

ISSA Proceedings 2006 - What Is The KKK: Metonymy And Synecdoche In Arguments About Racism



1. *The War on Terror*

Debates about whether Afghanistan and Iraq are two faces of the same Global War on Terror (GWOT) or two different wars linked by a common thread mark the contemporary American political scene. Not only do they have to do with the colors used for military decorations, but this question also goes to the heart of the legitimacy of both endeavors. The centerpiece of this distinction lies with whether one is willing to collapse the techniques of terrorism with the individuals who perpetuate terrorist acts. While the Reagan administration had modest success in defining international terrorism as largely “state-sponsored”, opening up the way for acts of terrorism to dovetail with diplomatic considerations, terrorism has more often been treated as individual acts by responsible persons. Therefore, it has been classified as part of the criminal justice system. Only after 9/11 did the American public open to the idea that terrorists and acts of terror were unified and integrated multinational entities. As such, terrorists should be fought as though they were a coherent nation-state. While this argument has faded since the point where 57 percent of the American public thought that Saddam Hussein had aided the 9/11 hijackers, questions whether there is a Global War on Terror persist (Berman, 2003).

Here I am interested in the finite traditions that govern the ways we articulate coincident events. In particular, I am interested in the ways that synecdoche and metonymy open up coincident events to competitive interpretation. As rhetorical tropes, synecdoche and metonymy perform as cultural frames and strategies of argument. Taking discussions surrounding Ku Klux Klan activities at the University of Louisville as a text, I examine the ways that these two argumentative strategies set the stage for cultural antagonism. As synecdoche, the strategy adopted by those who sought to ban the Klan, it stands as an essential representation for a whole range of racist attitudes and behaviors

illustrated in a material experience of struggle. As metonymy, the concept of racism reduces to the historical and material action of the Klan as a distinctive object. As such, those who view the issue as a matter of the freedom of speech seem unconcerned about the material threat of the Klan.

2. Tropes and the Study of Argument

Tropes are important to the study of argument. They are fundamentally enthymematic in that they grant their ground as a consequence of a habit and context of thought. In addition, they direct focus and function to suppress particular elements of argument (Vico, 1996; Birdsell, 1993; Parson, 1994). As tropes, they invite participation by invoking pre-existing habits of interpretation or argumentative frames of reference. This has been widely appreciated in the study of rhetoric, particularly as related to the study of metaphor (Fritch and Leeper, 1993; Moore, 1996; Eubanks and Schaeffer, 2004). However, in addition to their expressive function, they are also important to understanding how people construct their symbolic world. In this way, rhetoric and cognitive linguistics share a common path.

Recent works by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) have documented how tropes, particularly metaphors, help to map out the world of thing, words and concepts. Focusing primarily in the area of political discourse, the two have identified how dominant metaphors help identify important features on politics' symbolic terrain. Lakoff (1996), in particular has argued that metaphors having to do with the proper functioning of a family help to explain seemingly incommensurate arguments that under-gird American conservative and liberal political rhetorics and worldviews.

While metaphors are the most widely studied trope, four master tropes have been recognized since the 16th century when Peter Ramus identified, in addition to metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. This four-part typology of coincidental relationships was mirrored in the work of Giambisto Vico (1968) in the 18th century who sought to differentiate the stages of consciousness characterizing human progress. More recently, Kenneth Burke (1968) broke with the linguistic theory of the post-war period which tended to reduce linguistic behaviors to either metaphor or metonymy and reconstituted the "master tropes" as four possible styles of thought (pp. 503-517; White, 1975). For Burke, as for modern cognitive linguists, the styles of thought were important because they provided a frame for both interpretation and understanding. As Burke notes, they play a "role in the discovery and description of 'the truth'" (p. 503).

I am limiting my discussion to two of the four tropes: synecdoche and metonymy. Of the four, the two are the most similar and easily confused and are the most likely to “shade into one another,” This is so much so, that they have often been reduced to one another (p. 503). Burke likens metonymy to reduction and synecdoche to representation. While both deal with issues of contiguous or sign relationships, they do so in subtly different ways. This narrow distinction is an issue of some controversy, but the fundamental difference has to do with the ways that a term is related to the thing that it represents.

