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Interactions and Conflicts Between the Knights of Labor and the Washington Duke, Sons and Company

Richard Trevelick, of the Knights of Labor, denounced factory owners as "princes" who exploited the labor of their workers.¹ Trevelick's statement highlights the conditions of tobacco labor in Durham, NC, which depended on the abuse of child laborers and the subjugation of labor unions. The conflicts between the Knights of Labor and Washington Duke, Sons and Company from 1885-1887 embodied the experiences of organized labor across the nation. Internal and external factors resulted in the downfall of the Knights of Labor in Durham, including an explosion in membership, lack of funding for strike support, and intimidation by Duke Tobacco. These factors weakened the Knights of Labor in Durham, and culminated in the decision to resolve conflicts with Duke through arbitration and the court system.

Scholarly works on the prominence of tobacco in North Carolina are numerous. Joseph Clarke Robert's *The Tobacco Kingdom: Plantation, Market, and Factory in Virginia and North Carolina, 1800-1860* (1938), illustrated the economic prominence of tobacco manufacturing in the Old South.² In this work, Robert explained the early successes of free labor on tobacco plantations across the south, and documented the evolution of the tobacco labor force in North Carolina after the Civil War. Nearly a decade later, Robert supplemented his original work with *The Story of Tobacco in America* (1949).³ Robert contextualized his prior scholarship within an overall framework of the history of the United States. The two works combined provide an overall characterization of tobacco labor pre-Civil War to Reconstruction. Supplementing his past thesis, Robert claimed that tobacco has had a protrusive influence on the United States from its inception to the publication of the work in 1949. Within this work, Robert included the ascension of the Washington Duke, Sons and Company in the tobacco manufacturing industry; highlighting the eventual stranglehold the company would have on the tobacco market. While both of Robert's books provided adequate research and analysis of the economic development of tobacco manufacturing in America, each fails to convey the importance of the laborer whom was principally responsible for the manufacturing of a finished product.

As an extension of Robert's works, Nannie Tilley, author of *The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 1860-1929* (1948), illuminated an increased focus on tobacco production in the South.⁴ Tilley declared that the development of bright-leaf tobacco served as the catalyst for the modern tobacco industry, spurring innovative experimentation, mechanization, marketing strategies. *The Bright-Tobacco Industry* provided detailed explanations of essential tobacco cultivation and

¹ "Captain Trevellick's Address," *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 11, 1886, <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 28, 2014).

² Joseph Clarke Robert, *The Tobacco Kingdom; Plantation, Market, and Factory in Virginia and North Carolina, 1800-1860* (Durham, NC: The Duke University Press, 1938).

³ Joseph Clarke Robert, *The Story of Tobacco in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949).

⁴ Nannie May Tilley, *The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 1860-1929* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1948).

manufacturing processes, but did not address the role of the laborer within the larger concept of the business. Tilley contributed the most in-depth research on the cultivation, marketing, and manufacturing of bright-leaf tobacco in the South. Tilley briefly touched upon labor disputes at the W. Duke, Sons, and Co. in Durham, North Carolina, but did not provide extensive attention to the causes of such conflicts.

The most in-depth publication on Washington Duke and his sons, James and Benjamin, Robert Durden's, *The Dukes of Durham, 1865-1929* (1975).⁵ Durden described Washington Duke as a leading industrialist and philanthropist of his time, and that he passed these characteristics on to his sons. *The Dukes of Durham* characterized the workers' experience at W. Duke, Sons, and Co. as an opportunity for social mobility in Durham's society. *The Dukes of Durham* provided a comprehensive account of how Washington Duke raised his modest tobacco production to an unprecedented level of success, and the creation of a tobacco empire with the help of his sons. Durden documented the importance of the Bonsack machine in relation to the company's eventual success. The book relies on the characterization of the Dukes as philanthropists to the extent that it ignores the cutthroat nature of the company's business tactics. While Durden mentioned Duke's disdain towards labor organizations exists, detailed attention to labor conflicts is largely absent.

Norman Ware's book, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895* (1929), provided a comprehensive history of early labor organization in the United States.⁶ Ware documented many of the influential labor organizations of the time, but emphasized the Holy Order of the Knights of Labor. This work's documentation is rich with primary sources pertinent to my research. Ware traced the origins of the labor movement during the Gilded Age to the increased mechanization in most crafts. Ware declared that the Knights of Labor were the first labor organization to be founded on the principle of solidarity, and united the working-class of society across crafts, race, and gender lines. *The Labor Movement in the United States*, portrayed the short existence of the Order as the most successful attempt to educate the working class on the dangers of organized capital. Ware's illustrations of local and national conflicts emblemize the struggle across the nation for workers' rights.

