

# THEY



Story by  
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KKK

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**A** sudden chill goes through my body and stops me in my steps. No words could be formed at that moment. All I could do was stare at that daunting, cold piece of paper. My cousin, my aunt and I were just coming back from the grocery store that day. I got out of the car with a bag in my hand and noticed there was a flyer laying on top of the bench on our porch.

“Save Our Land, Join The Klan” was the message on the flyer. There was an image of a Klan Knight on a horse, with the Confederate and U.S. flag behind them. The phrase “Loyal White Knights” and “Ku Klux Klan” were

written at the bottom, surrounding the image of the horse and knight. It was one year before Trump’s bid for reelection. The tension had been rising ever since the Trump era began in 2014. The city of Orange reported to the sheriff’s office that the same flyers had been distributed there.

Growing up in the neighborhood I live in was, at times, bitter. My family and I had always sensed a certain resentment from our neighbors about our presence and with that flyer on our front porch, it felt like salt added to a wound. It did not help that we were the only Mexican family that has been living in that block for over a decade.

The KKK has a great deal of history in Orange County; they are no strangers here. The first people

who became members of the KKK in OC were prominent members in their communities. They had strong involvement in the church and local government.

According to Jesse La Tour, a Fullerton Observer journalist who has researched the history of the Klan in this area, the KKK members in OC were not just extremists, they were prominent members of society, like Louis Plummer, superintendent on the board of education in Fullerton from 1919-1941, and Leon C. Myers, who was a pastor of the First Christian Church in Anaheim after arriving in 1922.

“They weren’t just uneducated ‘hillbillies,’ like people usually think of the KKK, these were civic leaders,” La Tour says.





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*me*



▲ Fullerton Union High School's Louis E. Plummer Auditorium removed his name in 2020 after backlash because of his KKK affiliation. Photo by Chastain Flores

**“THEY SAID THE  
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I was born and raised in a small town in the state of Michoacan, Mexico. I first started living in Fullerton in 2012 when I was 11 years old. My mom, younger brother and I came here from Mexico to stay for a year to obtain my citizenship and for my mom to set up everything we needed to finally move for good to this country.

I was always an extroverted kid. I had a lot of friends when I was living in Mexico. Being deemed an outcast at school and my neighborhood definitely took a toll on me. Moving was a very lonely point of my life.

A couple of kids tried to talk to me but quickly lost interest when they realized I couldn't really communicate with them. I only knew a few sentences in English. Not a word was ever really spoken to my brother or me. Kids were mean at times, they laughed at my accent or refused to play with me. I only recall three girls that I could call my friends.

At the same time, my mother was going through a similar experience.

"When you speak English, they are okay with you. Once you start speaking Spanish, they change their attitude towards you. Like you owe them something. You owe it to them to speak English rather than your own language," she says.

William Camargo, an artist, lecturer for University of California, San Diego and advocate for Hispanic communities in Orange County says the reason why the KKK was so active in Orange County was due to the political power that they held.

"I think Orange County was viewed as a 'safe space' or kind of like a suburb utopia for the white, middle class," he says. "Political power was a way for them to spew this racism."

On Feb. 10, 1917, the Anaheim School district voted to segregate all Mexican children and maintain two grades for them. Mexican American children, amongst other children who were segregated, were seen as inferior and therefore needed to be in different schools than white children. This lasted until 1947, after Mendez v. Westminster ended school segregation in several school districts of California.

Mexican families have been seen as inferior. My mom's main concern coming to the neighborhood was the way we, her kids especially, would

be treated. "There was a way they would stare at us sometimes, like we were intruders. Like we didn't belong there," she says. "I didn't want you guys to go through or notice that."

La Tour says the Klan tends to resurface every time there is major political discourse or national events.

"I think people often think about this monolithic, singular group or organization," he says. "But it really has had different waves in response to national events."

During Donald Trump's reelection campaign in 2020, the neighbors that lived a couple houses down put up a big "Trump Pence 2020" flag outside of their front porch. This made my family and me feel very insecure and uncomfortable in our neighborhood. Trump is a person who publicly expressed negative feelings towards the Hispanic community during his campaign in 2016.

Camargo says the history of the KKK in Orange County has accounted for recurring issues. It's still so prominent because this racism is recontextualized into recent events in different forms and is not being taught in history lessons.

"Knowing those correlations, the leaving out of that history, affects the future somehow," he says. "We saw that in 2016 and what is going on even today. That's why it's important to make note of this. The way they are replicated."

It comes as no surprise the rise of anti-immigrant and racist sentiments around the time Trump was running for president and when he was in office. Hate crimes in Orange County surged by 24% in 2019, according to the report of OC Human Relations. There was an emphasis on intimidation crimes during the same year Trump's reelection was happening.

My uncles first moved into my current neighborhood in 2008. The day they moved in, one uncle recalls our next door neighbors making unkind comments about them being Mexican. "Our next door neighbors didn't like us at first. They said the neighborhood was going to fall apart because we were Mexican... They always made sure to give us looks whenever we were outside," he says.

One Fourth of July in 2014 was especially memorable for all the wrong reasons. My cousin, Leo, came

over that day to spend the holiday with us. He was around 5 years old at the time. I was 13. He went over to play on a slide with the other kids but then Leo walked towards our driveway, looking very sad. Leo then said they wouldn't let him on the slide like the rest of the other kids.

After years of my uncles living in that neighborhood, they finally moved away in 2019. They left on much better terms with our front and next door neighbors, but some remained unfriendly. These experiences embedded scars on all of my family that will never leave.

It was around the time my uncles moved out of the neighborhood, in 2019. It was seven years after my mom and I moved to the area, one year before Trump's bid for reelection, that the KKK flyer showed up on my doorstep. It was a great mental toll for everyone involved. We felt as if we had a target on our backs. It was a horrible feeling of uncertainty and shock.

When we found that flyer on our front porch, we were very scared. All that went through my head was that heart wrenching Fourth of July and the days I spent with no one to talk to when I first moved in. We later found out the entire neighborhood had gotten these flyers and we were not, in fact, singled out. The police were already picking up the flyers since one of the neighbors had reported this to them. I felt relieved to find this out and realized we were safe.

The feeling of being uncomfortable in your own skin is horrible, something that I have felt on many occasions living in my neighborhood. To have to go through racist experiences like this as an 11-year-old kid, and later on reliving them when I was older is a lot of emotional damage. Unfortunately, it is just one of the countless stories and experiences that people of color still go through and the reality we live in.

Trump did not, in fact, win reelection that year. But there is still a bitter aftertaste knowing my neighbors were supporters of him and what he stands for. I still feel unwelcome at times, as I think about that flyer laying at the foot of my house door as it mocked me with disgust. Each time I go to the mailbox, I always stop and think before opening. Is it happening again? ❖