Gunter Radden and Zoltan Kovecses (1999) regard metonymy as a “cognitive process in which once conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same cognitive model” (p. 21). More simply, Ken-ichi Seto (1999) defines metonymy as a “referential transfer phenomenon based on the spatio-temporal contiguity as conceived by the speaker between an entity and another in the (real world)” (p. 91). In short, “metonymy is an entity-related transfer.” Hayden White (1975) describe succinctly how this plays out in the rhetorical realm, “through metonymy (literally ‘name change’), the name of a part of a thing may be substituted for the name of the whole, as in the phrase ‘fifty sail’ when what is indicated is ‘fifty ships’” (p. 34).

On the contrary, synecdoche typically deals with the nature of the whole as indicated in a quality of one of its parts. Seto (1999) defines it as “a conceptual transfer phenomenon based on the semantic inclusion between a more comprehensive and a less comprehensive category.” As such, it represents a category related transfer” (p. 92). White (1975) notes that by synecdoche a “phenomenon can be characterized by using the part to symbolize some quality presumed to inhere in the totality, as the expression, ‘He is all heart’” (p. 34). As such, the whole is reduced to an essential quality that inheres in one or more of the parts.

This discussion yields a few key points:

1. synecdoche and metonymy are closely related expressive practices that rely on a similar logic of contiguity between parts and wholes
2. the two tropes may be easily confused, but that they intend to draw parallels to different sets of similarities; between a part and a category in cases of synecdoche and between conceptually related entities in the case of metonymy
3. they are fundamentally argumentative in that they try to relate different ideas together utilizing a common cultural logic. In this sense they are enthymematic.

One final point I would like to make regarding these expressive strategies is that they make a difference in the way an issue is framed and offer separate prospects for interpretation. Because both rely on a habit of association that are bound in cultural concerns, that is, contiguity is as often a matter of real, conceptual and linguistic association rather than just one (Lakoff 1987). As such, communities define differently the degree of relationship between entities and concepts.

3. Context

Most generally associate the Ku Klux Klan with the Old South and the period of reconstruction after the American Civil War. However, its heyday as a national organization stretched from 1915 until World War II when, at one point, it claimed nearly 4 million members, or 20 percent of the adult white male population. The Klan's focus on anti-semitism, anti-Catholicism, nativism and race segregation had a particular appeal in Indiana where Edward Jackson, the Grand Dragon of the Indiana Klan served as governor from 1924 - 1929. However, this rule was short and by 1944 the organization declared bankruptcy and officially disbanded. In its place, several other organizations attempted to take up the mantle of the original Klan, particularly during the desegregation era of the 1950s and 1960s, creating a patchwork of similarly motivated, but decentralized, organizations. While these groups took responsibility for several high-profile racial incidents, they had little success regaining a significant membership. After several lawsuits in the 1980's and relentless pressure from federal authorities, Klan membership bottomed out. The Anti-Defamation League now estimates that there are no more than 2,500 - 3,000 members splintered into more than 150 different and competing organizations.

Despite their small size, the Klan maintains a powerful legacy. Their reputation for organizational secrecy, coupled with a penchant for publicity and terrorism magnified the effect of their modest membership. They are nearly synonymous with all acts and symbols of hatred, actively competing with Nazis as ubiquitous paradigms of racial hatred. While they had a dominating influence in the first half of the Twentieth Century, they have consistently waned in influence into the Twenty-first. They are largely in official disrepute; so much that nearly all of the states of the Old South have been forced to repudiate their official use of the Confederate battle flag because of its association with the Klan.