Leon Fink's, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (1985), served as a supplement to Ware's scholarship.⁷ While Ware outlined the importance of the Knights of Labor in the origins of labor organization, Fink explained the effect the Order had on politics in the United States. Fink asserted that at its highest point the Order was able to spur a national conversation over the social implications of industrial capitalism. Fink acknowledged the shortcomings of the Order, but accentuated the lasting impact it had on politics in America. *Workingmen's Democracy* alleged that the end of the Knights of Labor was not a true end, because its members dissolved into other organizations that would have an immediate impact on the turn of the twentieth century populist ideals.

Both the W. Duke, Sons, and Co. and the Knights of Labor merge within a portion of Melton McLaurin's book, *The Knights of Labor in The South* (1978).⁸ McLaurin produced an

⁵ Robert Franklin Durden, *The Dukes of Durham, 1865-1929* (Durham, NC: The Duke University Press, 1975).

⁶ Norman Ware, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895: A Study in Democracy* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1929).

⁷ Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1985).

⁸ Melton Alonza McLaurin, *The Knights Labor in the South* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978).

immense body of information regarding the expansion of the Knights of Labor throughout the American South, which had been immune to the Order's tactic for the majority of the organization's history. McLaurin's work contributed research regarding specific conflicts between the Knights of Labor and W. Duke, Sons, and Co. A small section of this book discloses information regarding specific incidents of abuse within Duke's tobacco factory. While *The Knights of Labor in The South* documented the occurrence of conflicts at Duke's factory, it did not provide extensive research detailing the social climate in Durham, NC that surrounded the events.

All of the aforementioned works reflect an imbalance in the historiography of the conflicts between the Knights of Labor and Duke Tobacco. Past scholarship focuses either on one party or the other, while failing to address the influences that brought them together. This paper aims to analyze the interactions between the two groups from 1886-1888, a time of particular ferocity that ended with almost complete extinguishment of the Knights of Labor in Durham, NC. Research examining why the radical nature of the Knights of Labor was muted during the years of 1885-1887 is sparse, and it is my goal to investigate why the situation in Durham was handled as it was. As are most events throughout history, this incident was shaped by multiple modes of influence. This research aims to dissect these influences in order to explore how they interacted.

Industrialization across the South spurred urbanization in the cities and towns surrounding factories, which corresponded with the rise of organized labor. Labor forces differed characteristically between industries, but child labor existed as a prominent theme throughout. By 1880, children composed thirty percent of the labor force in North Carolina's tobacco industry.⁹ The Knights of Labor, founded in Philadelphia in 1870, desired to combat the effects that industrial capitalism had on society, including child labor. A small group of workingmen established the Order following the dissolution of the Garment Cutters' Association of Philadelphia. Although Uriah Stephens held the post of Grand Master Workman first, Terence Vincent Powderly replaced him in 1879, and led the Order for the next fourteen years. Drawing membership from workers of different crafts helped popularize the organization, and contributed to the foundation of Local Assemblies across the Northeast.¹⁰ The Order sought to organize laborers across racial and gender lines, increasing its reputation as all-inclusive. Local Assemblies did not claim exclusivity to white workingmen; black assemblies organized alongside whites. Women also exercised their agency by organizing Local Assemblies of their own. As industrialization brought big business to the South, the Knights of Labor spread to the region in order to organize workers.

Washington Duke exemplified the evolution of post-Civil War industrialization, as he transformed his agriculturally based tobacco business into a thriving cigarette manufacturer. Washington Duke owned a small farm near Durham, for which he used to grow tobacco before the onset of the Civil War. After Duke returned from his conscription as a Confederate soldier, he began the manufacture and sale of smoking tobacco. Popularized by European society, in 1881 Duke turned to manufacturing cigarettes instead of loose tobacco and gained a competitive edge over other tobacco manufacturers. Upon the introduction of the Bonsack machine in 1884,

⁹ McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 15.

¹⁰ Ware, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895: A Study in Democracy*, 23-25.

which mechanized the process of producing rolled cigarettes, Duke manufactured cigarettes at a rate that far surpassed any other factory in the nation.¹¹ From the application of new methods of production, aggressive advertising, and competitive pricing, the Dukes rose from their humble tobacco peddling beginnings to reign as tobacco kingpins. As the culture of tobacco manufacturing changed so did the treatment of its workers, which caused conflict with organized labor.

