because of how quickly southern lawmakers quickly regulated legislation to convict and re-enslave Black peoples.²⁰

¹⁷ Rory McVeigh. "Klan Activism across the Country," in *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 167-179.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttd54.10>.

¹⁸ Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

¹⁹ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2013).

²⁰ Blackmon, 150-227.

In a report conducted via the Equal Justice Initiative in 2020, authors detailed that the 12 years following the Confederacy's loss in the Civil War highlighted a time of extreme brutality against Blacks. Anger about the South losing the Civil War led to thousands of Blacks, children included, being senselessly murdered, ambushed, and terrorized by white supremacist groups and individuals who evaded arrest and legal charges simply because they were white. These culprits of random violence against formerly enslaved people were almost never held accountable. Instead, they were highly regarded in their white communities and served as constant reminders to Blacks that there was no place in society for them. Former Confederate soldiers banded together with former masters to organize a reign of terror that effectively prevented Blacks from considering utilizing their constitutional rights that would allow them to protect themselves and their families and cast votes that could overthrow their abusers.²¹

In his book, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*, James H. Madison addressed how the Klan became institutionally integrated into twentieth century Southern politics. According to Madison, Democrats heavily relied on white terrorists' groups like the Klan to ensure elections were skewed towards white, conservative, political party victories. To guarantee results, Klan members reverted to threatening violence against competing Republican candidates. The threat was so great that many southern Republicans succumbed to the constant pressures and deserted their campaigns. It was near impossible for the southern Republican contender to conduct meetings and draw in new and repeat voters because the Klan and other white supremacist succeeded in guaranteeing Blacks were living in a constant state of fear for their safety. When the use of violence did not achieve the desired results, white Democratic candidates, who were usually Klan members, would often vote for literacy tests and other voter suppression techniques in addition to resorting to voter fraud in order to intercede the Black vote. The majority of these

²¹ "Journey to Freedom." EJI Reports, June 15, 2020. <https://eji.org/report/reconstruction-in-america/journey-to-freedom/#chapter-1-intro>.

illegal actions happened in cities and states where there was an almost equal population of Black and white voters residing.²²

Violence, favorable court decisions, mass lynching, and the lack of any law enforcement laid the ideal foundation for white supremacist groups to continue Black disenfranchisement.²³

White mobs regularly justified these often-deadly attacks as necessary to punish Blacks for fictitious crimes they believed would increase now that Blacks were freed.²⁴ In some regions, however, whites and Blacks decried lynching as a denial of justice. In his 1918 book, *The Truth About Lynching and the Negro in the South*, Winfield H. Collins justified lynching because “the lynching of Black men prevents their becoming over-dangerous to the white South.”²⁵

Publications, such as Collins, gave many whites further confirmation they needed to continue their racist actions. With many books in circulation claiming the same sentiment, a decrease in activity was not going to be soon.

The Civil Rights-era Klan, which is the third documented emergence of the group, aligned themselves with violence and suppression. In 1954, when the Supreme Court legally enforced school integration, many whites in the South caused an uproar as school boards denied the ruling and either maintained segregation or made integration an incredibly uncomfortable experience for Blacks. Similar to the opposition of the limited, practically non-existent, laws benefiting Blacks during Reconstruction, the agitation and unwarranted anxiety that arose from the shocking, to some, Supreme Court decision yielded further reasoning for a Klan resurgence.²⁶ Just a short year before another landmark Supreme Court ruling, Eldon Edwards organized a

²² James H. Madison. “The Politics of Mediocrity,” in *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 112-126. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv153k6jh.9>.

²³ “Journey to Freedom.”

²⁴ “Reconstruction in America - Equal Justice Initiative.” Reconstruction Report. Equal Justice Initiative, 2020. <https://eji.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/reconstruction-in-america-report.pdf>.

²⁵ Winfield Collins, *Truth about Lynching and the Negro in the South* (New York: Neale Publishing, 1918).

²⁶ Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

branch of the Klan in Atlanta, called the U.S. Klans, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. His membership numbers were incredibly low until the “separate but equal” ruling the following year. Over the next three years, after the initial founding of the group, Edwards organized the largest Klan rally in years. By 1958, Edwards’ U.S. Klans had an estimated 15,000 members.²⁷

In his book *Klansville USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*, Sociology professor David Cunningham explains why white supremacists’ ideas remain today. “Right-wing extremist groups,” Cunningham said, “tend to most successfully organize and recruit new membership in times when their potential followers feel as though their way of life is threatened.”²⁸ Cunningham considers the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s as an example. During that time there was another significant rise in organized white supremacist hate groups. “The Ku Klux Klan was the predominant group then, and the Klan used the rising civil rights tide and the passage of the Civil Rights Act in the mid-1960s as a recruiting tool, in effect. Their numbers surged incredibly in 1964 and in 1965.”²⁹

The youth organization, the Kadets of America, also had a surge in attendance during the Civil Rights movements. Historians and other scholars have long discussed the relationship between fighting the Communist threat and America’s image abroad. Many whites believed that the people who participated in Civil Rights movements were Communists. In his book, *The Blood of Emmett Till*, historian Timothy Tyson dissects that popular belief in the 1960s. Tyson uses former Mississippi Supreme Court Judge Thomas Pickens Brady as an example of the racial tensions and fear of the Red Conspiracy that was quickly spreading across the United States. Judge Brady implied that intentional racial unrest, or the act of African Americans protesting for

²⁷ John Lester, *Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, Growth and Disbandment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1905).

²⁸ Emily Woodbury, “What History Tells Us about the Mobilization of Hate Groups in the U.S.,” NPR, January 25, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=959769976>.

²⁹ David Cunningham, *Klansville, USA: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

their basic human rights, was “a tool of the ‘Red Conspiracy’ in the overall effort to socialize and Communize our government.”³⁰ Brady was just one of thousands of segregationists in Mississippi, but his position of power allowed him to gather many followers who banned together to fight a threat they thought would be America’s great demise.

Historian Thomas Borstelmann provides another view in his book *The Cold War and the Color Line*. His political perspective on the Cold War and race tensions in the United States depicts a story of racial agitation evanesing with the change of presidents. Before this, under avid Vietnam War supporter President Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency, racial violence was high in America. Johnson’s Vice President Hubert Humphrey believed that Communist spies were dispersed amongst Civil Rights protests and intentionally provoking violence.³¹ There was no shortage of white nationalism during the Cold War. In fact, it was almost encouraged by America’s leading political figures. What Cecil Parris did with the Kadets of America was not widely seen throughout the Cold War era. By involving children in the overall national sentiment of segregation and the “Red Scare,” Parris covered what the adult movement was missing: youth.

The Kadets of America, which started in 1953, saw a rise in membership in the mid-1960s, mirroring a spike in attendance and protest of the Civil Rights movements.³² Those members were all school-aged children. While the Kadets could not exact extreme terror, conduct public lynching gatherings, or burn churches, they portrayed their stance in a more subtle yet effective way. Members wore Confederate uniforms and participated in southern Confederate memorial events and parades. Most units in the Deep South states carried Confederate flags while marching. These are not the violent actions America was used to

³⁰ Timothy B. Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 93-94.

³¹ Thomas Borstelmann, *American Race Relations in the Global Arena: The Cold War and the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 188-189.

³² “Kadet Teen Town Country Club, Opened to West State Teenagers.” *The Jackson Sun*, June 17, 1959. Accessed April 28, 2022. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/282588497/?terms=kadets+of+America&match=1>.

viewing from organizations like the Klan, but actions, nonetheless, from a group of children and teenagers that also viewed themselves as being of the dominant race. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center's definition, several Kadets of America units could be considered a milder version of an organized hate group, which is defined as "an organized group or movement, that based upon their official statements, principles, or actions, advocates hate, hostility, and violence towards an entire class of people."³³ While there is no documented evidence of units enacting violence, their actions, principles, and statements are clearly meant to uphold the superiority of the white race. However, what might be an unknown fact, the Anti-Defamation League claims, that "most white supremacists do not actually belong to organized groups."³⁴ Yet, the mere existence of these organized groups supplies supremacists with most of the principles and inspiration to act as solo, yet active members of the movement.

As with most behaviors, the foundation of belief systems begins in the home environment, whatever that may be. "Keeping your families pure and raising your kids among your kin is what we fight for," said Darren, an Aryan Nation member in 2010.³⁵ Aryan Nation homes are some of the most private and guarded of white supremacist organizations. Aryan parents use the home as a place to raise their children as what can be akin to soldiers, who will defend the white race against anything they deem as a threat to their existence.³⁶ Other groups have political agendas and may fall in the category of "alt-right." These ideals may include nationalism, anti-globalism, being suspicious of centralized federal authority, being reverent of

³³ "Frequently Asked Questions about Hate Groups." Southern Poverty Law Center, March 18, 2020. <https://www.splcenter.org/20200318/frequently-asked-questions-about-hate-groups>.

³⁴ "How Hate Groups Form." Anti-Defamation League. Anti-Defamation League. Accessed May 12, 2022. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/how-hate-groups-form>.

³⁵ "Aryan Nations." Southern Poverty Law Center. Accessed April 9, 2022. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/aryan-nations>.

³⁶ Pete, Simi, and Robert Futrell, *American Swastika: Inside the White Power Movement's Hidden Spaces of Hate* Second edition, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015). <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cab08646a&AN=mtsU.3a6a73e1.fedc.4eb0.8bb4.ba18fd4d6bb8&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

individual liberty, holding conspiracy theories, and overindulging in paramilitary training- just to name a few.³⁷ While the Kadets of America were not as extreme, nor as private, as Aryan Nation members, they were an early well documented organization that allowed for children and young adults to come together in an organized manner that would soon engage in many of the nonviolent rhetorics that survived past the Civil War.

The current face of white supremacy in America goes beyond the systematic racism minorities in the United States have long faced and continue to face, with no real end in sight. Most well-rounded and educated Americans and non-Americans understand that the United States was founded on white supremacy, slavery, and the oppression of people of color. While the Civil War legally ended slavery in 1865, that did not stop the torture, murder, and unadulterated hatred towards Blacks. With the end of the Civil War came the creation of organized hate and domestic terrorist groups with the goal to exact a version of justice onto Blacks, and other persons of color, that some of the white population believed their government lacked the capability of conducting.

³⁷ Pete, Simi, and Futrell, 125-132.

Chapter 2: Cecil Lewis Parris: A Centuries Long Product of Time

The face of white supremacy in America has many shapes and many origins. This thesis addresses the creation and rise of the Kadets of America and its founder Cecil Lewis Parris, from the 1950s to 1970. Parris was born in 1897 in a small, quiet town in Georgia, to two working middle class parents. The family lived on a farm manned by the father along with the boy and his two older brothers. His mother and two sisters fell into societal gender norms and kept the house in running order.³⁸ The father made sure all his children were educated and could read and write. The boy would go on to attend an agriculture and mechanical school named Powder Springs A&M, now called the University of West Georgia. From there he would bounce around the United States and some of Canada before serving a short period in World War I.³⁹ All the while, he was a man who clearly knew what he wanted but was still piecing together the best way to reach his goals. It would take him close to 60 years to create his legacy, which includes an annual fishing event that still occurs to this day, and the youth organization of his dreams. Cecil Lewis (Leo) Parris finally shook off his small-town farming roots to become a nationally

³⁸ “1910 United States Federal Census.” Ancestry®. Ancestry.com. Accessed May 5, 2022.

https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/7884/images/31111_4327479-00745?treeid=&personid=&rc=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=rgG106&_phstart=successSource&pId=3301836.