The University of Louisville is a public, urban research university located in Louisville, Kentucky. Founded on the banks of the Ohio River, Louisville's

metropolitan area stretches well into southern Indiana. While Kentucky is not in the heart of the Old South and was free of much of the public strife associated with desegregation, the University of Louisville is a place that is uniquely sensitive to race issues. Nearly one third of the city of Louisville identify themselves as African-American, nearly half of Kentucky's African-American population. While the urban center is ethnically diverse, southern Indiana is largely rural, agrarian and white. Despite the diversity of its physical location, the University population is only 11% African American and has one of the lowest minority graduation rates in the country for a university of its type and size.

The university is keenly aware of this dissonance and has made several attempts to remedy the situation. In 2002, Louisville's President James Ramsey inaugurated a University diversity plan. In addition to initiatives seeking to hire additional minority faculty and direct administrative resources to increasing minority recruitment and retention, the President began a speaker's series to help bring attention to issues of diversity on the Louisville campus.

4. The Klan Comes to Louisville

In November 2003 in response to an incident involving racially insensitive t-shirts, the University invited Sistah Souljah to speak on the campus. A graduate of Rutgers University and famous for her role as Minister of Information for the Rap Group Public Enemy, she became infamous when in a 1992 *Washington Post* interview she quipped regarding the L.A. riots: "If black people kill black people every day, why not have a week and kill white people?" Instantly, she became a media celebrity as Democrats repudiated her extremism and Republicans used it as evidence for the culture war. Both of her videos were immediately banned from MTV. However, the incident was isolated. Subsequently, she has written two books and become an activist for the third world and children's rights.

The University of Louisville (U of L) spent \$ 11,000.00 on the presentation. And while Souljah's talk was largely heralded as uplifting by students who attended, WHAS radio talk-show host Francene Cuncinello took the event as an opportunity to comment on Sistah Souljah's controversial past and to question the benefits of the diversity program overall (Frazier 2003). Subsequently, two members of the International Keystone Knights of the Ku Klux Klan appeared at the office of Provost for Diversity and Equal Opportunity, Dr. Taylor-Archer, on 1 December 2003 demanding that the university pay Barry E. Black, Imperial Wizard of the International Keystone Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (IKKKK), an equal amount of money to speak as part of the diversity forum. They also demanded that the

University dismantle the diversity program. Regarding the tone of their demands, the *Louisville Courier-Journal* quoted the IKKK Kentucky Spokesman, James D. Kennedy's letter: "Such statements as blacks are at war with whites onley (sic) promotes racism in the black communitys (sic)." Kennedy went on to write, "Sister Soldier (sic) had also stated that blacks are being killed in alarming rates, so we need a 'Kill Whitey Week.'" These remarks onley (sic) instigate rage & encourage the black populous (sic) to commit violent acts against European-Americans based on thier (sic) ethnicity." The University denied their demands.

The U of L Debate Society instantly sponsored a program as a public response to the critics of Sistah Souljah. Dr. Ricky Jones of the Pan-African Studies Department noted that the KKK was a particular threat. He distinguished the KKK from Sistah Souljah: "The KKK has a history of lynching, terrorizing and killing African Americans. Has Sister Souljah (sic) ever burned a cross in your front yard" (Abner, 2003).

The controversy continued into the second semester. A kiosk at U of L's Belknap campus, about two miles away from the main campus, was spray painted with racial epithets and fliers were found outside a residence hall and classroom building. In March, more than 100 students rallied to ban the Klan from campus. And in April, campus safety received a call that two people were placing IKKKK recruiting material on University kiosks. When campus safety arrived, they found that the two had placed materials on a "campus map" which was considered campus property and were declared "persona non grata" and permanently banned from the campus. At the end of the school year the University administration removed the public information kiosks from the campuses. Klan spokesman Jim Kennedy threatened to contest the ban in court with the help of the Kentucky ACLU (A.P., 2004). As part of their protests, Klan members applied to hold a march on 1 May 2004, Derby Day. Local officials denied the permit request saying that the police would already be stretched too thin to provide adequate security (Bowman, 2004).