The Knights of Labor first clashed with the Washington Duke, Sons and Company in 1885. Particular details are sparse, but the conflict arose over the whipping of a child laborer, who happened to be the son of a local Knight. An excerpt from the *Journal of United Labor* asserted that the whipping of the child had come from one of Duke's factory bosses. The *Journal* announced, "[t]he lash is freely used on the backs of helpless little children at the Duke Factory. The Knights of Labor will take the matter in hand, and call upon the friends of humanity to aid them in putting an end to such outrages."¹² The Knights of Labor publicized the incident so widely that Washington Duke arranged to meet with Terence Vincent Powderly. A letter from Powderly to John Ray, the State Organizer in North Carolina for the Knights of Labor, explained, "Mr. Duke called upon us and expressed a willingness to meet with us for the purpose of adopting a plan to avoid future entanglements."¹³ The meeting between Duke and the Knights of Labor produced an agreement that child beatings would no longer take place at factories under the ownership of the Dukes. Pleased that such an agreement had been made, Powderly believed that the two organizations had taken a step in the right direction.¹⁴ However, the agreement failed to quell the animosity between the Knights of Labor and Duke Tobacco.

In the same year a Durham Knight revealed another facet of child abuse. Duke's factory had exposed pornographic pictures to young boys and girls during the course of their work. The task of packing cigarettes required child laborers to insert a promotional item. In this case, the "promotional item" included one of three different photographs depicting a woman in a state of undress. The Knight who informed Powderly of the condition at the Duke factory expressed his disgust that, "the young boys and girls conduct this work side by side."¹⁵ It is clear that the Knight believed that exposing the children to such material while confining them in a close proximity would influence them to reenact the images they saw. There has not been any mention of any action taken on the incident. The exposure to unsafe factory machinery and conditions may have been unhealthier than a few pornographic photographs.

Richard "Captain" Trevelick travelled to Raleigh, North Carolina in the spring of 1886 as part of a tour that sought to increase the membership of the Knights of Labor. In a speech, Trevelick announced child labor as a chief concern of the Order, he explained, "[a] fixed purpose of the Knights of Labor is that no child shall enter a factory until it reaches its fifteenth year and has a common school education."¹⁶ The Knights of Labor saw education and a working age limit as a way to keep children out of the hands of violent foremen. The organizer also declared that

¹¹ Tilley, *The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 1860-1929*, 557-58.

¹² Hiram Paul, "Letter to the Editor," *Journal of United Labor*, August 6, 1887, *Powderly Papers*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University), microfilm (accessed at the Duke University Perkins Library).

¹³ Powderly to John Ray, December 23, 1885, *Powderly Papers*.

¹⁴ Powderly to John Ray, December 23, 1885, *Powderly Papers*.

¹⁵ A.M. Cutberson to Terence Vincent Powderly, September 7, 1887, *Powderly Papers*.

¹⁶ "Captain Trevelick's Address," *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 11, 1886, <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 28, 2014).

the Order disliked strikes, and that resolution by arbitration was a principle of the organization.¹⁷ As Trevelick concluded his speech, he pointed out that it is the public's duty to ensure safe working environments for all citizens.¹⁸ Trevelick's advice provided the Local Assemblies with a clear route for conflict resolution based on arbitration, which they put into action the following year.

In June of 1887, Duke once again violated their agreement to not allow foremen to beat children at their factories. Chas White, a foreman at the Duke tobacco factory beat a ten year-old child laborer by the name of Eddie Cheek. Details of the incident vary, but sources documented that White kicked the child between five and eight times. Battered and bruised, the boy was unable to work and unable to earn money to help his family. The child had been beaten because he had complained openly about White. The *Weekly Craftsman*, added, "[t]his was his lame excuse. Surely it is a contemptible thing for a man to be so low as to whip a child because he 'talked about him.'" Local authorities brought White before Esquire Green in court to answer the charges levied against him. According to the *Craftsman*, "[t]he only evidence that White produced was that he did not kick the boy eight times, only five times." Esquire Green found White guilty of beating the child and fined him fifteen dollars. As the trial closed Green remarked, "this thing of child whipping had to be stopped as it was done entirely too much in this section, and he would punish every offender that was brought before him, and could not see how a man could let his feelings be so enraged as to permit him to strike a defenseless child."¹⁹ Though legally a success justice felt betrayed, and the Order was shocked that the foreman retained his position at the Duke's factory. Duke Tobacco manipulated the coverage of the incident to misconstrue details surrounding the event.