³⁹ Elmer Hinton. “Savannah Firecracker His ‘Kadets of America’ Is Giving a Boost to Boys the Nation Over,” *Nashville Tennessean*, November 24, 1957. Accessed March 29, 2022.

<https://www.proquest.com/news/pagelevelimagepdf/1900182309/pagelevelImagePDF/ED26F24ED6A34D88PQ/1?tlb=t&accountid=4886>.

recognized name and a local socialite, and civic leader, who would ensure the small town of Savannah, Tennessee in Hardin County would never be forgotten.

With family roots going back to the late 1700s in Virginia before migrating to South Carolina, Cecil Lewis Parris, also acknowledged as Cecil, C.L., or Parris, considered himself a true American patriot, devoted to his family, his business, his town, and his nation. How did Cecil Parris, a farm boy from Marietta, Georgia become the spokesperson and most popular person in the town of Savannah, Tennessee? Furthermore, where did the driving inspiration to start an all-boys and, at a later date, girls included, militant-style group on the sprawling lands adjacent to Shiloh National Military Park begin? What was the path Lewis took to transform his dream into a reality? Because of the winding road Parris took to achieve his goals, it is hard to decipher if he was inspired by his grandfather's participation in the Civil War, his potential 4-times great-grandfather's participation in the American Revolution, or his own involvement in World War I.⁴⁰ Whatever the reasons may be, he organized the Kadets of America to resemble the military-style training boys received in traditional military schools.

There are many trails of the Parris family that can be followed due to Census data, draft cards, newspaper articles, and more; but despite this, Cecil's timeline and whereabouts are difficult to definitively outline as there are gaps in the public records and other information such as records, journals, diaries, and photos may be in the hands of family members and not accessible to the public.

⁴⁰ "1790 United States Federal Census for Samuel Paris." Ancestry®. Ancestry.com. Accessed May 5, 2022. https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/5058/images/4440913_00305?treeid=&personid=&rc=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=rgG109&_phstart=successSource&pId=193471.

William Eves	1	4	William Eves	2	1	Thomas Vincent	2	1
Nancy Love	1	3	William Hubbard	1	1	Robert Burton	1	2
Andrew Barton	1	2	Andrew Ball	1	2	Brown Morgan	1	2
William Todd	2	4	John H. Lewis	2	1	Caroline Newman	1	1
William Miller	1	2	Andrew Robinson	1	2	Ezekiel Gurry	1	1
John Love	1	2	John Barber	2	3	Elizabeth Childs	1	1
William Barber	1	1	John Barber	2	2	Stephen Wilson	2	6
Hugh Barber	1	1	William Charlton	1	1	Mary Wilson	1	3
Henry Barber	1	1	Thomas Hopper	1	2	John Lewis	1	3
Thomas Gray	1	1	Lewis Thomas	1	3	John Purdie	1	1
John Appleton	2	2	Thomas Key	4	1	Thomas McBride	2	2
John Barber	1	1	John Barber	1	2	David McBride	1	3
Samuel Moore	1	2	Lewis Barber	2	1	John Moore	1	6
David Hardy	1	3	Lewis Barber	2	1	John Dobbins	1	1
Lovina Wilson	1	2	Benjamin Moore	1	3	Samuel Lamer	1	2
John Barber	1	4	William Moore	1	3	Samuel Paris	1	3
Samuel Barber	1	3	John Gurry	1	1	Thomas King	2	4
William Barber	1	1	David Gurry	1	2	James Gurry	1	6
David Barber	1	1	Capt. Deary	2	2	Patrick Darby	1	1
David Barber	1	2	John Deary	1	1	Benjamin Darby	1	2
			Robert Harris	1	2	John Darby	2	2

Fig. 1. Photo depicting Samuel Paris in Rockingham, NC.

Little about Parris's private life is known, however, the lineage of the Parris family can be traced back to the late 1700s. Before Samuel Parris' death in 1791, he moved his family to Rockingham, North Carolina. In Rockingham County, the population was just shy of 17,000 people and consisted of few large plantations. Rockingham was primarily known for producing vast amounts of tobacco. When men gathered arms and joined the Confederates in 1861, it came as somewhat of a surprise as most of the citizens and the local government held a strong allegiance with those in Washington D.C.⁴² During the Civil War, Hanover County experienced a major battle as troops steadily fought to make their way to Richmond. According to a local historian, the Battle of Gaines Mill can possibly be noted as General Robert E. Lee's first victory of the Civil War. To this day, the battlefield remains protected and maintained by Richmond National Battlefield Park.⁴³

Samuel Parris and his wife both died and are buried in the Carolinas. Their son Nathaniel, or Noten Dickenson Parris, moved his family to Dallas, in Paulding County, Georgia. Before this

⁴¹ "1790 United States Federal Census for Samuel Paris."

⁴² Ned Harrison, "Civil War Left Its Mark on Rockingham." Greensboro News and Record. Greensboro News and Record, January 25, 2015. https://greensboro.com/civil-war-left-its-mark-on-rockingham/article_66a7d9ad-8ea6-51bb-8774-7b02c3f9b5d6.html.

⁴³ "Hanover's History: Hanover County, VA," Hanover's History | Hanover County, VA. Civic Plus. Accessed May 5, 2022. <https://www.hanovercounty.gov/684/Hanovers-History>.

move, Nathaniel and his wife Lucy had a son in Spartanburg, South Carolina and named him Lewis Parris. Most of the early Parris family is buried in either Spartanburg, South Carolina or Marietta, Georgia. Research indicates that a cemetery in Georgia, located at New Canaan Baptist Church, is the final resting place for some Parris' while other burial sites for the family located in South Carolina and potentially Virginia are overgrown and have unmarked tombstones.⁴⁴ The familial ties to the Spartanburg County, South Carolina community from the Parris family may have influenced their behaviors and beliefs. The county is named after a local military unit that fought in the American Revolutionary War and uncoincidentally for the time, each state the Parris' resided in were major players in the war. Spartanburg was a flurry of activity for the American Revolution and the Indian Wars.⁴⁵

In addition to having a large Native American presence in late eighteenth century Spartanburg, there was also a population, unknown in size, of enslaved peoples who sustained the town's economy by laboring in the cotton fields and textile mills. However, the cotton plantations were small and as most larger plantations in the South did not heavily rely on chattel slavery, although it was still practiced, but indentured servitude was also common. Even though no Civil War battles ever reached Spartanburg, the city had hundreds of men enlist to defend the South.⁴⁶

While in Spartanburg, Lewis Parris and his wife Phoeby gave birth to a son named Noten Dickerson Parris. Noten, whose Americanized name is Nathan and who was probably named after his grandfather, was born in 1831. It is here in the family line that the first public photos of members of the Parris family emerge. Noten resided in Dallas, Georgia until his death in which

⁴⁴ Lisa Koch. "Samuel Parris (1697-1759) - Find a Grave Memorial." Find a Grave. Find a Grave, January 1, 2011. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/63576570/samuel-parris>.

⁴⁵ "Spartanburg County, South Carolina." Civic Plus. Accessed May 4, 2022. https://www.carolana.com/SC/Counties/spartanburg_county_sc.html.

⁴⁶ "Spartanburg County, South Carolina."

he was the first documented burial of his family that occurred outside of South Carolina. According to Ancestry.com, Noten was a member of the 5th State Line Infantry Regiment of the South Carolina State Troops, fighting on the side of the Confederacy.⁴⁷ In some family documents, it is rumored that Noten did not physically serve in the war, but instead worked in a factory that became occupied by Union soldiers. He was then taken to a prisoner of war camp where he escaped but did not make it home until three months later because he made the trip home by foot.⁴⁸



*Fig. 2. Noten Dickerson and Susannah Parris*⁴⁹

By 1870, Dickerson and his wife Susannah had six children, two of which were born in Alabama. By 1880, the couple had two more children and were living full-time in Georgia.⁵⁰ Only the eldest six children's names are truly known as they are listed on Census records, but after 1870, Dickerson only provided the initials of his children's names in public records. One of

⁴⁷ "All U.S., Civil War Soldiers, 1861-1865 Results for Noten Dickerson Parris." Noten Dickerson Parris - U.S., Civil War Soldiers, 1861-1865 - Ancestry.com. Ancestry. Accessed May 4, 2022. [https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1138/?name=Noten%2BDickerson Parris&count=50&F0003CAC=5th%2BCavalry%2BRegiment%2BSouth%2BCarolina](https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1138/?name=Noten%2BDickerson%20Parris&count=50&F0003CAC=5th%2BCavalry%2BRegiment%2BSouth%2BCarolina).

⁴⁸ TheBaileyGirls. "Civil War." Ancestry® | Family Tree, Genealogy & Family History Records. Ancestry, August 4, 2011. https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/11245893/person/12095283888/media/28bb967c-5291-44ed-bf24-4a0c5f254ca6?_phsrc=rgG56&_phstart=successSource.

⁴⁹ "All U.S. Civil War Soldiers, 1861-1865 Results for Nten Dickerson Parris."

⁵⁰ Sandy Lyle. "Noten Dickenson 'Noke' Parris (1831-1907)." Find a Grave. Find a Grave, May 11, 2012. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/89999481/noten-dickenson-parris>.

Dickerson's sons was Warner David Parris. Warner Parris was born in South Carolina less than a decade after the Civil War officially ended in Texas. He fathered eight children between two wives and by far, Cecil was the most successful of his children.⁵¹ Media and genealogical research indicates that Cecil Parris seemed to have come from a close-knit family that valued privacy in their home life. Towards the end of his father's life, Cecil and his father lived together in his home in Savannah, Tennessee until his father's death in 1963.⁵²

*Fig. 3. Warner David Parris with Wife Ludie Benson and Children*⁵³

Entrepreneurship and the Training Rifle Saga

After Parris left Georgia, he clambered around some midwest states working for quick money before eventually migrating to Iowa to pursue a career in sales. It is here that ultimately led to his partnership with a man by the name of William Dunn. Dunn was an inventor who



⁵¹ "Warner D Parris Dies in Savannah," *The Jackson Sun*, April 25, 1973. Ancestry. Lehi. Accessed May 3, 2022. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/282807102/?article=c6549c7e-79bc-4024-ab89-7283c621232d>.

⁵² "Warner D Parris Dies in Savannah," *The Jackson Sun*. April 25, 1963. Accessed April 10, 2023. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/282807102/?terms=Warner%20Parris&match=1>.

⁵³ "Warner David Parris," Ancestry® | Family Tree, Genealogy & Family History Records. Ancestry, September 18, 2016. <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/88759914/person/340035902809/gallery?galleryPage=1>.

owned an incredibly successful hardware store in Clarinda, Iowa. His first production company operated out of the back of his store until he could build a free-standing factory. Once that factory was built, the Dunn Manufacturing Co.'s goal was to sell wind powered generators, specifically to farm owners, so they could recharge their electrical items.⁵⁴ Dunn needed help marketing his product and in 1936, Parris' sales background put him in a direct position to partner with Dunn. In 1937, Dunn solidified the partnership with Parris and together they created the Parris-Dunn Corporation.