In the fall of 2004, the IKKKK petitioned the university to meet at one of the university's "free speech" areas to hand out materials. Despite publicly asking twice and re-raising the issue on the campus in September and in November, they failed to show up at the requested time. Since then, they have periodically requested the opportunity to use the "free speech" areas.

The University offered multi-pronged response. Relying on a theory of free speech

as a centerpiece of a modern university, the President acknowledged that, while he found the Klan personally odious, he was powerless to do anything to stop them beyond the measures already taken. In a series of “closed door” meetings and letters to the campus community, President Ramsey sought to assure the community that they understood the gravity of the situation and that they sympathized with student and minority concerns, but that there was little that the institution could do to stop the group from using the “free speech” zones. As a general premise, he acknowledged that the University’s commitment to diversity means that it is committed to listening to all voices wishing to address the university community and that the best response to offensive speech is counter-speech. He says in his 11 February letter: “However, even if we do not welcome or agree with them, we have an obligation to allow them to exercise their rights to free speech just as we would any other individual or group who comes to our campus and abides by our guidelines. This does not mean we have to listen to what they say, and it does not mean we cannot respond with additional free speech expressing differing views.”

However, he acknowledges that the KKK represents a threat to the community. He interprets this as physical and in response notes that he is empowering the Public Safety department to take measures to protect the campus community. He characterizes the threat to the community as intellectual discomfort, given “the history of the organization and the views it espouses (Ramsey, 11 February).

In subsequent meetings with faculty and student groups, the President’s claim that he was hamstrung by the Constitution was met with suspicion. In a letter after a 2 March campus forum, Ramsey lamented that despite all of the time discussing the issue, that “many of the issues are being mischaracterized. This is absolutely not about preferring hate groups over our African American community. It is not about the university administration vs. those who care about diversity. It is not about choosing the U.S. Constitution over campus safety. Those characterizations are not true” (Ramsey, 4 March). Instead, he framed an issue regarding the strength of the university community; whether it was prepared to deal with the issue in a unified or divisive way. Rather than a purely physical threat, he now characterizes the threat as one located in “the history of these groups and the values they hold” rather than the situation presented. However, his solution, again, is to increase the role of the Department of Public Safety to insure campus safety as a primary concern.

In defense of engaging the Klan “diplomatically”, Ramsey takes a more defensive tone and again avers to the obligations of an educational community to “work to improve our understanding of the issues we face and how they relate to the larger society. As an educational community, we have a responsibility to share information and talk openly about issues while respecting that we bring different perspectives that cannot be characterized as either right or wrong to the discussion.” He also notes: “The difficulty is that to protect our own voices, our own hard-earned rights, we cannot selectively exclude the voices of others, no matter how distasteful they may be, as long as the individuals expressing those views abide by the law and by our own long-established practices.”

However, when the issue moved from placing pamphlets and making demands on administrators and to a threat to actually showing up in the “free speech” zone, Ramsey changes his tone once more. Rather than embracing counter-speech or supporting the open and free exchange of ideas and the importance of engaging difficult and controversial topics in an overt way, he asks that the community shun those ideas. In a 3 September letter, he notes that his only rationale for allowing the Klan on the campus is external, located in the Constitutional obligation and that the University “must comply with state and federal laws that guarantee freedom of speech.” Gone are the earlier references to the fact that some ideas were not “right or wrong.” In response to the Klan’s request, he offers that the University should, “choose to deny these two individuals what they most want: Our attention. They want to disrupt our campus, distract us from our mission, and harm the reputation of our institution and its students, faculty and staff.”

Ramsey acknowledges the double edge of the liberal tradition. Speech is paramount to a university community in theory, but in practice should be selective. The Klan represents a threat, but it is largely historical or can be dealt with by using modest and immediate resources. While there may be long-term threats, they are insufficiently linked to the actual group on campus on warrant attention. Attempts to acknowledge the problem only give them more than they deserve. All the while, Ramsey carefully distinguishes the Klan from any greater meaning or significance on the campus. They are outsiders, their ideas are aberrant and can be easily ignored without much harm. Their real threat is not material, it is historical or social, a consequence of their name and the response that they provoke.