In an attempt to attack the interracial nature of the Knights of Labor, the *Durham Recorder*, a conservative reactionary newspaper, publicized the event as an assault by an African American man; fueling racial unrest and further shielding Duke Tobacco from wrongdoing. The article titled, "A Cruel Negro," states that a man by the name of "Charley White" severely beat a child, but did not include any information relating to where the incident took place, or to the employer of the attacker. The information provided by the *Recorder*, left readers unable to acknowledge that a foreman employed by the Dukes beat a child laborer until, in the *Recorder's* words, "the victim is bruised from foot to crown and is in critical condition."²⁰ The insinuation that an African American conducted the beating attacked the interracial nature of the Knights of Labor. On July 19, 1887, Terence Vincent Powderly communicated, "[o]ur Order does not recognize any difference in the rights and privileges of the races of mankind. Colored men are regarded as entitled to the same treatment as whites, they may be admitted to Assemblies having white members."²¹ Reportedly, upon John Ray's initial visit to Durham he organized an African

¹⁷ "Captain Trevelick's Address," *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 11, 1886. <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 28, 2014).

¹⁸ "Captain Trevelick's Address," *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 11, 1886. <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 26, 2014).

¹⁹ "Poor Child is Lashed in Duke's Factory at Durham," *Charlotte Weekly Craftsman*, July 25, 1887, *Powderly Papers*.

²⁰ "A Cruel Negro," *The Durham Recorder*, June 15, 1887, *Powderly Papers*.

²¹ Terence Vincent Powderly to J.O. Parsons, July 19, 1887, *Powderly Papers*.

American Local Assembly of over one hundred members.²² The diverse membership of the Knights of Labor provided an attractive target for Duke Tobacco and the *Recorder*.

The *Recorder's* plan to characterize the beating as a racial matter to mask the true cause of the incident coincided with decades of racial antagonism. To be clear, the victim, Eddie Cheek, and the attacker, Chas White, were white. The *Recorder* described the attacker in the beating as "a cruel negro," as to cause public hysteria that distracted readers as well as the public from acknowledging the true identity of the aggressor, and who employed him. It is no coincidence that the *Recorder* published this racially fueled story, knowing that the Knights of Labor encompassed an interracial membership. The public furor that this article created encouraged the public to lash out against African Americans and interracial organizations.

The conflicts between the Knights of Labor and Duke Tobacco conveyed the rise of tensions between the two organizations. The child beatings that occurred in the Duke's factory coincided with the Order's demands for labor reform. In many parts of the country workers' used strikes to draw attention to workplace abuses. However, the situation in Durham required a more diplomatic solution.

In comparison to the overwhelming amount of strikes fueled by the Knights of Labor in other parts of the country, Local Assemblies in Durham handled their conflicts in a respectively calm manner. The conflicts between Duke Tobacco and the order never resulted in a strike. The Local Assemblies in Durham did not cause public disturbances to politicize their grievances; instead, they sought help from hierarchy of the organization. Even from the onset of the first incident of child abuse in 1885, Local Knights brought the abuse to the attention of State Organizer, John Ray, who then reported to the General Executive Board.²³ This was not the case for many other Local Assemblies, and particularly from 1885-1887, the time between the two incidents in Durham, strikes attributed to the Knights of Labor swept the nation. Daily newspapers carried reports of new strikes with each issue. In an article, the *News and Observer* stressed, "[i]t is evident that the conflict between labor and capital, which has long been foreseen, has begun. Not a day passes without news of strikes in almost every section of the country."²⁴ Terence Powderly defended the Knights of Labor's role in the spread of strikes, and declared, "[i]t is a coincidence merely, and there is no concerted action contemplated by the Order, as has been suggested."²⁵ The Knights in Durham sought solutions to their conflicts with Duke through organizational policies rather than impromptu strikes.

From 1885-1886 membership of the Order rapidly expanded; members often enacted strikes without any prior consultation, which made controlling the increasing membership extremely difficult. In the year of 1886 alone, over 483 new Local Assemblies provided workers in the South an avenue for protection from workplace abuses.²⁶ As early as 1885, State Organizer John Ray observed, "[t]he fact that labor has been so long disorganized in the South, makes it very hard to organize Assemblies and harder still to hold them together."²⁷ The Knights

²² Hiram Paul to Frederick Turner, August 31, 1885, *Powderly Papers*.

²³ John Ray to Terence Vincent Powderly, December 10, 1885, *Powderly Papers*.

²⁴ "Labor Troubles," *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 10, 1886. <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 28, 2014).

²⁵ "Grand Master-Workman Powderly," *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 11, 1886. <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 26, 2014).

²⁶ McLaurin, *The Knights Labor in the South*, 49.

