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# Terror In The Night: The Klan's Campaign Against The Jews



## **Synopsis**

The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist recounts the Ku Klux Klan's terrorizing of Mississippi's Jewish community and the ambush staged by the FBI and the Meridian, Mississippi, police that ended the terror. 25,000 first printing. Tour. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Ku Klux Klansmen, claiming that Jews were the driving force behind the civil rights movement, bombed two synagogues and a rabbi's house in Jackson and in Meridian, Miss., in 1967-68. A Klan hit list targeted Jewish business leaders for assassination. Nelson, Los Angeles Times Washington bureau chief who covered the South in the civil rights era, discovered evidence that the FBI and the Meridian police, using funds supplied by the Jewish community, paid informants to set a trap that left Klan hit man Thomas Tarrants III wounded and his fanatically anti-Semitic bomb-maker girlfriend Kathy Ainsworth dead. This absorbing true-crime tale is a time capsule to the civil rights movement's heyday. Using FBI files obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, Nelson recreates the case and illuminates the FBI's long vendetta against him for his reportage. Photos. Jewish Book Club alternate; author tour. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This often gripping journalistic account of appeasement and retribution in 1960s Mississippi has three parts. The first is the story of how the assimilated Jewish communities of Jackson and

Meridian, Mississippi, which had resisted opposing segregation and racial violence, were drawn into the struggle against the Ku Klux Klan when they too became targets of attacks. The leaders of those communities then experienced the poetic justice of being unable to enlist fellow citizens, cautious appeasers, in the fight. The second part is the story of the response of the FBI and the local police, with the cooperation of the Jewish community leaders--retribution that ultimately overstepped the limits of legality. Of particular interest is Nelson's detailed account of how the FBI bullied two leading Klansmen into cooperating. The last and least interesting part is Nelson's recitation of the personal and professional risks he took in uncovering the story of the retribution. Recommended for history collections.- Timothy Christenfeld, Columbia Univ. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Just as stated.

thanks

TERROR IN THE NIGHT carried me back into the earlier life of a man who later became my student. I had known about his earlier life in sketchy outlines, but this 20 year old book by master reporter Jack Nelson drew me back into the late sixties when I myself was a seminary student and traveled with fellow students to Atlanta to the funeral of the larger than life figure of Martin Luther King Jr. But the murder of King was an outcropping of the very deep and pervasive racial hatred and Klan violence against blacks and Jews all across the South. As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of these events it is important for us to re-read and remember the terrors some of us have lived through, whether as victims or perpetrators. My former student is now a very different man.

Review of Terror in the Night: The Klans Campaign Against the Jews by Jack Nelson (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1993). 260pp. \$22.00. Reviewed by Barry Mehler for Hadassah Magazine, 1993. December 28, 1992 720 words Jack Nelson is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and one of America's leading reporters on the civil rights movement. His latest book, Terror in the Night is a "non-fiction thriller" that is sure to please anyone who enjoys a fast-paced, action packed book. According to the jacket cover, Terror in the Night is "the explosive story of how the FBI and the Meridian police, bankrolled by the Jewish community and assisted by informants, planned an ambush that killed a female elementary-school teacher and left the Klan's top hit man critically wounded. Some cried entrapment. Some cried murder. Still others cried justice. And some, who will