Prior to Parris's partnership with Dunn, he was the president of the Wincharger Corporation in Sioux City, Iowa until he retired in 1936 and he was bought out by Zenith Corporation. The company that was founded in 1935, lived a short life.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, with the help of Dunn, the two created, in 1937, the Parris-Dunn Corporation, which produced training rifles for the Army and Navy. Lisle Corporation, another wartime corporation that produced the magnetic drain plugs all tanks at the time were required to carry, and the Parris-Dunn Corporation brought a surge in economic success to Clarinda and provided jobs for both men and women.⁵⁶

Parris was initially the President with Dunn as his Vice-President, but during the war production years, their roles were reversed. With the end of World War I, America sold its unused rifles as surplus and when the U.S. became involved in World War II, the military suffered a shortage of rifles, other military weapons, and essential aids for the war effort. This changed the course of the Parris-Dunn Corporation as the United States did not consider wind powered generators a priority or meaningful source during the war. However, instead of making

⁵⁴ Drillmaster. "A History of Drill and Training Rifles Part 6." *The DrillMaster*. May 10, 2012. <https://thedrillmaster.org/2012/05/10/rifle-history-part-6/>.

⁵⁵ "Retiring Wincharger President Honored," *Sioux City Journal*. October 29, 1936. Accessed May 2, 2022. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/510476183/?terms=C%20L%20Parris&match=1>.

⁵⁶ Gordon Gammack. "Small Town Vigor Earns 2 'E' Awards," *The Des Moines Register*. July 24, 1943. Accessed March 22, 2023. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/130614289/?terms=Lisle%20Corporation&match=1>.

assigned parts, Cecil Parris and Vernon Lisle traveled back and forth to Washington D.C. pitching the idea of non-firing rifles (Parris) and drain plugs (Lisle). The men finally garnered the approval needed and Parris and Dunn began production of the non-firing training rifles.⁵⁷

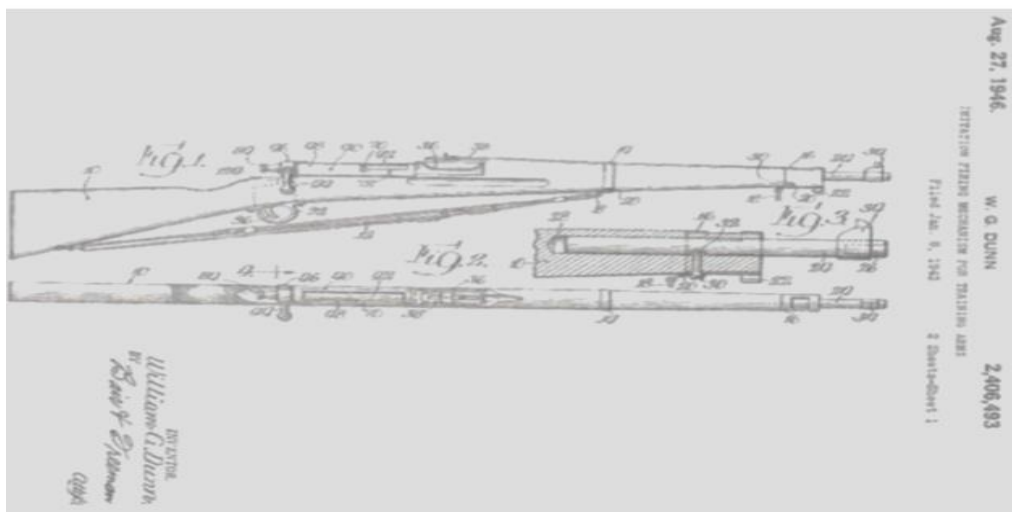


Fig. 4. Sketch of training rifle by Dunn⁵⁸

It was a stroke of pure luck Dunn and Cecil were ready and able to assist the United States in its time of need. With World War II underway, the United States was facing a shortage of rifles leaving training and hunting rifles as the dominant weapons used by soldiers.⁵⁹ With patriotism and love for the country running deep through his veins, Cecil had the idea to produce wooden training rifles out of the factory that was manufacturing wind powered electrical equipment. The training rifle would be standard sized and made from scraps of lumber the factory would otherwise discard. The Navy commissioned 300,000 rifles and the Army commissioned 200,000. According to a 1945 article, the government contracted Parris-Dunn Corporation for \$1,500,000 and provided jobs for more than 250 men and women.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Gordon Gammack. "Small Town Vigor Earns 2 'E' Awards."

⁵⁸ Drillmaster. "A History of Drill and Training Rifles Part 6."

⁵⁹ J.L. Smith. "Clarinda War Plants Expect Peace Orders," *The Des Moines Register*. July 15, 1945. Accessed May 4, 2022. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/128566286/?terms=C%20L%20Parris&match=1>.

⁶⁰ J.L. Smith. "Clarinda War Plants Expect Peace Orders."

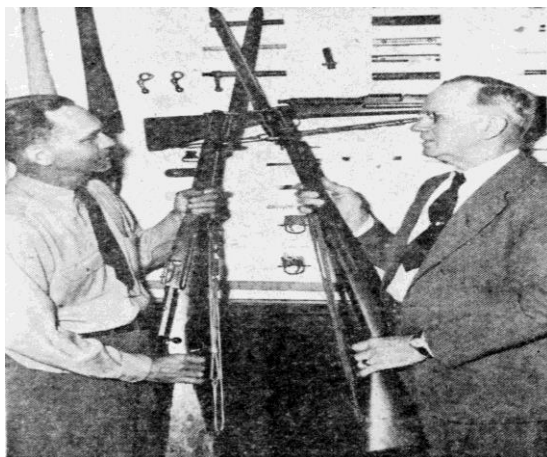


Fig. 5. Dunn and Parris holding their training rifles⁶¹

So impressed by the rifles the Parris-Dunn Corporation manufactured for the U.S. Army, the Navy then reached out to order their own specialized training rifles. The Navy's first order consisted of 190,000 training rifles outfitted with bayonet studs, adjustable rear sites, and working triggers.⁶² With this order, and more rolling in, both Dunn and Parris soon realized they had a problem. There was not enough manpower to meet the high demands from both of the military branches. This spurred the creation of another company, a sub-affiliate of the men's original corporation named Parris-Dunn Associates. The company was created to help resolve the employment dilemma.



Fig. 6 and 7. The butt of the training rifles produced by Parris-Dunn⁶³

⁶¹ J.L. Smith. "Clarinda War Plants Expect Peace Orders."

⁶² Drillmaster. "A History of Drill and Training Rifles Part 6."

⁶³ Drillmaster. "A History of Drill and Training Rifles Part 6."

Production of both the wind-electric equipment and the training rifles was so massive that it required 11 operational buildings to meet demands. With an increase in employees and despite manufacturing two entirely different products, Parris and Dunn were able to meet the demands of the army so exceptionally and accurately that they were rewarded the Army-Navy “E” Award.⁶⁴ After the completion of their military contracts, they produced a more civilian rifle model, which was the same as the military models, but with different markings on the butt. These training rifles were produced for drill groups and ROTC programs. By selling their trainers to civilian groups, Parris was able to achieve the pitch he had been making since 1943; for Parris-Dunn Associates to manufacture toy weapons. The toy weapon Parris proposed to the company’s chief engineer, Maurice Greiman, was a kid-friendly Western style pistol that would shoot corks. Greiman readily agreed with Parris, but his goals could not truly be fulfilled until his partner retired in 1949.⁶⁵

Parris Manufacturing Company

With Dunn’s retirement from all of the business’ dealings, Parris moved the company to Savannah, TN and aptly renamed it the Parris Manufacturing Company. Here he ran the company with his two brothers, Bill and Harold Lewis. The brothers employed 150 people to meet the demands as orders drastically increased with the popularity of the new toy rifle. During the Civil War Centennial, to commemorate the war, Parris’ company released a replica of Civil War muskets and pistols that fired cork. The company replicated full-size but less accurate models of the M1903 Springfield and also produced smaller sizes for children that included dummy bullets, a leather sling, and a rubber bayonet.⁶⁶ They also produced replicas of Davy

⁶⁴ “Two Clarinda Plants Set An “E” Record,” *The Courier*. July 20, 1943. Accessed March 23, 2023. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/357708464/?terms=Parris-Dunn%20Associates&match=1>.

⁶⁵ Drillmaster. “A History of Drill and Training Rifles Part 6.”

⁶⁶ “Savannah Factory Produces Civil War Pistols, Muskets,” *The Jackson Sun*. April 27, 1961. Accessed March 23, 2023.

Crockett and Kentucky rifles and pistols that were meant to model weapons similar to those used by frontiersmen. In 1962, it was recorded that the plant produced 1 million guns and about 12 million rounds of ammunition.⁶⁷

One of the major deciding factors in moving from Clarinda to Savannah was not only because of the economic advantage of being closer to the supply of wood and steel used to make the toy weapons, but the fact that Savannah offered a 12,000 square foot factory for the company's use, rent free for 10 years.⁶⁸ This offer was an astoundingly generous offer from a small town that had little else to offer.



Fig. 8. C.L. Parris with Confederate Reenactors holding Parris Manufacturing rifles⁶⁹

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/282605444/?terms=Savannah%20Factory%20Produces%20Civil%20War%20Muskets&match=1>.

⁶⁷ Leo Soroka. "Ex-Iowans Run World's Biggest Arsenal (Toys)." *The Gazette*. February 11, 1962.

⁶⁸ "Clarinda to Lose a Major Industry," *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*. January 25, 1952. Accessed May 3, 2022.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/37643305/?terms=C%20L%20Parris&match=1>.

⁶⁹"Savannah Factory Produces Civil War Pistols, Muskets."

Making replicas of war era rifles and Western style pistols was just the beginnings of the arsenal. Parris Manufacturing Company eventually expanded their toy weaponry empire to manufactured bow and arrow sets and swords along with period-themed outdoor costumes.

Harold Lester Parris would join his big brother in the toy manufacturing business that spurred the Kadets of America organization into existence and support his endeavors when he began to pitch the Kadets idea to Civitan groups. Harold was a valuable behind the scenes weapon. He ensured the toy production company ran smoothly, pitched new toy ideas, managed finances, and kept his big brother on track with realistic news and outcomes about the factory warehouse and the Kadets. Later on, Harold would be the first to tell Cecil of the need for Parris Manufacturing Company to produce more than toy guns and bow and arrows.⁷⁰ He would also be one of the first to admit defeat when the Kadets of America's memberships began to decline. When the company moved from Clarinda, Iowa to Savannah, Tennessee in 1952, Cecil was the president and chairman of the board. Cecil enlisted another brother, R.D. Parris, known as Bob, to be the manager of the New York sales office when it opened in 1952. The New York office did not remain open long enough to see sales.