On the contrary, the U of L and greater African American community were not conciliatory. Rather than viewing the Klan's attempts as the isolated actions of a couple of activists who wanted to pass out pamphlets for of the IKKKK, they viewed the Klan in a clearly elaborated historical context. Viewed from this context, they sought to ban the Klan and all who took the name, not just the couple of activists or the IKKKK, from the campus. They also sought to sever ties between the University and the radio station that stoked the issue. Debate coach, Ede Warner was a public face in regard to the Klan on campus. Following, Pan-African studies professor Ricky Jones' characterization, he articulated a link between the activists, the Klan and terrorism in general. In a BET interview (Scott, 2005), Warner said: "Their [terrorists'] moves are moves of intimidation. Why is this any different?. . . It's very subtle. It's not direct. It's not 'we're gonna hurt you. It's 'we're going to send you some fliers to remind you what we're about. They've put me on some Web sites."

An element of secrecy magnifies the Klan's power and lends credence to conspiratorial claims about them. They are not overt, they are not what they seem and they hide for a range of activities that defy classification along a simple continuum of actions. As such, they are indistinguishable from racism. Rather, they are the embodiment of it. In this sense, the posting of fliers and attempts to use the "free speech" zone are simple fronts for more nefarious activities that fall under the same rubric. Posters to a BET chat forum dedicated to the Louisville incident demonstrate this synecdochal reduction, where a quality of part of an entity is taken as a characterization of the entity as a whole, more clearly. There are three interesting elements of this conflation: first, allowing the KKK shows a fundamentally racist division between threats to whites and threats to African Americans. Second, the notion that the Global War on terrorism should include the Klan for their use of forces as a means of intimidation and, third, a conflation of the historical Klan with the work of independent members that appropriate its name and tradition or the IKKK as an independent body from the whole history of the Klan.

The first theme that becomes evident is that the separate treatment of the Klan and Al Qaeda points toward a particularly racist view and a litmus test of racism. One blogger commented: "The history of the KKK speaks for itself, if you are unaware of their history, then 'Google' it (yes it is 2004). We refuse to act like this is at the forefront of our agenda; however we cannot simply ignore this type of

action. If you disagree with us, it is your right. We will not argue or plea with you to understand where Black folk are coming from. Either you feel us or you don't... One question we will ask, if Al Queda came on campus passing out literature and recruiting, then what would you say?" (SOULution, 2004). More to the point, a poster to BET's messageboard linked the difference to larger issues dealing with systematic racism[i]. They said:

[T]here are currently two classes of terrorist organizations, those who threaten the us and those who threaten a portion of the population. only the first group is taken seriously. the us has a bloody history of persecution of minorities, and i daresay that most americans know nothing about it. crimes by the klan are rarely prosecuted, for most americans think as they do. to compare black criminal activity to klan history is stupid. in the current climate, it would not be surprising to discover that the klan would be given complete absolution by bushwinkle and his nazis. (listen up blackrepublicans, BET Messageboard, 1/15/2005 12:34:05 AM)

In this frame, the free speech justification covers overtly racist activity. Any rationale that defends any part, is a defense of the whole of racism because all racism is the same. Another poster said: "it's just like the whole terrorist thing.... you arrest terrorists that are against the white people so far.... and then the group against black people suddenly their just going what the first amendment tells them they can do...." (bAcArDiMaMi, BET Messageboard, 1/14/2005 10:40:45 AM)

In such a world, white racists and terrorists stand differentiated from minority terrorist groups. While minority groups gain the attention and ire of the government, white racists and radicals exist as part of the accepted fabric. Another poster noted that moral equivalence should link the two: "it should be banned and every KKK member demonstrating needs to be arrested for being a member of a terrorist group. otherwise lets give equal time to the people who hate whites and blow up buildings with whites in them i.e. al qaeda and islamic jihad. don't allow one terrorist group to demonstrate and ban another. (twocents, BET Messageboard, 1/13/2005 8:49:12 PM)