²⁷ McLaurin, *The Knights Labor in the South*, 116.

of Labor's rapid expansion hindered its ability to assimilate new members into the organization's policies and standards.²⁸ Unfamiliar with the procedures for reporting abuses, new members overzealously enacted impromptu strikes. Small-scale strikes often failed or brought about a beneficial change temporarily; however, small strikes often left workers in a worse position than before. Powderly denounced strikes such as these, but advocated synchronized widespread strikes that effected business on a larger scope. Powderly's based his views on striking upon policies that attempted to ensure the longevity of the Order. According to Knight T.C. Greene, "[a] strike is a last resort."²⁹

Unplanned strikes drained the Strike Assistance Fund, making strikes a dangerous and unpredictable mode of resolution for workers and their families. Employers often discouraged workers from striking or joining unions by instilling fear that doing so would have negative effects on the worker's family. During the Knights of Labor General Assembly of 1880, the Order enacted a policy that centralized the control of the Strike Assistance Fund, in order to restrict the frequency of strikes.³⁰ However, the Order's policies concerning striking and the control of the Assistance Fund changed numerous times over the years, further disorganizing the formation of strikes. The General Assembly of 1887 eventually abolished the Strike Assistance Fund, but the Order still allowed local assemblies to raise their own fund if desired.³¹ Fortunately striking did not provide the only avenue for workplace conflict resolution.

Outside of striking, printing labor newspapers furnished the Knights of Labor with a less violent approach to dealing with workplace violations. The Order spent a large portion of its assets on printing; sponsoring and supporting multiple newspapers including the *Journal of United Labor*, the organization's nationally published newspaper. Printing allowed the Order to publicize incidents of conflict both large and small, which forced employers to be aware of how their actions would be perceived by the public. The Order believed that publicizing events would fuel their goal of handling labor disputes through arbitration, and not through the use of force. Newspaper coverage of incidents pressured companies to compromise with the Order, promoting long-term change rather than momentary progress.

The Knights of Labor in Durham chose the power of the press over the power of the strike. Duke Tobacco responded by attempting to thwart controlled action by the Knights of Labor through intimidation. As internal disagreements developed within the Order, external pressures attempted to further degrade the organization.

The agreement between the Knights of Labor General Executive Board and Washington Duke on the discontinuation of child beatings did not address the personal attacks experienced by Knights outside of the Duke's factory. In a series of letters presented at the Knights of Labor General Assembly of 1885, multiple members of the Order provided detailed accounts of the harassment and danger they faced. The *Durham Reporter*, attacked and antagonized citizens' fears of the Knights of Labor as a "secret society," and claimed the moral authority to warn Durham's citizens not to collaborate with the Knights of Labor.³² The *Reporter* claimed that a speech given by State Organizer, John Ray, advocated, "at once, and in one platform, socialism,

²⁸ McLaurin, *The Knights Labor in the South*, 49.

²⁹ T.C. Greene to Terence Vincent Powderly, February 1, 1887, *Powderly Papers*.

³⁰ Knights of Labor General Assembly, *Records and Proceedings, 1880*, (Reading PA: The Assembly, 1878-1888,) 247-248.

³¹ Knights of Labor General Assembly, *Records and Proceedings, 1887*, 1802.

³² Knights of Labor General Assembly, *Records and Proceedings, 1885*. 33-34.

communism, nihilism and every kind of ism that is damaging to any country."³³ In the same article the *Reporter* included a North Carolina law defining secret political societies, and the punishment for being involved in one as a misdemeanor as well as, "not less than ten nor more than two hundred dollars, or be imprisoned, or both, at the discretion of the Court."³⁴ Intimidation by Duke Tobacco and the *Reporter* scared local Knights who believed they could be arrested for their affiliation with the Order.

As the backlash against the Local Assembly in Durham intensified, so did the methods by which Duke intimidated the Order. Hiram Paul, a Durham Knight, worked as the publisher of Durham's labor newspaper, *The Durham Workman*. In a letter to Frederick Turner, General Secretary-Treasurer of the Order, Paul explained that spies had infiltrated the Knights' meetings in Durham.³⁵ Paul cited a discussion concerning a possible boycott of the *Reporter*, which the newspaper publicized the very next. Paul described, "[t]he editor of that capitalistic nose-rag was informed of our action the next day...[h]e not only knew we had appointed a boycotting committee, but knew the name of each member, and also the name of each member who had taken part in the discussion. Now, how could he have learned these facts except through a member of our Assembly?"³⁶

During these years, Duke symbolized the brute force of capitalism, while the *Reporter* pitted the public against the Knights of Labor, and labor unions in general. The *Durham Workman* attempted to combat the discouraging characterizations of the Knights of Labor supplied by the *Reporter*. After the first incident of child abuse at the Duke's factory, the two newspapers feuded publically. An excerpt from the *News and Observer*, of Raleigh, North Carolina, explained, "[t]he *Durham Workman*...representing the Knights of Labor faction is waging war upon the *Daily Reporter*. Acrimonious and vindictive language is used on both sides, while the bitterest feeling is aroused."³⁷ The influence of both Duke and the *Reporter* made the task of recruiting members for local assemblies in Durham extremely difficult. John Ray, the State Organizer, asserted, "the men are daily expecting a wholesale discharge of members, and for that reason outsiders fear to join the Order, and our members are very poor and frightened."³⁸ The diminished status of Local Assembly membership in Durham was so severe that Ray warned, "if something is not done I fear that the whole four Locals in Raleigh and Durham will be lost."³⁹ Although the Knights of Labor had the *Workman* on their side, they could not compete with the propaganda power of the *Reporter* and Washington Duke.