In Savannah, Harold would become the overseer of factory production and the head of Parris Lumber Company, which was a subsidiary of Parris's toy factory also located in Savannah. There could not be a truer definition of keeping the business in the family as Cecil hired younger brother, William Benson Parris, known as Bill, to be the Vice President and Treasurer of Parris Manufacturing Company. When the factory relocated in 1952, the brothers

⁷⁰ Thomas BeVier. "Morale Stays High As Cadet Ranks Thin," *The Commercial Appeal*. September 23, 1969.. Ancestry. Lehi. Accessed May 4, 2022.
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/770946379/?terms=Kadets%20of%20America&match=1>.

built an additional 10,000 square foot factory to help meet their goal of producing 1,000,000 toy guns for the year.⁷¹

After serving in the Air Force during World War II, William Benson Parris moved his family to Hardin County, TN to work closely with his brothers. Production was going so well for the brothers and Parris Manufacturing Company that the brothers employed 150 full-time workers in order to meet the overwhelming demands.⁷² In 1965, the brothers added 100 more employees to increase production of toy and training rifles to 6,000 a day.⁷³



74



75

Fig. 9 and 10. Toy training rifle and Crockett's Old Betsy produced by Parris Manufacturing

Mr. Catfish

Spurred by the success and acknowledgement from the military Parris carried his excitement all the way to Washington D.C. in January of 1945. In tow was a plan and the beginning stages for the Kadets of America. In what can be seen as one of his more radical moments, he went with the goal of garnering federal government backing. He believed that his

⁷¹ Jack Dealy. "Hardin County's Newest Industry Starts Year's Output Of 1,000,000 Toy Weapons," *Nashville Banner*. March 27, 1952. Accessed May 2, 2022.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/603181063/?terms=Harold%20L%20Parris&match=1>.

⁷² "Brother from Clarinda Manufacture Blank Ammo," *Ames Daily Tribune*. July 5, 1961. Accessed May 4, 2022.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/54456979/?terms=C%20L%20Parris&match=1>.

⁷³ "Area Industries Grow; More Jobs Are Sighted," *The Jackson Sun*. July 27, 1965. Accessed May 2, 2022.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/282777575/?terms=C%20L%20Parris&match=1>.

⁷⁴ "Crockett's Old Betsy." Parris Toys. BizBuzz Digital. Accessed December 5, 2021.

<https://parristoys.com/collections/rifles/products/crocket-old-betsy>.

⁷⁵ "Full Size Trainerifle." Parris Toys. BizBuzz Digital. Accessed December 5, 2021.

<https://parristoys.com/collections/rifles/products/full-size-trainerifle>.

vision of a youth military-style organization which would prepare children and teens for war would garner the government support he thought he needed.⁷⁶

When this idea did not immediately garner the reaction that was hoped, Parris went back to his home in Iowa before a new opportunity would present itself in Savannah. Allowing Parris to become a community builder. He and his brothers' business provided jobs and other opportunities. For years to come, Parris would add "Mr. Catfish" to his repertoire of titles. The construction of the Pickwick Landing in the 1930s created the potential for tourism fishing in Savannah, but Parris largely is the sole reason the Savannah, Tennessee Catfish Derby became nationally recognized.



Fig. 11. C L Parris with a possible Catfish Derby Beauty Queen contestant⁷⁷

Cecil brought to the tournament an element of flash, dash, and spectacle that few believed would actually help increase attendance. In 1953, Cecil joined the Hardin County Boosters Club of Savannah to make the event more appealing by raising \$2,000 worth of prizes for the newly formed National Catfish Derby.⁷⁸ The six weeks long fishing rodeo, typically held from the end

⁷⁶ E.P. Chase. "Iowa Manufacturer," *Globe-Gazette*. January 25, 1945. Ancestry. Lehi. Accessed May 4, 2022. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/391358363/?terms=C%20L%20Parris&match=1>.

⁷⁷ Photo courtesy of the Tennessee River Museum

⁷⁸ Frank Vestal. "Double Prize for Fishermen; Catfish and Money As Well," *The Commercial Appeal*. May 17, 1953. Accessed May 3, 2022. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/770006364/?terms=Catfish%20Derby&match=1>.

of June to mid-July or mid-June to early August, would include events such as a catfish cook-off, a catfish skin-off, the fishing tournament itself, and a beauty pageant, in which one woman would be crowned “Catfish Queen.”⁷⁹ No longer was the tournament just for men, but now it offered elements that could entertain and include the whole family. The entrepreneur in Parris could not pass up a chance to make a local event much larger. Outside of a brief hiatus in date, the Catfish Derby has occurred almost every year, but not one person of color has been highlighted in any news coverage of the fishing tournament, rodeo, or beauty pageant in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The lack of diversity signaled an unwelcoming environment.

The beauty pageant became so popular partly due to the fact that the lucky winner of the pageant received a two-week, all expenses paid trip to New York City. To market this event, Cecil sent out hundreds of letters to various Civitan clubs and businesses so they could submit women for the beauty contest who they thought had the greatest opportunity of winning. To further increase turnout, Cecil also announced the release of tagged fish in hopes of motivating fishermen. Each tagged fish had a dollar amount attached to it that was donated by members of the community or business. When the fish was caught, the fisherman would then receive whatever dollar amount the donor pledged on the fish. By opening day on July 1, 1953, there were more than 250 tagged catfish bringing the total close to \$2,000 in cash prizes.⁸⁰

Savannah continues to host the National Catfish Derby as a major event, but not in the summer when the bass fishing tournament takes place. The Catfish Derby is now held during September, but still draws thousands of people and has guest appearances by actors and other

⁷⁹ “Two New Features to 1953 Catfish Derby: Tagged Fish, Bigger Queen Contest,” *The Memphis Press-Scimitar*. May 18, 1953. Accessed April 29, 2022.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/799939183/?terms=Catfish%20Derby&match=1>

⁸⁰ “Two New Features to 1953 Catfish Derby: Tagged Fish, Bigger Queen Contest.”

popular commercial fishers. ESPN has also attended the event and helped to keep the derby from disappearing into the past by airing it on its networks.⁸¹

After a successful derby and with the promise of bringing it back the following year, Parris returned to the idea he pitched to D.C. more than five years prior. His popularity, creativity, and charisma allowed for Parris's vision of his youth group, trained in military-style drills and using his famous training rifles, to finally come to fruition. The Kadets of America was founded in the fall of 1953, following the conclusion of the 2nd Annual Catfish Derby. Cecil and his brother Harold raised the idea to the Savannah Lions Club, of which they were both members. One week later the first unit was established in Savannah and consisted of 50 boys. Quickly after, a second unit was created in Pulaski, Tennessee and consisted of 40 boys, and a third unit was established in Florence, Alabama.⁸²

Chapter Three: Forming the Kadets of America

⁸¹ Taylor Wilson. "Something's Fishy in Hardin County." ESPN. ESPN Internet Ventures, November 12, 2003. https://www.espn.com/outdoors/fishing/news/story?page=f_fea_catfish_myth-or-fact_TN_Wilson

⁸² "Youth Drill Team Formed in Pulaski," *Nashville Banner*. June 11, 1955. Accessed May 3, 2022. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/603468320/?terms=Kadets%20of%20America&match=1>

With an operational guideline that closely mirrored the Boy Scouts of America but differed in morals, the Kadets of America introduced themselves to the world. “The Kadets are taught discipline, teamwork, self reliance, and self confidence” said Parris in an interview with *The Tennessean* in 1961.⁸³ Included within this organization were also sub groups and programs the youth could join. Such groups were: the Kadet Bicycle Brigades, the Kadet Drum and Bugle Corps and the Kadet Kavalry Korps. The members of the Kadet Kavalry rode and trained with horses and Shetland ponies. In addition to the country club, Parris’s farm was also able to comfortably house rows of white buildings that resembled barracks, for those who were accepted into the Kadet summer program in Savannah. It is here that Parris would develop a business and attraction in Savannah that would go on to garner immediate success, that mail for the summer program was being routed to the city of Savannah, Georgia instead. The delivery mistake went on for so long that Parris went to the post office and convinced the postmaster to add a stamp for “Catfish Capital of the World” to ensure further mixups would no longer occur.⁸⁴

A couple of years after relocating his toy company to Savannah, Parris took his toy rifle production a dramatic step forward and combined his toy weapons with a military style training. In what seems to be a response to the public’s concern on safety, Parris made sure to include in his campaign that the Kadets of America organization was also meant to teach boys and girls “the basics of gun safety, basic military drills and pride in America and her flag.”⁸⁵ Boys and girls who joined were often afforded the opportunity to participate in parades and other local celebrations, showing off their skills learned during Kadet training. In 1956, and according to the

⁸³ Julie Hollabaugh. “Kadets to Surround Hardin County in Yesteryear's Aura.” *The Nashville Tennessean*, May 9, 1961.

⁸⁴ Joe McDavid. “Foul-Up Started Gala Fish Derby At Savannah,” *The Commercial Appeal*. June 28, 1959.. Accessed May 3, 2022.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/770139401/?terms=Catfish%20Capital%20of%20the%20World&match=1>.

⁸⁵ “Kadets of America.” Vintage Kids Clubs. Vintage Kids Clubs Online Museum. Accessed December 5, 2021. <https://www.vintagekidstuff.org/kadets-of-america>.

United States Patent and Trademark Office, Parris first filed the copyright and trademark paperwork for the Kadets.⁸⁶ Soon after, a nationwide campaign was launched.



Fig. 12. Photo of the Kadets of America Trademark⁸⁷

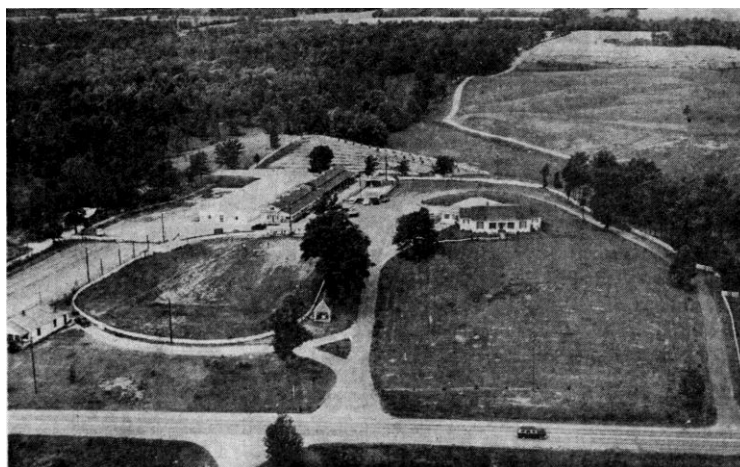


Fig. 13. Aerial View of the Kadet Teen Town⁸⁸

It is unclear if Cecil knew the extent to which the Kadets of America would reach, but by 1960, there were 400 units spread across the United States. Except for one photo documented African American unit in Chicago and another with no apparent photos in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, no other units appeared to consist of persons of color. Popularity and support from whites were so profound for the Kadets that Cecil was able to purchase roughly 200 acres in Savannah to build a Kadet Teen Town. The town was to be run by Kadet members and

⁸⁶“Trademark Electronic Search System (TESS).” United States Patent and Trademark Office. Accessed December 5, 2021. <http://tmsearch.uspto.gov/>.

⁸⁷Photo courtesy of the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

⁸⁸ “Kadet Teen Town Country Club, Opened to West State Teenagers.”

supervised by what equated to an elected governing board. The amenities offered were on a similar level to those we can find in luxury country clubs today. There was a swimming pool, golf course, putting green, and driving range. In addition to an archery course and stables that housed 40 horses and Shetland ponies.

What was most fascinating, yet not completely strange, was that Cecil had five man-made lakes installed, all of which were stocked with fish. One lake in particular was stocked with blue catfish thanks to the Tennessee State Game and Fish Commission. That lake, just two miles south of Savannah, was at the time one of the only lakes in the United States to be stocked in such a manner. However, not all Kadet members were allowed to enjoy this new town. Those Kadets not local to Savannah or bordering West Tennessee towns, were only allowed to enjoy the 7,000 square foot recreation center if they were accepted into the summer programs Parris hosted each year. Those fortunate Kadets who lived close could pay the fee to enjoy the recreation center which housed a large dance floor, live music on Fridays, and outdoor swimming pool. As well as the clubroom, kitchen, and café.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ “Kadet Teen Town Country Club, Opened to West State Teenagers.”