This sense of contiguity lies in a racial denial of the history and power of the Klan where the Klan is such a vivid representation of racism that it is impossible to disarticulate. Only a system rife with institutional racism would fail to see the equivalence: "... others are trying to keep us from focusing on the real issue here

an organize terrorist group being able to speak on a public college campus this is a tactic used always by either people in denial about racism or people who are racist or bigots" (coolchil1, BET Messageboard, 1/14/2005 10:33:05 AM). Another notes: "white folk in this nation will not arrest every neo nazi and kkk member and send them to guantanamo bay cuba because deep down inside many white folk sympathize with thier white supremacist ideology"(DART, BET Messageboard, 1/11/2005 2:46:03 PM).

The equivalence lies with the name and not the actions of the two on the campus. Because the activists choose that name, they choose its history. A BET poster observes:

[T]he KKK is nothing but a terrorist organization, but because they are made up of white trash, they are allowed to rein supreme without restraint until they maim or murder someone. but, if this were al-quada, some arab group, or some black group, the police would be called immediately. The KKK is just another of many signs of the degrading of american society, the stagnated social progress amongst all races (Africaspeak, BET Messageboard, 1/12/2005 10:44:00 PM)

One other concern that echoes the original letter from the Klan to the U of L and appears throughout the comments against the Klan is that African Americans can not be held accountable for what happens when they engage the Klan. Or, that the violence that will accompany the Klan's appearance will end up hurting the African American community as a whole. In short, that the mere existence of the Klan rises to the level of fighting words. These concerns found their way into President Ramsey's call for the community to ignore the Klan, but they also find their way into Ede Warner's rationale for declaring them a terrorist organization and the BET Messageboard discussions. Warner said: "There have been students who have said if the university won't protect us, we'll protect ourselves, but for the most part students stay away... "If something goes wrong, and some of our students are involved, they will be demonized for being the aggressor... It won't be that it was bad the Klan was on the campus, it will be about the lack of restraint by our Black students. It's too bad because I think it could be prevented." A subsequent poster also notes: "how can the campus administration let that go on? they are just asking for trouble... the sad thing is, kids might take it in their own hands and will end up in big trouble, because campus authorities act like it's no big deal to begin with. crazy! (what in the hell!, BET Messageboard, 1/11/2005 12:03:41 PM). Because of this, the Klan is an entity

whose existence is, by definition, a threat and requires an irrational response. Material threats, such as the threats of racism, transcend the ability of speech to engage them.

Whites responded to the terrorism equation in a predictable form by pointing out the KKK's lack of threat. Mark Potok from the Southern Poverty Law Center noted that: "having the Klan banned as a terrorist organization based on its past would be legally difficult, especially given the Klan's inaction in recent years." Others pointed toward the position of the IKKK. The UCLA Bruin responded by pointing toward the activist's ability to threaten the campus:

At the University of Louisville, the KKK doesn't act as a "terrorist" group. The definition of a terrorist group is one that exerts threatening force or violence for the purpose of intimidation or coercion, usually with political motives. But, in the case of the KKK presence at the university, these descriptions simply don't match. Instead, the group posts signs, writes letters and delivers speeches. The KKK's message is utterly despicable, but so far, its only crimes are blatant ignorance and vile personal beliefs. Because the organization refrains from physical force or coercion, it's not a terrorist group (Ilana, 2004).

The U of L's official website made a similar argument, reducing the threat of the Klan to their means of expression rather than their agenda or history. They write: The courts have recognized the Klan's history in other cases. The Seventh Circuit in 2003 even suggested that the name of the Klan and its paraphernalia might someday be recognized as "fighting words" unprotected by the First Amendment but concluded that, at this time, it has not reached that level"(FAQ sheet).