Multiple companies in Durham suppressed labor publications. Durham cotton mill owners targeted Mr. C. F. King, the editor of the *Charlotte Weekly Craftsman*, after a critical article appeared in his newspaper. On March 21, 1887, Durham police arrested King and charged him with libel. The article that spurred the conflict, "The Condition of Affairs at Durham, How the Poor and Helpless are Oppressed, The Cotton Mill Operatives," was originally written by the *Richmond Labor Herald*. Criticisms within the article regarded the condition of

³³ Knights of Labor General Assembly, *Records and Proceedings*, 1885. 33-34.

³⁴ Knights of Labor General Assembly, *Records and Proceedings*, 1885. 33-34.

³⁵ Knights of Labor General Assembly, *Records and Proceedings*, 1885. 33-34.

³⁶ Hiram Paul to Frederick Turner, September, 6, 1885, *Powderly Papers*.

³⁷ "The Durham Workman," *Raleigh News and Observer*, September 29, 1885. <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 28, 2014).

³⁸ John Ray to Frederick Turner, August, 28, 1885, *Powderly Papers*.

³⁹ John Ray to Frederick Turner, August, 28, 1885, *Powderly Papers*.

child labor within the factories and mills in Durham. The *Craftsman* declared, "[i]f there is a hell on earth, in which young innocent ones are made to suffer, the cotton mills of Durham is that place," and added, "[n]o court, no attorney, no grand jury, no governor interferes when the lash is applied to the little ones..."⁴⁰ The *Tobacco Plant*, a newspaper in Durham, publicized the libel case and sympathized with the cotton mill owners, and pronounced, "[w]here the proprietors of these mills are known, they need no vindication, for those acquainted with them...would not for a moment believe such infamous accusations concerning them."⁴¹

Multiple newspapers came to the defense of the mill. The *Daily State Chronicle*, in an attempt to further vindicate the owners announced, "[w]e know that the managers of the Cotton Mills, are Christian gentlemen and would not be guilty of making a hell on earth."⁴² The case would ultimately be compromised between the two parties, after which King made a statement retracting the accusations and characterizations regarding the nature of the mills.⁴³ The *Craftsman* eventually suspended its publication in November of 1887.⁴⁴ Factory and mill owners in Durham diminished claims promoted by labor newspapers by relying on the often-sympathetic dispositions of other newspapers across the state.

Despite attacks from factory owners, the *Workman* still posed a threat to organized capital in Durham. Duke tried to persuade Hiram Paul's landlord to evict him from the printing office where he operated the *Durham Workman*. Paul explained to Secretary-Treasurer Fredrick Turner that his landlord, Mr. Brit, began to pressure him for a small debt in regards to the purchase of a printing machine to be paid. In a letter to Fredrick Turner, Paul eluded, "Mr. Brit began to push me to the wall for the balance due...[n]ot being able to raise that amount immediately he took steps to dispossess me, backed, as I learn, by the Dukes, who are striving to break up the Assemblies here."⁴⁵ It is clear that Duke's early economic prominence allowed them the ability to influence citizens to sabotage the success of the Order in Durham; an ability that only strengthened as the company became more profitable. The external pressure exerted by Washington Duke degraded the confidence of the local Knights, but the internal frustration between Durham and the hierarchy also contributed to their downfall.

Local Knights addressed their concerns multiple times to the hierarchy of the Order, pleading for investigations into the grievances levied against the Duke's.⁴⁶ D.L. Kaufman, a member of the State Assembly General Executive Board, explained to Powderly that the local Knights felt "ignored" by the leadership of the Order, and asked for further information regarding the agreement the Duke's had made with the Order in 1885. In a letter from Kaufman to Powderly, he stressed, "I was trying to get out what kind of settlement was then made [in reference to the 1885 agreement with Duke]...and you were the proper officer to communicate with..." Kaufman added, "we cannot afford to let such matters pass off without some satisfaction and this is exactly what has brought the Order down in this town...The members here believe the

⁴⁰ "The Durham Libel Case," *Raleigh Weekly State Chronicle*, March 31, 1887. <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 28, 2014).