Fig. 14. Page from the 1956 Kadets of America Handbook⁹⁰

Membership fees were \$5 for girls and \$10 for boys and helped keep the facility operational, but ultimately it was run as a nonprofit business and most of its funding came from donations from civic clubs, private events and Parris' own finances. A project the size of what Parris did would cost millions of dollars to build in 2023 and millions of dollars were not easy to come across in the 1960s, especially in a small town like Savannah. Despite his many endeavors in the industrial sphere, Cecil did not have an unlimited supply of funds. He had hundreds of people on his payroll he needed to support, his brothers included, and was not receiving a salary just by being Mr. Catfish. However, from some unknown source of income, Parris claimed to have invested \$100,000 of his own money into the teen town and then proceeded to monetize the Kadets to support the remainder of the project. Members across every unit were charged an

⁹⁰PMAssistantLLC. "1956 Kadets of America: Boys Handbook Digital Restoration." Etsy. Etsy. Accessed December 6, 2021. <https://www.etsy.com/listing/1006908166/1956-kadets-of-america-boys-handbook>.

additional tax which was due when semi-annual membership fees were paid. If members desired more amenities, they would be financed through bond issue, purchased by Cecil and paid off with the money coming in from membership dues and other income being generated in the Teen Town.⁹¹



Fig 15. Building of Kadet Teen Town Barracks⁹²

In addition to the Teen Town, Cecil offered a Kadet training school in which five to ten members of every unit throughout the nation could send boys or girls to participate in one week training classes. Once the classes were completed, attendees could then return home and relay the information on drills and leadership to their unit members. However, before the training school became a success, Cecil conducted a trial run in the summer of 1957 that lasted four weeks. The turnout was larger than anticipated, making the school a permanent feature of the Teen Town.⁹³ According to an article written in November of 1957, the Kadets of America had an estimated 10,000 members with units in every state.⁹⁴ While that statistic has proved difficult

⁹¹ “Kadet Teen Town Country Club, Opened to West State Teenagers.”

⁹² “Kadet Officers School To Begin at Savannah,” *The Jackson Sun*. June 8, 1958. Accessed May 4, 2022. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/282548010/?terms=Kadets%20of%20America&match=1>.

⁹³ “Kadet Officers School To Begin at Savannah.”

⁹⁴ Elmer Hinton. “Savannah Firecracker His ‘Kadets of America’ Is Giving a Boost to Boys the Nation Over.”

to find supporting evidence to corroborate, it is not a far-fetched reality. By this time, Cecil had also initiated other activities within the town. Now there was an annual watermelon growing contest and his farm now held more than ponies and horses. He raised cattle, chickens, and hunting dogs. He and his brother William also raised and owned prized Beagles.⁹⁵ The expansion of the farming element of the town is almost an homage to his childhood farming days in Georgia.

Along with the obvious kadet school, membership also included swim, dance, horseback and golf lessons. Parris hinted at the reason for the other lessons was so kids would be well-rounded and able to socially hang on the same level as children in Nashville.⁹⁶ Meaning he did not want the children associated with his name an organization to be seen as country or less-than. Like Nashville, Hardin County residents were first hand witnesses to the ravages of war, but unlike Davidson County, Hardin is home to one of the bloodiest battles of the war. The Kadets of America was headquartered near Shiloh National Military Park, on Pickwick Dam Highway, and the scene of the Battle of Shiloh or also known as the Battle of Pittsburg Landing. The battle lasted two days in April of 1862 and resulted in one of the largest casualties of the Civil War. The Union defeated the Confederates and forced them to retreat back into Corinth, MS to recoup. The Confederates lost almost 11,000 soldiers during the two day battle and despite the Union losing more, they were the victors in the end. It is important to note that Hardin County was a small area filled with independent farmers, not plantation owners. It is said the local farmers did not like the economic advantage that plantation owners had by owning slaves.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ "Here and There In The State," *The Daily News-Journal*. January 9, 1955. Accessed May 5, 2022. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/359073129/?terms=C%20L%20Parris&match=1>.

⁹⁶ Rudy Abramson. "Teen Town- Investment in Youth." *The Nashville Tennessean*, September 7, 1959. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1900241669/48921762C85443A0PQ/1?accountid=4886>.

⁹⁷ "Shiloh." American Battlefield Trust. American Battlefield Trust. Accessed December 5, 2021. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/shiloh>.

According to the *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, when the time came to vote, Hardin County voted to stay in the Union. However, their vote was obviously vetoed when Tennessee decided to secede. The men of Hardin County joined the Confederacy reluctantly and mostly because they were drafted.⁹⁸ During and after the Civil War, Hardin County and Savannah were an almost 50/50 split on politics. As a descendent of a Confederate veteran, Parris never hid his stance on the Civil War and was quoted saying that if the Confederates had his knowledge on how to produce weapons, albeit not toys, the war would have ended differently.⁹⁹

The Kadets participated in a number of events organized by southern heritage groups. A local Kadet unit attended a Confederate Day luncheon put on by the Nashville Civitan Club in 1962 where descendants of Confederate soldiers listened to Stanley F. Horn speak on how Aspirin could have helped change the course of the Civil War if General Braxton Bragg had access to the pain reliever.¹⁰⁰ General Bragg was known to suffer from headaches and this group and speaker believed that if modern-day medicine had been available to Bragg, the Stars and Bars flag might have been America's permanent flag. Bragg led armies in the Battles of Stones River, Perryville, Shiloh, and Chickamauga. None of which aided the Confederacy in their attempted advancements.¹⁰¹ When Horn concluded his speech, he was presented with a large cake decorated with the Confederate flag and the gathering was concluded with a demonstration by the Kadets of America's drill team.¹⁰²

⁹⁸James McDonough. "Battle of Shiloh." *Tennessee Encyclopedia*. *Tennessee Historical Society*, March 1, 2018. <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/battle-of-shiloh/>.

⁹⁹ Leo Soroka. "Ex-Yankees Make Arms for Rebels." *Elizabethton Star*, July 19, 1961. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585901263/?terms=Ex-Yankees%20Make%20Arms%20for%20Rebels&match=1>.

¹⁰⁰ Hugh Walker. "Aspirin Could Have Changed History." *The Nashville Tennessean*, March 28, 1962. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1900363471/A679E5F13A264479PQ/2?accountid=4886>.

¹⁰¹ "Braxton Bragg," Civil War | Biography, *American Battlefield Trust*. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/braxton-bragg#:~:text=Though%20opposed%20to%20secession%2C%20Bragg,the%20Confederate%20army%20in%20March>.

¹⁰² Walker, "Aspirin Could Have Changed History."

Due to all the attention the organization was gathering from various conventions, parades, and other appearances, the Kadet trainer rifle ended up accounting for 24 percent of Parris' toy factory output in the 1950s. Each training rifle came with a Kadets of America handbook and form to mail-in if children wanted to join. Members of the Kadets of America received handbooks as part of their uniforms as well. The handbooks had gender specific pages and detailed how the boys and girls should wear their designated uniforms and prices for additional decorative items. Another page detailed the "B-B Air Rifles" the Kadets used. It cited the materials the rifle was made from, which were a blend of wood and steel, while the following page laid out the official Kadet training rifles, outfitted with bayonets, metal butt plates and adjustable slings. One of the more notable aspects of the handbook is how it begins.

The first page was a letter from Parris describing the purpose for the Kadets of America organization and all the events and parades children should expect to take part in as loyal members. Final comments of the letter include "The training you receive as a Kadet will be equal to that which you would receive in regular military school... the type of training that has helped our country's greatest leaders..."¹⁰³ This brings into question who Parris believed America's greatest leaders to be and what were their ideas of patriotism. Included in the handbook was an order form and above the form were photos of the Confederate flag and the American flag, both of which could be purchased from the organization. The Confederate flag was one dollar more than the American flag. As if he knew this question would be raised, the following page was an order form from which the Confederate and American flags could be purchased.¹⁰⁴ The symbolism of the two forms placed akin to each other could signify one of two implications. The

¹⁰³Calsidyrose. "Kadets Order Form." Flickr. Yahoo!, February 4, 2014.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/calsidyrose/12309987483/in/photostream/>.

¹⁰⁴ "Kadets Order Form."

from whites after the Civil War, which included the terrorization of Blacks and other people of color and the support of Jim Crow

One of the first major parades the Kadets participated in was in front of former Georgia governor, Samuel Marvin Griffin. In 1968, Griffin was the vice presidential running mate to George Wallace. Griffin once told reporters he wished he had the opportunity as a boy that the members of the Kadets had. Former Governor Hugh White of Mississippi supported the organization and believed the programs would make a better America. Governor White was known for trying to persuade the African American citizens and leaders of Mississippi to accept equal but segregated schools. His efforts were being made after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling. The rest of White's political career was spent fighting the integration of Mississippi's public schools.

Parris constantly stated the Kadets of America was operated as a patriotic but non-partisan organization. However in June of 1961, during the Civil War Commemoration Celebrations in Nashville, in which Tennessee was "declaring its independence from the United States," the Kadet Cavalry Korps participated in the celebration with the Red River Riders of Clarksville and the Martin Guard of Pulaski.¹⁰⁶ Both of these groups identified as mounted Confederate cavalry units



¹⁰⁶Dancy Studio. "Confederate Grays to Rededicate 1861."

Fig. 17. The Kadet Cavalry Kopr¹⁰⁷

Both of these groups identified as mounted Confederate cavalry units. There seemed to be no strict age limit that the units adhere to, only suggestions. Typically boys as young as age five could join the Kadets of America and remain active members until they turned 16 years-old. However, it does seem that depending on location, determined the ages boys and girls had to be to join. For example, in certain units in Oklahoma, children had to be between 11 and 16 years-old for one unit in the state, but for another unit in the same state, the youngest participant could be nine years of age.¹⁰⁸

The same was true in Pennsylvania- to join members had to be at least 9 years old, but no older than 14. Meanwhile in New Jersey, children just had to be 5 to join. Some later units that were formed did fall under the idea of patriotism, but hoped that the Kadets could teach youth self-discipline. Former Tennessee Secretary of State, Joe Carr, who was in charge of the juvenile division, kept momentum in the organization rolling when he stated that the organization would be optimal in combating juvenile delinquency. In Orlando, Florida, two chief petty navy officers started a unit in the area with this in mind. They hoped that by opening this unit, boys and girls would learn discipline, leadership, teamwork and loyalty; all in the hopes of combating juvenile delinquency.¹⁰⁹

The same is true for one of the organization's all-Black unit members. Formed in Chicago in 1957 and sponsored by a local couple named Edna and Gilbert Acklin, the pair wanted to help combat juvenile delinquency in their community and thought that forming their

¹⁰⁷Dancy, Studio. "Confederate Grays to Rededicate 1861," *The Nashville Tennessean*, June 11, 1961. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1900344109/560F805273F642BEPQ/8?accountid=4886>.

¹⁰⁸"Local Students Graduate from Kadets of America," *The Newcastle Paper*, November 9, 1989.