5. Discussion

The Klan's attempts to protest on the Louisville campus distilled two competing interpretations that can be explained with reference to tropic tradition. Whereas the administration viewed the IKKK's attempts to influence the campus as the work a sad group of misfits and outsiders who, at worst, had little hope of doing any more than raising the ire of some protestors, anti-Klan advocates took the IKKK as part of a well-worn tradition of racism. It was not that they were misfits appropriating a name. Rather, their appropriation of the name itself was an indication of their intent and their central role in a long tradition of racism. What is important to the synecdochal representation is that the racism of the Klan is not special or unique, but rather part of the fabric that colors all parts of institutional racism. Because the Klan is a paradigmatic example of racism, it serves for some

as an apt and visible representation of a whole that is largely invisible. It inheres with the same qualities as all racism, except it is a largely visible but only partially known incantation.

The metonymic representation, on the contrary, establishes racism as part of a continuum of activity. While we should reject all racism in the abstract, we should approach material manifestations in a pragmatic fashion. As such, the Klan represents only one extreme element of racism that is, for most, distant and harmless. Its extremism makes it an object to be ignored or pitied rather than addressed. Within the metonymic frame, the invocation of the Klan as an example of racism is more likely to produce apathy or abstract abhorrence than real action because there is so little connection between them and most others.

While the existence of a single and identifiable material object such as the Klan would normally predict a concrete and finite field of argument, the fact that different groups come at the same object with a different set of interpretive schemes makes conflict more likely. These implicatures open and close meaning. As Burke (1970) notes, every means of articulation is both a way of knowing, seeing or naming and a way of limiting these qualities. Here, the perceived material histories of these events encourage groups to use tropological prefigurations as the starting point for their conversations. Whether the Klan is alive and well, whether they are terrorists that have the support of the official state, whether they are a small group of down and outers or inheritors of a long history of hate and intimidation have to do with the relationship of that part to the whole. Since this exists prior to any actual manifestation of the Klan and it is a premise for argument rather than a subject of it. This is why President Ramsey's claims that they were just another dissonant group or that an increase in public safety officials had little effect on the complaints of anti-Klan protesters. When viewed as a single manifestation of a whole system of racism, these small and focused actions were only placebos to further hide the larger issues. To stop the actual protestors did little to stop racism. While the two groups were bound by a single vocabulary, they were separated by the relations between terms rooted in a material experience of racism.

For argument, the distinction points toward the enthymematic potential of different tropological structures. White notes that synecdoche tends to support comic interpretations, focusing on the potentials for transcendence while metonymic interpretations tend to find themselves rooted in tragic

interpretations, since they tend to ignore the complexity of problems in favor of conceptual coherence. Here, synecdoche brings the Klan to life as a constant and lingering threat intimately related to all forms of racism while metonymy distinguishes them as irrelevant.

However, engaging the “Klan” according to their chosen nomenclature might hold a middle ground. While the tendency is for administration officials to take the Klan in terms of their anemic material threat, that is the threat posed by the obscure IKKKK, this is not the name that they use themselves. Instead, they choose to articulate a link with the white history by choosing to use the larger reference. In this instance, they seek to have their cake and eat it too – to gain the historical reputation of the Klan without carrying any of its negative baggage. This lets them off too easily. If they choose the name, then let them be responsible for it. It is unimaginable that a group on a U.S. campus would call itself Al-Qaeda USA without gaining the critical attention of authorities. The same can be said for the KKK who share a similar history of intimidation and terrorism.

For the study of argument, the lessons are broader. Attention to master tropes helps draw attention to the finite ways that coincident events may be articulated. While we often use a common vocabulary that leads us to believe that we are talking about the same thing, tropological prefigurations (the tendency to aver to one strategy over another) may help to explain some instances where arguments in the same field fail to find resolution. As such, they are one other way that figurative logics can help scholars to map out the terrains of argument and become attuned to unseen potentials for failure.

NOTE

[i] The Messageboard accompany all news reports on the BET website. They ask for audience participation. Because they are not edited and are placed at the discretion of the poster, they tend not to use traditional grammar, spelling or syntax.

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