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The Little Klansman: A Symbol of American Infantilism Amidst Racial Tensions

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Introduction

In December of 1856, a string of violence was unleashed as the United States witnessed the birth of the infamous hate group the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The KKK has continued to influence society by spreading condemning messages of hate, and membership has always been a family affair. This was the case at a rally in Gainesville, Georgia over Labor Day weekend in 1992.



Figure 1: *The Little Klansman*

Thesis

Using Michel Foucault's theory of surveillance, I argue that the photograph *The Little Klansman* serves as an example of metonymy because it represents the historical and intense racial struggle within the United States. Josh, the child Klansman, is an infantile citizen who is unknowingly endowed with the advocacy to expose the racial failures of our nation.

Key Terms

- Metonymy: The way in which iconic images act to sum up a situation to represent a larger idea and control a society's collective memory.
- Michel Foucault's Theory of Surveillance: The viewer is situated above the subject so that the subject's worth becomes dependent on its relationship to the viewer.
- Infantile citizenship: Through their lack of knowledge, American children have the power to draw attention to failures that exist but are ignored continuously within the United States.

Analysis

At the rally, the cameras and reporters served to document the actions of the Georgia state troopers, acting as a way to instill appropriate behavior by taking the place of the panopticon as a disciplinary apparatus that made it possible for, "a single gaze to see everything" (Foucault, 1995, p. 173). In this photograph, the riot shield created a physical separation that initiated a connection, if only fleeting, between the child Klansman and the trooper. The child stares at the shield full of wonder and touches it playfully as if it were a toy, exercising his power as an infantile citizen to make onlookers question the unfolding situation.