

# Teacher opposes 'over-reaction' to growth of KKK

By SYLVIA HART  
Press Register Reporter

Ku Klux Klan organizations generally are becoming stronger, according to a university professor, who acknowledged he thought for awhile the news media had been exaggerating the strength of today's Klan.

DR. DAVID Chalmers, a professor of American history at the University of Florida in Gainesville who is a specialist in the KKK history and activities, presented his views on the Klan during the latest session of the Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue Group.

In the dialogue session on the University of South Alabama campus, Chalmers, a mustachioed man with dark, graying hair whose appearance and voice were reminiscent of the late American entertainer Groucho Marx, differed markedly from Marx in not filling a role of entertainment.

CHALMERS TOLD his audience that for a time when he received calls from representatives of the news media in various parts of the United States asking about "the Klan revival, I'd usually say to them, 'You're the Klan revival' ... and I thought for quite awhile, up until quite recently, that the Klan would continue to endure, but a good portion of the attention it got was media hype."

The professor continued, "My views about the meaning of what's happening and the Ku Klux Klan revival have been somewhat altered."

When asked later by a member of his audience why he changed his opinion, Chalmers, who, with his dark coat unbuttoned and his hands in his pants pockets as he walked informally among his listeners, named three reasons.

HOWEVER, "IN the last few years Klan support has been growing. The Klan perhaps has something like 10,000 members now." The growth is partly attributable to "a growing aggressiveness on the part of the Klan and a somewhat slightly abler leadership."

Despite the growth, the professor did not see reason for alarm. "That's a lot to have 10,000 or 1,000 or 25 or one outside your door. You may well have reason to be upset, but it's a very small number among some 75 million people who constitute the South." The Klans are concentrated in the South.

While Chalmers said he had changed his mind in coming to the conclusion the Klan is growing stronger, he nevertheless had critical words for the news media and contended members of the media tend to "over-dramatize" Klan activities. Likewise, he said black and Jewish organizations sometimes over-react to the supposed threat of the Klan.

NEVERTHELESS, he expressed understanding of a view presented by a Jewish member of the audience, who said the reason American Jews "are nervous" about the Klan is that they recall when there "were only six Nazis marching in Germany" before World War II. "We either expose the Klan for what it is and keep it on the surface or let it hide and fester. There is no middle road."

In discussing the Klan's history, Chalmers called the group "America's oldest secret terrorist society." The organization is more than 100 years old.

TALKING ABOUT the thinking of the Klansmen, the professor said, "Today's Klansman gives himself the status and the prestige that society has otherwise denied to his ... lower middle-class role ... by his self-appointed role as a defender of the old values and symbols of the flag, the Constitution, white womanhood and racial separation.

"Combined with the Klan's sense of mission is an overwhelming awareness of powerful enemies, and this together with the heritage of violence ... has added a sense of danger, excitement."

HE SAID, "In the first place, some of the Klans ... are much more heavily armed, much more aggressive and much more confrontationist-minded; second, there has been violence, much more shooting; third, the Klan is much more important, as far as I can see, in the eyes of the black organizations of America, and that is for a good portion of the black people and black ministers."

Elaborating on the importance accorded the Klan by blacks, Chalmers said, "For black organizations, the Ku Klux Klan represents and symbolizes the enemy. It symbolizes whatever oppressions, whatever memories, whatever obstacles the black person faces.... What is going on now in the black organizational community is an attempt to organize an anti-Klan network."

Chalmers played a tape-recording of a KKK speech which was made in St. Augustine, Fla., 15 years ago. The same type of speech is made by today's Klan leaders.

## THE KLAN SPEAKER

talked about the "Jew carpet-baggers" who had "teamed up with the niggers and tried to take away everything that the white man had."

The speaker said that some "cotton-picking, half-witted preachers" claim that Jesus was a Jew. "Jesus wasn't no Jew. He was a white man."

The Klan leader admonished his audience to listen to him because "I'm speaking for God."

When a member of the dialogue audience asked the professor for the number of members in today's Klan, he said, the membership had been "down to a generally estimated 6,000 or 7,000," partly because Klansmen had become concerned about "their public-relations image."