

KNIGHTS OF THE SWITCH:

A STUDY OF THE WHITE CAPS AND THEIR VIOLENT RESISTANCE TO SOCIAL AND MORAL CHANGE IN THE UNITED STATES

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Source : *The White Caps*, directed by Wallace McCutcheon and Edwin S. Porter, featuring Kate Toncray, John R. Cumpson, and Arthur V. Johnson (Unknown, 1905), 12 min,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErdX_N6DD4I&list=WL&index=23.

WHO ARE THE WHITE CAPS?

- Movement begins in Crawford and Harrison Counties in Southern Indiana in the 1870s – In the 1880s spreads across the United States
- Targeted individuals that they deemed as acting immoral or in conflict to the established social standards of the community
- Originally called the Knights of the Switch, due to their preferred instrument of punishment, a green hickory switch, which they used to brutally whip their victims : Male or Female
- Membership included:
- Generic term “White Caps” adopted as a reference to the white muslin mask they used to disguise themselves

RESEARCH THESIS



White Cap style groups do not fit into our traditional understanding of white extremist groups in the nation during this time. These White Cap groups did in fact count another racial group among its ranks, and their identity was based more in resisting social and moral change, rather than focused directly on violence toward minorities in United States.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCES:

- Newspaper reports from across the United States
- Books written during and shortly after the groups reign of terror
- Visual sources – An early silent film was made supporting White Caps

Secondary Sources:

- Utilized academic database such as ProQuest and JSTOR to search out other scholarly works concerning White Caps and similar violent social resistance
This included peer reviewed journal articles and several PhD. dissertations

OVERVIEW OF THE WHITE CAPS



- Areas of operation in the United States
- Was this an organized movement?
- What were the social and moral issues with which the White Caps concerned?
- Was the race of their victims a factor?
- What circumstances led to their rise and eventual fall?

Contemporary Implications....

Why does the study of White Caps matter today?



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THANK YOU

QUESTIONS?