⁴¹ "The Libel Case," *Durham Tobacco Plant*, March 23, 1887. <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 26, 2014).

⁴² "The Durham Libel Case," *Raleigh Weekly State Chronicle*, March 31, 1887. <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 26, 2014).

⁴³ "The Durham Libel Case," *Wilmington Morning Star*, August 23, 1887. <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 28, 2014).

⁴⁴ "A Card," *Fayetteville Messenger*, February 24, 1888. <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 28, 2014).

⁴⁵ Hiram Paul to Frederick Turner, September, 6, 1885. *Powderly Papers*.

⁴⁶ D.L. Kaufman to Terence Vincent Powderly, July 14, 1887, *Powderly Papers*.

General Executive Board have ignored them."⁴⁷ Powderly responded with multiple vague letters, and eventually admitted that no formal minutes or records of the meeting with a representative had been taken, but acknowledged that Duke agreed that child whipping would no longer take place in their factories.⁴⁸ The Knights failure to keep records of such an important meeting exasperated local Knights in Durham, and gave insight to the internal workings of the hierarchy.

Personal jealousies between members, Local Assemblies, and the leadership of the Order contributed to the internal degradation of the Order. In one of his more frustrated letters, Powderly explained, "since the district was organized, it has failed to conduct itself as a District Assembly of the Knights of Labor. Bickering, dissensions, and jealousies have characterized the actions of both officers and members, until it would be better to turn over the property of the entire District and cease to work than to continue in such a foolish manner."⁴⁹ The policies drawn up and enacted at General Assemblies were often ignored by Local Assemblies, causing confusion throughout the interactions of opposing districts within the Order.

Newspapers publicly exposed the discontinuity within the Order and distorted the image of the organization. An article from the *News and Observer* in 1886 documented the differing opinions between two influential Knights regarding the dramatic increase in strikes throughout the United States. The article noted that Martin Irons, a Chairman of the Knights of Labor, told reporters that an order was to be commanded that would impose a general strike across the entire United States. Such an order would never be established. The same article compared the words of Irons with Secretary-Treasurer Fredrick Turner; Turner refuted, "If Chairman Irons is correctly quoted, it simply shows he is one of the men who are at present doing the Order a great injury." Turned concluded that officials of the Knights of Labor should exercise caution in their exclamations, so to not cause "incendiary acts" that would cause irreparable damage to the public perception of the organization.⁵⁰ The Southern districts, still affected by the Civil War and Reconstruction, felt as though certain policies of the Order benefited Northern districts, rather than the Order as a whole.⁵¹ The press exasperated internal fragmentation by highlighting conflicts within the organization.

The schism inside the Knights of Labor is evident when comparing Hiram Paul's "Letter to the Editor" and the "Report of the General Executive Board." Paul's scathing tone implied his disappointment with all of the parties involved in the Durham dispute. Paul attributed to the Dukes an overwhelming amount of the blame, for it was a foreman in their employ who beat Eddie Cheek. He also charged the hierarchy of the Knights of Labor with failing to fairly represent the Local Assemblies in Durham. The most telling aspect of Paul's letter is the section where he snidely jabs at the General Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, Terence Vincent Powderly. Paul cited a letter written by Powderly to the State Organizer, where Powderly expressed that if Paul would "let up," in regards to his conviction against the Dukes, that perhaps the relationship between the two organizations would be less volatile. Paul countered Powderly's assertion and explained that he had in fact "let up" by refraining further publications in reference

⁴⁷ D.L. Kaufman to Terence Vincent Powderly, August 18, 1887, *Powderly Papers*.

⁴⁸ Terence Vincent Powderly to D.L. Kaufman, August 16, 1887, *Powderly Papers*.

⁴⁹ Terence Vincent Powderly to John Crawford, March 26, 1888, *Powderly Papers*.

⁵⁰ "Quite a Dispute, The Knights of Labor Hold Varying Views," *Raleigh News and Observer*, edited by Fred Olds, Raleigh, NC, March 27, 1886. <http://www.newspapers.com> (October 26, 2014).

⁵¹ John Andrews to Powderly, November 3, 1887, and Powderly to Andrews, November 9, 1887, *Powderly Papers*.

to the conditions at the Duke's factory, but doing so had not produced any improvement.⁵² Paul's willingness to publicly tarnish Powderly's image revealed his conviction about the situation in Durham.

