Standard 8.86 Lesson

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The Ku Klux Klan, also known as the KKK, had beginnings in Pulaski, Tennessee in 1865. It began as a social club for Confederate soldiers and evolved into a group of people who did not want African Americans or white Republicans to have the ability to hold office. They were also trying to keep African Americans from being able to vote. Their goal was to keep control of African Americans through violence and intimidation. Much of this violence happened during the Reconstruction period after the Civil War.
Members of the KKK would dress in white robes with hoods and go to African American voter’s homes, threatening them and burning wooden crosses in their yards. When these threats did not work, many in the KKK turned to more violent actions such as beatings, whippings, lynchings and massacres. Many African Americans, as well as white supporters, were murdered or wounded throughout the south in the 1860s during many confrontations. Some African Americans continued to hold office during this time, but many were scared away.

Because of the confrontations, the KKK grew in size and gained many supporters. In 1868, Nathan Bedford Forrest became the first leader of the KKK. Forrest, a former Confederate general in the Civil War, became known as “The Grand Wizard” of the KKK.

As the 1868 election approached the violence escalated to an unacceptable level. Klansmen began to murder thousands of African Americans and other Republican voters. People then realized much stricter laws would have to be passed to protect African Americans in the South.

Many African American voters wrote to Congress to petition help. In 1870, Congress made it a crime to use force to keep any people from registering to vote, voting, holding office or serving on a jury. In 1871 they passed the Ku Klux Klan Act, allowing the government to take action against any terrorist organization. Many Klan members were arrested during this time, but convicting them was difficult. Then in 1882, the US Supreme Court declared the KKK
Act unconstitutional.

Source
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/grant-kkk