

# Testimony of Elias Hill

## Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States



**ABOUT THE READING** Elias Hill was an ex-slave and a minister from South Carolina who testified about his experience with the Ku Klux Klan before a congressional committee in 1871. The excerpt below is from that testimony as published in the committee's report in 1872.



*As you read the passage below, think about what the Ku Klux Klan wanted from Elias Hill. The following words might be new to you: **rheumatism**, **prevailed**. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.*

Elias Hill is a remarkable character. He is crippled in both legs and arms, which are shriveled by **rheumatism**; he cannot walk, cannot help himself, has to be fed and cared for personally by others; was in early life a slave, whose freedom was purchased, his father buying his mother and getting Elias along with her, as a burden of which his master was glad to be rid. Stricken at seven years old with disease, he never was afterward able to walk, and he presents the appearance of a dwarf with the limbs of a child, the body of a man, and a finely developed intellectual head. He learned his letters and to read by calling the school children into the cabin as they passed, and also learned to write. He became a Baptist preacher, and after the war engaged in teaching colored children, and conducted the business correspondence of many of his colored neighbors. He is a man of blameless character, of unusual intelligence, speaks good English, and we put the story of his wrongs in his own language:

"On the night of the 5th of last May, after I had heard a great deal of what they had done in that neighborhood, they [the Ku Klux Klan] came. It was between 12 and 1 o'clock at night when I was awakened and heard the dogs barking, and something walking, very much like horses . . . At last they came to my brother's door, which is in the same yard, and broke open the door and attacked his wife, and I heard her screaming and mourning . . . At last I heard them have her in the yard. She was crying and the Ku- Klux were whipping her to make her tell where I lived . . . Some one then hit my door. It flew open. One ran in the house, and stopping about the middle of the house, which is a small cabin, he turned around, as it seemed to me as I lay there awake, and said, 'Who's here?' Then I knew they would take me, and I answered, 'I am here.' He shouted for joy, as it seemed, 'Here he is! Here he is! We have found him!' and he threw the bedclothes off of me and caught me by one arm, while another man took me by the other and

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they carried me into the yard between the houses. . . . The first thing they asked me was, 'Who did the burning? Who burned our houses?'—gin-houses, dwelling-houses and such. Some had been burned in the neighborhood. I told them it was not me; I could not burn houses; it was unreasonable to ask me. Then they hit me with their fists, and said I did it, I ordered it. . . . They struck me again with their fists on my breast, and then they went on. . . .

They pointed pistols at me all around my head once or twice, as if they were going to shoot me, telling me they were going to kill me; wasn't I ready to die, and willing to die? Didn't I preach? That they came to kill me—all the time pointing pistols at me. . . . One said '... hush!' He had a horsewhip, and he told me to pull up my shirt, and he hit me. He told me at every lick, 'Hold up your shirt.' I made a moan every time he cut with the horsewhip. I reckon he struck me eight cuts right on the hip bone; it was almost the only place he could hit my body, my legs are so short—all my limbs drawn up and withered away with pain. . . . They all had disguises on. I then thought they would not kill me. One of them then took a strap, and buckled it around my neck and said, 'Let's take him to the river and drown him. . . .'

They said 'Look here! Will you put a card in the paper next week like June Moore and Sol Hill?' They had been **prevailed** on to put a card in the paper to renounce all republicanism and never vote. I said, 'If I had the money to pay the expense, I could.' They said I could borrow, and gave me another lick. They asked me, 'Will you quit preaching?' I told them I did not know. I said that to save my life. They said I must stop the republican paper that was coming to Clay Hill. It has been only a few weeks since it stopped. The republican paper was then coming to me from Charleston. It came to my name. They said I must stop it, quit preaching, and put a card in the newspaper renouncing republicanism, and they would not kill me; but if I did not they would come back the next week and kill me."

**ANALYZING LITERATURE**

1. **Main idea** What seems to be the main reason that the Ku Klux Klan attacked Elias Hill?

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2. **Critical Thinking: Analysis** Why would someone like Elias be seen as an enemy by the Ku Klux Klan?

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