The "Report of the General Executive Board" painted an entirely different image, one of tranquility in the aftermath of the trial that found Duke's foreman guilty of beating a child. In response to D.L. Kaufman's letters to Terence Vincent Powderly, and Hiram Paul's letters to Frederick Turner, the General Executive Board conducted an investigation into the claims of the Local Assemblies in Durham. The Knights of Labor assigned Thomas Barry the duty of conducting the investigation. Barry's placid description of the situation in Durham conveyed a sense of calm. Barry even conveyed that the social climate within the Knights at Durham was behind the times in his letter by declaring, "I think I succeeded in arousing them from their Rip Van Winkle sleep."⁵³ Barry claimed that only fifteen employees at the Duke tobacco factory were Knights, and also remarked, "[t]he company say they have never discriminated against the members of our order, and gave me a letter to that effect."⁵⁴ Barry's report ignored all of the information provided by D.L. Kaufman and John Ray in previous letters stating the harsh treatment that the Local Assemblies in Durham experienced. Barry's investigation of the conditions in Durham ignored these letters completely, and it is as if he wholeheartedly believed Duke had held up to the standards of their agreement with the Knights in 1885. The disconnect between the Local Knights and the hierarchy of the organization led Barry to accept Washington Duke's guarantee of a safe workspace.

The Knights of Labor maintained a tenuous public image at this point in time due to the Haymarket Riot in Chicago. On May 4, 1886, just months prior to the escalation of tensions in Durham, a bomb built and detonated by striking workers ignited a fury of conflict in Chicago. Multiple policemen and civilians were killed by the blast, and many more were wounded. Eventually eight men were found guilty of varying aspects of involvement. Four men were hanged for being in connection with the bombing. The person who threw the bomb has never been identified. The aftermath of the riot left public opinion of labor unions, including the Knights of Labor, in an irreparable state. Powderly theorized, "[a]t Chicago the sound of a bomb did more injury to the good name of labor than all the strikes of that year, and turned public sentiment against labor organizations so strong that it required the most strenuous efforts on the part of the officers of labor societies to keep their charges from being dragged down into the mire of anarchy."⁵⁵ The Knights of Labor were perceived as rabid anarchists, hell-bent on overthrowing the established social order in the United States. After the Haymarket Riot the Order entered an era of decline that would ultimately culminate with the elimination of every local assembly across the nation. The membership of the Order would plummet drastically during the fallout of the events in Chicago, with most members joining organizations that the public viewed as more moderate.⁵⁶ The lack of guaranteed funds to be available for Knights in

⁵² Hiram Paul, "Letter to the Editor," *Journal of United Labor*, August 6, 1887, *Powderly Papers*.

⁵³ Knights of Labor General Assembly. *Record of Proceedings, 1888*, 109.

⁵⁴ Knights of Labor General Assembly. *Record of Proceedings, 1888*, 109.

⁵⁵ Terence Vincent Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor, 1859-1889* (Columbus, OH: Excelsior Publishing House, 1890), 543.

⁵⁶ McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 169.

Durham in the event of a strike contributed to the decision to address the conflicts with Duke through arbitration and the court system.

The goal of the Knights of Labor was to educate workers and protect them from the exploitation of organized capital, but internal and external factors resulted in the downfall of the Order. The dramatic increase in membership, between 1885-1886, caused irreparable problems and signaled that the organization had become unsustainable. Newly initiated members lacked proper education regarding the policies and procedures for resolving labor conflicts. The expanding membership enacted strikes uncontrollably, which degraded the Strike Assistance Fund. Frustration with the Order's structural instability contributed to personal rivalries within the organization; internal bickering surrounded the misrepresentation of the goals of the Knights of labor, as documented with the debate between Chairman Irons and Secretary-Treasurer Fredrick Turner. Members' independent actions thwarted the Knights of Labor's principle of conflict resolution through arbitration. Just as internal forces contributed to the downfall of the Knights Labor, external forces worked against the organization as well.

As the Knights of Labor strove to create solidarity among the workers of the United States, external forces sabotaged the organization's vision. Organized capital used their economic resources to manipulate newspaper publications to misconstrue details of labor conflicts, such as Duke Tobacco's control of the *Recorder* in order to hamper public sympathy for organized labor. Further, the interracial makeup of the Knights of Labor's membership supplied anti-labor newspapers with an attractive target for criticism, especially within the context of post-Civil War Southern society. The occurrence of the disastrous Haymarket Riot further tarnished the public image of the Order by portraying the Knights of Labor as anarchists rather than reformers.

The rapid industrialization of the South outpaced the development of workers' protection, which led to horrid abuses in the name of profits. In response to degrading working conditions the Knights of Labor and other organized labor movements sought to ameliorate the lives of workers. Despite the protections offered by labor unions they are still stigmatized today, leaving many workers at the mercy of their employers.

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