¹⁰⁹"Youth Group Established at Sanford." *The Orlando Sentinel*, March 27, 1958. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/222169148/?terms=Youth%20Group%20Established%20at%20Sanford&match=1>.

own unit would be an impactful way of teaching young Black boys and girls discipline, leadership, and manners. Gilbert Acklin stated, “[v]andalism and delinquency were so terrible in this community.¹¹⁰” The unit's drill team performed so well that they were in high demand and traveled throughout North America performing in parades and other private events. According to an article in 1964, the Acklin's home was beginning to resemble a trophy case rather than a home.¹¹¹ Despite efforts to entice teenagers into joining the unit, none joined. The group was comprised of 35 young people aged from 4 to 12 years. The lack of teenage participation did not stop the Acklins as they held daily practices during the summer and weekly practices during the school year. The couple also provided the majority of the financial obligations while the parents provided the uniforms and rifles.



¹¹⁰ “Kadets of America Win Trophies for Drill Skill.” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (1921-1967), October 10, 1964, 17, <https://ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/kadets-america-win-trophies-drill-skill/docview/493087266/se-2>.

¹¹¹ “Kadets of America Win Trophies for Drill Skill.”

*Fig. 18. Kadet Unit 1114 of Chicago*¹¹²

Despite there being another unit in the Chicago area, in Hegewisch, that unit was located in a predominantly white suburb and sponsored by the local VFW chapter. The *Chicago Defender* wrote an article on the success of Unit 1114 in Phoenix, Illinois, just 20 minutes south of the Hegewisch unit.¹¹³ Research does not indicate if the two units ever crossed paths, but it is unlikely since Chicago is, to this day, one of the most racially segregated cities in the United States. Unit 1114 is one of two, documented all-Black units and instead of following the trend Parris set at his Kade Teen Town, the Acklin's formed their own use for the Kadets and brought positive change to their community. So, whether the Kadets started as a product of the Cold War, the racial tensions of American society quickly shaped the way the organization's various units conducted their practices. The other unit in Winston-Salem was founded at the local YMCA, which already had a Drum Corps.¹¹⁴

¹¹²Couple Directs Youth 'Kadets.'" *Chicago Tribune*. October 4, 1964.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/201614992/?fcfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IkpXVCJ9.eyJmcmVlLXZpZXctaWQiOiJwMTYxNDk5MiwiaWF0IjoxNjc5OTMxMzc5LCJleHAiOiJlE2ODAwMTc3NzI9.yJnznHD8eiDAWKvhlZa5wOXKMxeuWlOaRkFUI2vziio.>

¹¹³"Kadets of America Win Trophies for Drill Skill."

¹¹⁴"Branch 'Y' Announces Additions, Promotion," *The Sentinel*. June 28, 1969. Accessed April 12, 2023. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/936097136/?terms=Kadets%20of%20America&match=1.>



¹¹⁵“Kadets of America Win Trophies for Drill Skill.”

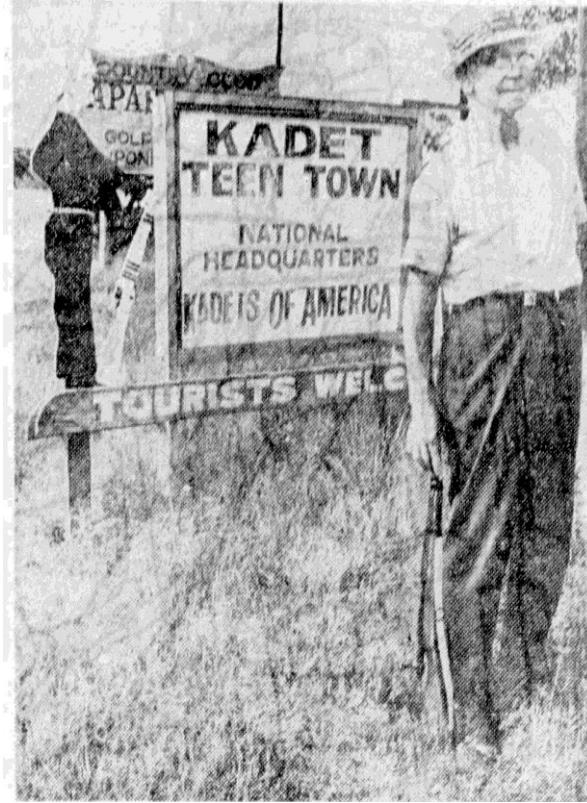


Fig. 20. Parris standing guard at Kadet Teen Town sign with rifle by his side¹¹⁶

Chapter Four: Revitalizing and Reliving the Past

The Kadets of America organization came about during a time of great change. The Cold War era was a strange time for American society. Children were being taught that a nuclear

¹¹⁶BeVier, Thomas. "Morale Stays High As Cadet Ranks Thin."

attack could happen at any moment and annihilate the United States. Wars were breaking out as citizens of war-torn countries were struggling to survive and create some sense of normalcy. Another reason Parris potentially decided to organize the Kadets was because the youth of America had all absorbed the fear of nuclear attack from their parents, neighbors, and government. In a way, the organization helped subdue those fears by preparing the children for attacks, by training them in basic cadet drills, sharp-shooting, and other military school elements. Yet, the program also offered a place and time for the youth to relax and enjoy the pleasures of young adulthood; escaping the reality of the Cold War fears for just a moment.

The Cold War fear did not escape Parris and the residents of Savannah. In 1953, a year after *Duck and Cover* was released, Parris outlined his plan for the Kadets of America program. Parris had always liked the idea and concept of youth military schools, but did not appreciate the high costs that prohibited many from attending; missing out on the training and self-discipline strategies that were being taught. He believed that all male youth should be afforded the opportunity to evade the grips of juvenile delinquency that was rising in America. The same year as the Hungarian Revolution, in which Hungarians staged an uprising against Soviets and were not successful in overthrowing the Soviet military, Parris launched his nationwide campaign for the Kadets of America.

The other change was racial- desegregation. The Kadets of America lasted for almost two decades and despite all efforts to keep the organization afloat, there was not enough support, financial or otherwise. Cecil decided to sell his toy company, Parris Manufacturing Co., in the mid-1960s. According to an article in *The Commercial Appeal*, the company's sales had dropped while the Civil Rights movement reached new heights. Consumers were not as ready to spend their money on toy confederate firearms as previous years. These are the musings of Cecil Parris that can be read in the 1969 *Commercial Appeal* article. Parris blamed the decrease in sales on

“minority groups” whom he believed had ill intentions and wanted to sabotage his company and organization.¹¹⁷ At the time the company was experiencing a dip in sales, they attempted to expand their inventory and included puzzles and three new board games for consumer purchase. As of 2022, the company no longer manufactures puzzles or games and is back to toy rifles, pistols, and bow and arrows as their main products.

As previously mentioned and worth mentioning again, Parris hails from a family of patriots. His ancestors fought in both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. Cecil himself was deployed for World War I and he and his partner’s business became incredibly successful with a contract they received from the U.S. Navy and Army. Patriotism was an aspect of Parris’s life that was so ingrained; it seemed to be what his whole persona was built on. Parris took that passion and trained children to be respectable citizens and patriots of America. When memberships for the Kadets began to dwindle, so did Parris’s sense of identity. Parris appeared to be angered and believed that children would begin to lose their perception of patriotism. Parris states, “[i]f you take patriotism and toy rifles away from kids, there isn’t anything will weaken America more.”¹¹⁸ The Kadets of America did not survive long after this statement was made in 1969, yet America continued moving forward, all thoughts of the Kadets quickly pushed aside. After Parris sold his company to a father-son duo from Texas, he donated 120 out of his 185 acres of land; which consisted of the Kadet Teen Town, Shetland pony stables, and golf course,

¹¹⁷ Thomas BeVier, “Morale Stays High As Kadet Ranks Thin.”

¹¹⁸ BeVier, “Moral Stays High As Kadet Ranks Thin,” 3.

to the Hardin County Board of Education. Now, all that remains is the toy factory, his home across the street, and the two public schools that were built on the land.

Fig. 21. Photo of Parris's former home taken in 2022¹¹⁹



Fig. 22. Photo of Hardin County Middle School on land donated by Parris.¹²⁰

In 1970, the Kadets essentially became an inactive organization and Parris began to spend more time in Florida. Little was written about the group in the 1970s and only one article appears covering an active organization in November of 1989. The unit was based in Newcastle,



¹¹⁹ Photo taken by author.

¹²⁰ Photo taken by author.

Oklahoma and only had three members. It performed at local football halftimes and in drill team competitions. The unit also had such activities as: hiking, camping, rock climbing, and firearm



Fig. 23. Photo of Parris Manufacturing Company taken in 2023¹²¹

safety. To further connect the patriotic backbone that runs deep in the roots of the organization, the Newcastle unit was located in the local National Guard Armory.¹²² The article, which was printed November 9, 1989 in *The Newcastle Pacer*, was one of the last ones published on an active unit. The birth of the new decade saw the official death of Cecil Parris’s Kadets of America.

Despite the Kadets of America organization coming to a close in 1970, Cecil Lewis maintained his role as head entertainer and founder of the annual Catfish Derby in Savannah. The derby lasted more than 15 years, before taking an unplanned hiatus in 1969.¹²³ Parris is nationally credited for starting the National Catfish Derby, but he credits an article he read in *True Magazine*, which talked about how Pickwick had some of the best fishing around, for

¹²¹ Photo taken by author.

¹²² “Local Students Graduate from Kadets of America,” *The Newcastle Pacer*, November 1989, 5. Retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com/image/612336899/?terms=kadets%20of%20america&match=1>.

¹²³ Johnny Malone, “Lagging Interest Writes End to Catfish Derby,” *The Jackson Sun*, July 1969, 20. Retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com/image/282950672/?terms=catfish%20derby&match=1>.

inspiring him.¹²⁴ The 1952 derby was a well marketed occasion. Articles and ads ran in newspapers and magazines across the country bringing in visitors from all over the nation. The event was so popular and became a massive yearly undertaking in the county that it is rumored that the 1969 derby simply could not garner enough volunteers and civic groups to ensure the success of the festivities. Formal complaints were also made about the lack of fish in the Pickwick Dam area. Residents and fishermen believed that toxins from Tennessee River Pulp & Paper were being discharged into the lake and affecting the fish population. Boat dock owners used the excuse of toxins and low fish count to quit sponsoring the national event as well. However, the president of the mill in 1969 claimed, “The waste water from the mill contains no toxic substances that are harmful to fish or human life.”¹²⁵ Some regular fishermen, participants of the derby and also recreational, did not seem to agree with the president, and other Savannah residents did not seem to care either way. Therefore the last Catfish Derby was held in 1968, and like all previous years, was a success.



Fig. 24. The Motel in Savannah, Tennessee¹²⁶

¹²⁴John Rogers, “About Catfish Derby At Savannah, Tenn,” *The Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 1952, 25. Retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com/image/799599639/?terms=catfish%20derby&match=1>.

¹²⁵Malone, “Lagging Interest Writes End to Catfish Derby,” 20

¹²⁶ Photo from McLemore Auction Company of the Bellis Motel before it was demolished in 2020.