read this book will cry "exploitation and sensationalism!" The implication in the blurb is that the Jewish community bankrolled an "ambush" which resulted in the death of an innocent elementary school teacher. The "female elementary school teacher" was no innocent bystander. She was a cold blooded terrorist out for murder. At the time she was shot, she was armed and dangerous. Her car was parked in front of the house of Meyer Davidson, a Jewish community leader active in the civil rights movement. She was there with her partner, Tommy Tarrants who had brought sixteen sticks of dynamite to blow up Davidson's house and kill his family. The blurb could just as well have said that the ambush put an end to the Klan's reign of terror and that one Klan terrorist was killed and the other captured. Instead, the book is written and advertised as a shocking exposÃ...Â .In fact, we have known for years now that the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover abused its powers. We know they illegally kept files on presidents, senators, and congressmen. We know that Hoover himself hated Martin Luther King, Jr. and waged a virtual war against the civil rights leader. So it is hardly a surprise to learn that when the FBI was ordered by Johnson to get the Klan, they used the same illegal tactics they used against the others. It is hard to imagine that readers of this book will be able to feel outrage over FBI infiltration of the Klan! Certainly, the FBI's abuse of power should be a concern to every citizen, but this book does not tell us anything we did not already know about that abuse. There are interesting revelations which I hope will not get lost in the hoopla over the abuse of police power. Jack Nelson could not have written this book without the unstinting cooperation of the man at the center of the story: Thomas Albert Tarrants III. Tarrants transformation from a hate filled murderer to missionary anti-racist is one of the most intriguing aspects of this story. Second, Jewish readers will find the sensitive description of the Southern Jews dilemma during the civil rights movement well worth reading. Of course, there were Jews on all sides of the issues, including many who supported segregation. But those like Rabbi Nussbaum, who supported the civil rights movement, found themselves in an exquisitely difficult and dangerous position. Finally, this story may help sensitize readers to the reality which allowed for a reign of terror to go on for years against the black community. After Temple Beth Israel was bombed, then Governor John Bell Williams rushed to the scene and issued a public statement in which he said, "it defies the imagination of civilized people to understand a mind so depraved as to destroy any house of worship." The irony was that "Williams had been silent while at least two hundred black churches in Mississippi were bombed or burned during his time as a congressman and governor." (116)The attack on the Jewish community ended the Klan's reign of terror. After the synagogue bombings, the Jewish community closed ranks. The ADL brought pressure on the FBI, local leaders raised significant sums of money to be used in the campaign against the Klan, and political pressure was brought on state officials from the

Governor on down. In the end they were successful. The question that lingers is: why was the bombing of two hundred black churches not enough to mobilize the forces of justice?

If you weren't alive then, you probably don't remember that the Klan not only hated Jews, but bombed their homes and places of worship. Nelson tells this story, but also tells how at least one of the Klansmen either was entrapped or very nearly entrapped by a law enforcement operation. Is bribery and so on ok to catch someone this loathesome who would probably have carried out another bombing anyway if not led on by police? Would you think the same thing if you agreed with the bomber's cause? Read this - it is informative, scary, and fascinating. And make your own judgement about the cases, and the people involved on all sides of it.

Interesting book. Read as though you were reading an investigative case file. I grew up in Mississippi during this time and remember many of the people mentioned as well as events. Reading this filled in some blanks.

When I was a volunteer civil rights worker in Mississippi during 1964, I was not welcomed into any local synagogue. As a Jewish New Yorker, I figured I had two strikes against me but still hoped for some dialogue. I had the support of my family and synagogue in New York when I went south, but I knew that local Jews in Mississippi were in a complex situation. Some were racist and pro-segregation, some were conformist and just hoped the storm would pass, and some were terrified of Klan and White Citizen Council retaliation --some few, I hoped, had other reactions and saw other options. It reminded me of the dilemmas that individual Jews faced in Nazi Germany about what roles to play in the face of that official system of oppression, discrimination and terror. Jack Nelson's book "Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews" is important reading about the 1960s in Mississippi, about Klan attacks on Jews, and especially about the varied responses within the Jewish community to those Klan attacks and bombings. The Klan has historically hated Jews. The Klan's attacks described by Nelson were not because Jackson and Meridian rabbis had come out publicly in opposition to segregation or in favor of voting rights for African Americans, but because the religious leaders finally objected to the massive burnings of black churches. Nelson also offers an intriguing and nuanced analysis of the FBI's use of COINTELPRO techniques for infiltrating the Klan -- and interestingly describes Hoover's response to his articles and book. For someone interested in this topic from a different perspective, I would also suggest the wonderful book by Debra L. Schultz (et al) "Going South: Jewish Women in the

Civil Rights Movement" (2001)

Interesting and exciting but I did not think it was well written, especially considering that it was written by a well-known journalist.

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