Savannah resident Jay Barker missed his favorite childhood event. In 1993, he and other members of the community formed the National Catfish Derby, Inc, of which he was president. The idea came to Barker when he was celebrating the 50th anniversary of his in-laws and lifelong Savannah residents, Bill and Betty Bellis. The Bellis' owned the popular hotel catfish tournament participants stayed in during the event- Bellis Botel. The Catfish Queen beauty pageant was also held there. While celebrating their anniversary at the Botel, Barker got the idea to revive the popular derby. Barker did not want to stray too far from the original layout of the derby; so participants would be fishing for cash prizes and tagged fish would be released prior to the event. The biggest difference between the two event time periods is the amount of time participants were allowed to fish. The new regulations in 1993 allowed for fishermen to fish from June 7th to September 3rd. The prizes were also considerably better than those offered in the previous 12 year period. The ultimate prizes included a 1993 Nissan truck or a Snapper riding lawn mower.¹²⁷

The Parris Manufacturing Co. also participated in the revival of the 1993 derby. Together with the National Catfish Derby, Inc. they sponsored a kid's fishing rodeo and helped organize the town festival. A catfish cooking competition was also held in which participants were judged on best catfish and best hushpuppies.¹²⁸

¹²⁷Taylor Wilson, "Paying Homage to the Catfish," *The Jackson Sun*, May 1993, 26. Retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com/image/284058874/?terms=catfish%20derby&match=1>

¹²⁸Taylor Wilson, "Catfish Derby Will Sponsor Fish Rodeo," *The Jackson Sun*, August 1993, 28. Retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com/image/283700838/?terms=catfish%20derby&match=1>



Fig. 25. Parris with a Kadet unit and beauty pageant contestants at a Catfish Derby

Another seat sat empty that needed occupying in order for the newly revived derby to be a success. Candidates were needed, women specifically, to compete for the honor of being crowned the Catfish Queen. The once fought over title drew in young women from across the nation. Most girls were not allowed to enter as easily as before, now there was a vetting process beforehand. It is reported that roughly 55 pageants were held in various towns as preliminaries to the Catfish Queen pageant.¹²⁹ However, Barker and the board decided to limit the 1993 contestants to Tennessee residents only. Part of this decision was due to the fact that the Catfish pageant would itself be a preliminary to the Miss Tennessee USA Pageant. A separate teen contestant would also be chosen and be advanced to compete for Miss Tennessee Teen USA crown.

Since its revival in 1993, the annual Catfish Derby has not had any issues with maintaining the widely popular event. To this day, two months out of the year are dedicated to the catfish tournament and weekly prizes are given until the weekend of the big event. The Catfish Derby is not the only pastime that attempted revival in Hardin County. Of course with the return of the derby in 1993, numerous activities and events were added that easily filled the

¹²⁹Delores Ballard, "Catfish Queen Surfaces Again," *The Jackson Sun*, August 1993, 9. Retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com/image/283699508/?terms=catfish%20derby&match=1>

gap that was left missing by the Kadets of America. However, for one avid supporter of the former organization, it did not fill in the void with modern-day activities. In Mississippi, a local historian named Dr. Charles W.L. Hall would go on to write a book on the missing element of the derby and its founder. Colonel Hall did not stop there though; in 2008, 15 years after the Catfish Derby revival, Dr. Hall would also try to revive Cecil Parris's first legacy, the Kadets of America.



Fig 26. Photo of Colonel Charles W.L. Hall¹³⁰

Colonel Charles W.L. Hall has authored many books on the Civil War and the Confederate army. Col Hall is best known in his hometown in Mississippi as an educator, historian, and minister. He is a self-proclaimed Confederate historian by being a zealous student of the “War for Southern Independence” as Col. Hall, commander of Camp No. 1329 of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, referred to the American Civil War. Col Hall was also awarded the War Service Cross by the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Southern Cross by the Order of the Southern Cross for his preservation efforts on the Franklin Battlefield Restoration.

¹³⁰ Charles W.L. Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008: In Service to America* (Jackson: Confederate Press).

Col Hall was a career officer of the US Army's Adjutant General Corps and is a war veteran of the Cold War, Vietnam War, and the Gulf War, retiring with over thirty years of service.¹³¹

Col Hall was the prime example of what it meant to be a Kadet. As a child, Hall was a member of Kadet Show Troop #15-52 in Louisville, Kentucky. The troop was sponsored by Hall's father's business. Under his leadership, the unit would grow from being a Show Troop into being a "Kadet Command."¹³² Worth L. Hall, a former World War II veteran, would serve as the unit's commander and Colonel. Like all Colonels and other commanders of Kadet units, leaders were expected to enforce and uphold the Kadets of America Proclamation. Various aspects of the proclamation included: inspiring youth to be patriotic, training them to be self-sufficient, and preparing them for commemorative events. The 2008 proclamation did not stray far from the original values established by Parris, as Col Hall wanted the new Kadets of America to be as similar to the original as possible. The renewed organization was endorsed by Hardin County Mayor, Kevin Davis. It seems that Davis believed in the revitalization efforts and the good the program would do for children of all ages. Therefore in 2008, a campaign was launched and the new theme of the program was to be "United We Stand."¹³³

Parris did not directly say whether he began the Kadets of America because of the rising fears and tensions created by the Cold War. However, Col Hall insinuated so when recalling his time in the unit. He referred to children in the Kadets of America as "Atomic Fallout Children of the 1950s."¹³⁴ While many children in certain areas of New Mexico experienced atomic fallout in 1945 with the testing of the nuclear bomb Trinity, nicknamed Gadget, there is no supporting

¹³¹"Scribd," 2013, December 8, 2022, <https://www.scribd.com/book/387414539/Revivals-to-Revolvers-to-Die-for-Commonwealth-and-Family-A-History-of-the-Second-Regiment-Kentucky-Infantry-Csa>

¹³²Charles W.L. Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008: In Service to America* (Jackson: Confederate Press)

¹³³Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*

¹³⁴Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 15

evidence that there was a Kadets of America unit in New Mexico in the 1950s.¹³⁵ It would not be too far-fetched of an assumption to say that Parris was also affected by the fears sweeping America during the Cold War. The tensions between the United States and Soviet Union were beginning to penetrate the lives of American citizens and play major roles in the upbringing of children. *Duck and Cover*, a 1952 educational film, was shown in classrooms across the nation. Its goal was to educate children on how to respond when facing threats of a nuclear attack.¹³⁶ The film was one among many that were shown with the goal of teaching the same message in a constant and unvaried fashion.



*Fig. 27. Photo from The Florence Herald of the first Kadet troop on assignment in an effort to recruit*¹³⁷

The fear of death by a nuclear war permeated the minds of growing children. During the height of the Kadets of America in the late 1950s, a survey was conducted and 60 percent of

¹³⁵Katherine Leede and Maggie O'Brien, "'Downwind' of Trinity: Remembering the First Victims of the Atomic Bomb," *NTI*, July 15, 2021, accessed December 1, 2022, <https://www.nti.org/atomic-pulse/downwind-of-trinity-remembering-the-first-victims-of-the-atomic-bomb/>

¹³⁶The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, "The Cold War in the classroom, 1952," accessed December 3, 2022, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/cold-war-classroom-1952>

¹³⁷ Photo from The Florence Herald of the first Kadet troop on assignment in an effort to recruit

children claimed to have constant nightmares about nuclear war.¹³⁸ It is sentiments like these that spurred the United States government into creating programs that would help improve the children of America's health, education, physical fitness, and divert them away from juvenile delinquency.¹³⁹

When Col Hall's father began to sponsor the Louisville Kadets unit, the United States was four years away from President Johnson's three year campaign of sustained bombing in North Vietnam, which can be seen as the time the U.S. officially entered the Vietnam War. When Col Hall put forth the new 2008 Proclamation to be signed by County Mayor Kevin Davis, it included details on how former Kadets members, now leaders, were all affected by the Vietnam War and would remember the Cold War era as plans continued to be made in their revitalization efforts. The terrorist attacks of September 11th were also stated as a reason to fill a void that was growing in the military training of American youth since the retirement of Parris. Despite Parris handing over the daily operations of the toy company to his brothers and the decline in Kadet membership across the nation, Parris still operated his Kadet Teen Town in Savannah until 1970.¹⁴⁰ During the years Parris had retired from the toy company and the closure of the Teen Town, sales had steadily dropped. Col Hall offers a different explanation of the decline in sales than Parris gave.

As previously stated, Parris hinted at minority groups to blame for the decline in toy sales. While there may be some form of the twisted truth in that statement, it is also reasonable to believe that it was not entirely due to the Civil Rights movement, but also the rise in opposition to the Vietnam War. Major protests against the Vietnam War first began in 1964 and continued

¹³⁸Alice L. George, *Awaiting Armageddon: How Americans Faced the Cuban Missile Crisis*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004), 147.

¹³⁹Ann Kordas, Review of *A Generation Discovered: Children and Families in the Cold War*, by Marilyn Irvin Holt, Richard Pells, and Sarah Potter. *Reviews in American History* 43, no. 4 (2015): 704–9.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43663603>

¹⁴⁰Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 19.

until the end of the war in 1975. Col Hall himself was placed on constant Riot Alert in Louisville as tensions rose. When Parris closed his Teen Town in 1970, stress was at new highs as some citizens were still angered by “Operation Menu” and the Kent State Shooting. After two years in South Vietnam, Col Hall went on to serve in the Gulf War and as a DOD Civilian in Japan and the Philippines until 2004. While Hall was away, Parris had passed away in Florida, with his wife dying 15 years later. When Parris passed, Teen Town, which he had dedicated all his time to after retiring from the toy company, was not opened again. According to Hall, the buildings fell into disrepair and were eventually demolished in 1989 and the swimming pool was filled in.¹⁴¹ The property that Parris did not give to the Board of Education, was acquired by Hardin County. No family members came forth to contest this decision. From there, the original home of the Parris’ with almost 26 acres, has been sold to various families.

After a couple years back home in Lumberton, Mississippi and with the thought of how his own children missed out on the life lessons that being a Kadet taught thousands of children, Col Hall set out on a mission to gather as much Kadets of America memorabilia as possible so he could begin the revitalization process. Months later, after over zealous efforts to acquire material, specifically newsletters and pamphlets, Col Hall finally took a moment to logistically think about the task he had taken on. The Kadets of America had, unofficially, ended almost four decades prior, it seemed like an unrealistic dream to try to recreate the program. However, without the fears of the Cold War lurking and a tense presidential campaign in the works, Col Hall believed it to be the perfect time to give American parents structure for their children. His first step was to design the first Kadets of America website. One of Parris's greatest struggles with the Kadets was communication amongst the different units and their leadership. He solved this problem by creating a monthly newsletter that was filled with up-to-date and relevant news on the

¹⁴¹Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 19.

happenings at Kadet Headquarters in Savannah.¹⁴² By establishing this newsletter, uniformity could be kept nationwide.



Fig. 28. Photo of The Kadet News that was sent to members¹⁴³

Col Hall created his own newsletter that would also be sent to members who joined the Kadets. The creation of the “Kadet Monthly Bulletin,” which would also be accompanied with the “Kadet E-Bulletin,” would be sent via the Kadet’s newly created email in an effort to ensure communication was not lagging. Possibly fueled by the presidential campaign, Col Hall made his own slogan to garner support and momentum for the budding program- “United We Stand.”¹⁴⁴ The slogan was not picked randomly as the phrase runs deep in Kentucky history. It is the official non-Latin state motto of Kentucky and a favorite phrase of the state’s first governor, Isaac Shelby.¹⁴⁵ Not only did Col Hall use the patriotic phrase for unification, he also used it to

¹⁴²Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 22.

¹⁴³Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 22.

¹⁴⁴Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 22

¹⁴⁵Ron Bryant, “The Kentucky State Seal,” *Kentucky Historical Society*, 1. Retrieved from <https://www.sos.ky.gov/sos-office/history/Documents/The%20Kentucky%20State%20Seal.pdf>

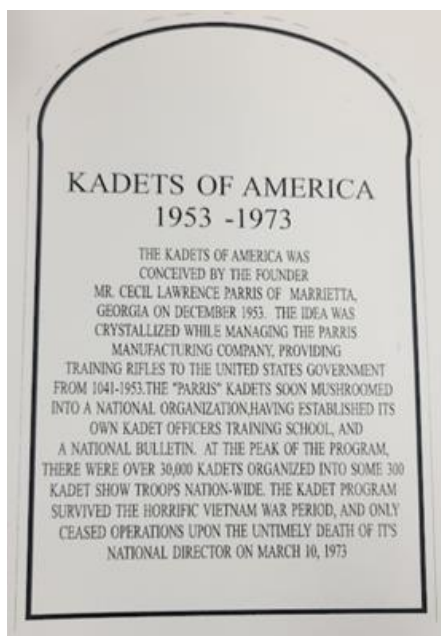
establish a sense of faith, stating, “child united with families, families united to the Nation, the Nation united to God!”¹⁴⁶ The uniforms would remain the same as the originals but with modern-style modifications and rankings would be replaced with official military titles to be used.

Therefore, in January of 2008, Col Hall presented the official Articles of Corporation for the Kadets of America to the Secretary of State Office in Nashville for approval. While visiting Nashville, Col Hall visited the Tennessee Historical Commission to inquire about retrieving a marker for the original Kadets of America. He had created mock markers with the texts he envisioned.¹⁴⁷ It is no wonder they were not approved as he, seemingly, did not file any of the proper paperwork and did not spell Parris’s name properly. Despite initiating these articles, Col Hall did not immediately move him and his family to Savannah, he registered the Kadets under a P.O. Box. Additionally, the four men he had listed as Directors also lived out of state in Kentucky, Indiana, and Mississippi. To help provide guidelines for his directors, Hall wrote “Official Kadet Kommandment’s Handbook” and the “Official National Employee’s Guide.”¹⁴⁸ The two handbooks contained ways to contact all the directors and organizational charts. Col Hall also set out to secure 501c3 status for the organization and after receiving proper documentation, opened corporate accounts in Savannah. However, lawyers were needed and out of the four he asked, all declined.

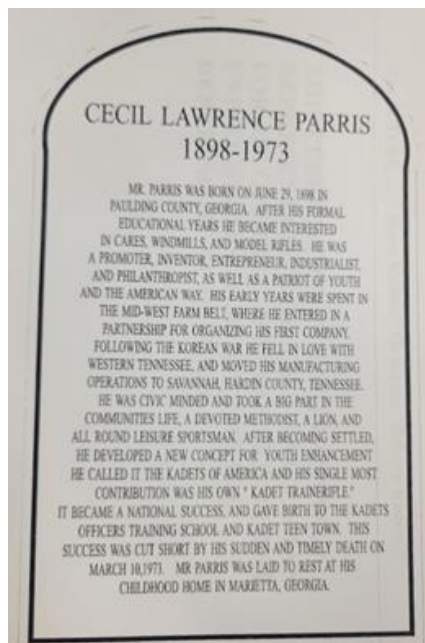
¹⁴⁶Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 22

¹⁴⁷ Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 28

¹⁴⁸ Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 28



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Figs. 29-31. Mock photos of the Historic Markers Col Hall proposed

In April of 2008, Col Hall made arrangements to move the Kadets of America

headquarters, and his family, from his hometown of Lumberton, MS to Savannah. The new

¹⁴⁹ Photos from History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008 of the drafted texts for Historical Markers Col Hall envisioned

¹⁵⁰ Photos from History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008 of the drafted texts for Historical Markers Col Hall envisioned

¹⁵¹ Photos from History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008 of the drafted texts for Historical Markers Col Hall envisioned

headquarters would be called “The Kadet White House.”¹⁵² In the home would be the offices for the directors; one of which would serve as an office space for the director and curator of the future National Kadet Museum-Hall of Fame. The windows of the future museum were to be decorated with the various flags that represented the Confederate States of America.

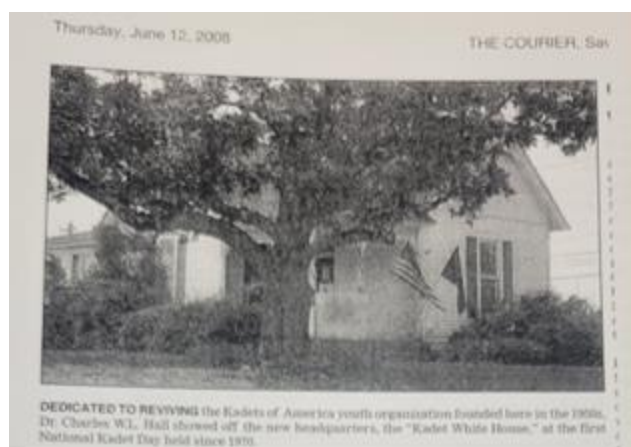


Fig 32. Photo of “The White House” the new Kadet headquarters¹⁵³

May 2008 saw the first ever “National Kadet Day,” for which a celebration of the opening of the headquarters also occurred.¹⁵⁴ It is unclear how many people came to the celebration and how many students registered to be a Kadet that first year. What is evident, is that it was an unsuccessful venture as in the following year, efforts were no longer being made to sustain the program. Not much remains left of the 2008 dreams of Col Hall. “The Kadet White House,” which would present-day be located behind the Tennessee River Museum and Hardin County Courthouse, was demolished at some indeterminate point.

Col Hall made great efforts in trying to recruit students to join the Kadets, but the family-run operation could not live up to the legacy left behind by the original founder, Cecil Parris. Despite meeting with then Hardin County School Director, John O. Thomas and gaining his

¹⁵²Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 31-32

¹⁵³Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 33

¹⁵⁴ Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 33

permissions to advertise the Kadets within the school as well as free use of school facilities, proximity to students would not be enough to salvage revitalization efforts.¹⁵⁵ Out of the original 145 students who expressed interests in becoming Kadets, between three Savannah schools, only five students immediately turned in their applications and dues.¹⁵⁶ It does not appear that the rest followed through. At the first ever “National Kadet Day,” only Col Hall’s daughter and two other Kadet volunteers attended.



Fig. 33. Photo from History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008 on National Kadet Day¹⁵⁷

While the original Kadets of America program achieved nationwide membership and were seen in newspapers in almost every state, their 15 year career came to such an abrupt halt. The severity of which the Kadets were essentially erased from American memory is somewhat shocking. However, Cecil Parris’s other legacy is one that achieved a much more successful stake in American memory. Maybe it is due to the fact that the Kadets of America was formed during the heights of war and terror, when parents wanted their kids safe at home, but the youth felt the need to defend their country. The National Catfish Derby offered families a chance to be

¹⁵⁵ Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 31

¹⁵⁶ Hall, *History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008*, 33

¹⁵⁷ Photo from History of the Kadets of America from 1953 to 2008 on National Kadet Day

just that, be families. So, maybe that is why the 2008 revival by Col Hall did not take effect; American parents had grown tired of seeing their children in military attire, preparing for the wars we hope never come.

Chapter 5: The End

Despite what some believe, hate does not exist inside its own bubble. It is a trait learned, often from one's family, but also through the groups and community members that one associates with. The new face of racism in America came on the heels of a tumultuous political disaster involving a president who encouraged white supremacy sentiment after the country's first Black president's term. With a newfound confidence and a leader in federal power who also seemingly aligned with white supremacy ideology, white supremacist groups took to the streets to instill fear and assert dominance over people of color and those who aligned themselves on the side of equality and justice for those who are being tormented. America has an interesting and complex history of the formation of these organized hate groups, but what is even more astounding is the lengths gone to by parents, family members, and communities to instill hatred and a sense of entitlement over Blacks and other persons of color into their children and young adults to ensure white peoples maintain their place at the top of the racial hierarchy and that the white supremacist agenda will continue.

On the surface, what Cecil Parris did in, creating the Kadets of America and the National Catfish Derby, might seem like a stroke of luck and great timing, but when delving deeper into the Parris' family history and their involvement in the American, Civil, World, and Cold Wars, it becomes a greater story to tell. The impact an organization such as the Kadets had on children at the time and the role it played in shaping their beliefs on not only patriotism, but race, is something that should be studied in greater detail. Understanding the motives behind these groups and organizations can potentially help us understand how these white supremacist groups and their purposes continue to gain momentum and popularity. And greater yet, effective counteractive methods.

The story of the Kadets of America is interesting because while there is plenty of information on the organization and its origins, there are not many primary sources accessible to

the public. Parris appears to have not left a journal and according to a personal call and follow-up email thread to Parris Manufacturing Company, there seems to be no more public copies of *The Kadet News* quarterly newsletters members received, and the Hardin County Archives does not allow access to those records. More likely they do not want outsiders poking into the quiet town's happenings. It is not known how many of the original uniforms are still in existence or better yet, good shape, but there are plenty of rifles and pistols from the Kadet's era that are being sold on third-party sites like Etsy and Ebay. Parris Manufacturing Company produces a modern-day Kadets Trainer Rifle and offers them in a variety of colors.

Parris might not have referred to the Kadets of America as a white supremacist group, but he surely did not stray far from the definition. The sheer number of these groups that existed is not shocking. What is unnerving is the ages of members of these groups and how they got there. Racism and hatred are as old as documented history, and rises in attitudes and actions can be correlated with contentious moments, like the Civil War for example. Long-term effects of the Civil War can still be seen throughout the South and some northern states today. There are multiple organizations for descendants of Confederate soldiers, and plenty of people still wave and display the Confederate flag proudly. Many of those people claim it is just pride in their southern heritage, but that heritage included the enslavement of Black people and genocide of Native Americans. These members of society claim to be patriotic, but what is patriotism if it does not include fighting for the freedom and equality of all people?

Patriotism has been made into a subjective concept of which many people practice their own versions. Parris was no different and he taught his version of patriotism to thousands of boys and girls across America. Despite being a product of the Cold War, it became increasingly clear where the true agenda of the organization lied. Besides a small exhibit in the Tennessee River Museum, the Kadets and Parris seem to have faded from most Savannah resident's

memories. An interview with a lifelong Savannah resident, before moving to Nashville for college, sums up the sentiment. Kailee Channell grew up in Morris Chapel, Tennessee, an unincorporated town in Hardin County just a 15 minute drive northeast of Savannah. She attended Hardin County High School and when asked about what she knows of C.L. Parris and the Kadets she replied, “I don’t know who that is.” When asked whether she attended any of the annual Catfish Derby’s and her experiences, she responded, “I have been and they are alright. I enjoyed them more when I was a kid, but as I got older it became less interesting because it was clearly an event marketed towards children, fishermen, and girls who cared too much about their looks and that wasn’t my thing.”

To this day guns are a topic of controversy. Outcries over regulations, safety, and school shootings can be seen almost every day in the news. They are aggressive and violent objects, but the Parris Manufacturing Company continues to produce toy weapons, predominantly rifles, for children with no apparent messaging on safe practices.

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