

**GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO CIVIL RIGHTS ORAL HISTORY
COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Dargan Frierson

INTERVIEWER: Kathy Hoke

DATE: January 9, 1990

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

KATHY HOKE: This is Kathy Hoke. I'm in the home of Mr. Dargan Frierson, interviewing him for a second time. Maybe we can just start out, I know you had a lot of very strong feelings about William Chafe's book, and I believe you wanted to talk about some of the references to the FBI that were made in *Civilities and Civil Rights*.

DARGAN FRIERSON: Well, yeah, I, when you were here before we talked primarily about the Klan and before the black power situation developed. And then, of course, you had said you would be back and we would continue--and at the end, towards the end of the interview before, you mentioned something about Mr. X. And I thought at that time that you were just referring to the fact that the FBI did not identify their informants, and that Mr. X was just some general term concerning informants. Then when I read Chafe's book, I realized that this Mr. X was a specific character whom he identifies as an FBI informant, and an FBI provocateur, and--

KH: Was he Harold Avant?

DF: That's who he's talking about, he described him.

KH: Harold Avant is Mr. X in William Chafe's book.

DF: Well, sure, yeah, Harold Avant, who we called, he called himself Nunding, N-u-n-d-i-n-g, Nunding is his Black Panther name. Now Mr. Chafe, or Dr. Chafe I guess he must be if he is at Duke, goes into great lengths to talk about the fact that they never could prove that he was a Panther, and that actually he was obviously an FBI informant. And I would love to get that word to some of the Panthers now, because I know Mr. Avant would lead a hard life if they ever thought he was an FBI informant--and it's an absolute bald-faced lie. He was never an informant. I never made any attempt to make him an informant.

I had excellent informants that I had developed in cooperation with the Greensboro Police. And I guess the thing that upsets me mostly about the book, and I realize that this isn't the entire program as Dr. [William] Link pointed out to me, that this is only a book that they had recommended for faculty reading that portrayed what had gone on. And I guess the thing that really upsets me most is the thrust of Chafe's book is, when he is referring to Black Pantherism and black power, that the FBI provocateur, who obviously was Harold Avant, or Nunding, was fabricating all of these things and creating an atmosphere of potential violence, which the FBI--and that would have been me, because I was the only person that did any of this. I worked it all myself. That I then would have given this information to the police, and as a result of that, the police overreacted and used tear gas on the people out there at Dudley High School and so forth. That, of course, is an absolute falsehood, totally untrue. I had excellent informants. I know, you know, usually before trouble is going to happen, thank goodness. But Nunding, or Harold Avant, was never an informant, although in his book, he doesn't actually call him Avant as the informant.

But it describes him perfectly--big, dark beard, and so forth. So you see, it's very easy to read a book. Everybody loves to bash police. I mean, that's got to be one of the most popular things--that's more popular than basketball now, is police bashing. I don't think I've ever read a book that praises the police or the FBI, but they love to bash it. Well, when I started reading this book-- you know, I read other books bashing police and FBI, and I just laugh about it and put it aside. But see, he's talking about ME, in this book--and I don't like people lying about ME, so that's why I got upset.

KH: Although I don't believe your name ever comes up directly.

DF: No, but it could have been me, because I'm the only man that worked in the black informants. So in my mind, I know it is I he's talking about. He's not talking about anybody else, because I'm the one he refers to. All these FBI memorandums, I wrote them all, every one of them. I remember them very well. And how he concluded, if he is a professor at the university, of Duke University, how he could have reached the conclusions that he did on such totally inadequate premises is unbelievable to me. He sites memos that I read, that I wrote, and then from this concludes all this garbage about the fact that this man was a provocateur, he was sent down here to stir up trouble so I would pass it on to the police and they would overreact. That is the most asinine conclusion I can possibly imagine, and I wish that Dr. Chafe was here, because I would like to tell him that right to his face. If he is supposedly seeking the truth, as I think most historians do, then how he could have been so totally biased, prejudiced--you know, the old saying, "Don't tell me the truth, you know, my mind is already made up, don't confuse me with the facts."

I don't know how anybody with a reasonable degree of intelligence could take

those memorandums that I wrote and conclude that Harold Avant, or Nunding, was an FBI informant. See, that's what upset me so much. Now the book is pretty accurate all through the early part of it, where he talks about the Klan and their opposition to integration. It's accurate about, of course, the Pearsall Plan, which tried to avoid integrating, although the Pearsall Plan was just freedom of choice, which eventually I think we are going to go back to in this country--but anyway, all that's pretty accurate.

Now he's got some absurd things. Now, for instance, he's got a picture in here he says is George Dorsett, and it isn't George Dorsett. George Dorsett was my informant. That all came out in the newspaper, the *Greensboro Daily News*, God bless them, it's the only paper in the country, the only news media in the country that ever--through the Freedom of Information Act--got the identity of an FBI informant and then plastered it on the front page. The Bureau was horrified when it happened. They said it was the only incidence--

KH: Harold Avant said--

DF: No, no, now this was Dorsett, now.

KH: Oh, Dorsett.

DF: I'm talking about Dorsett now. When they put, I was on city council at the time, and they had a picture of me and George Dorsett on the front page of the *Greensboro Daily News* and told all about our activities together and so forth, that they had gotten through the Freedom of Information Act. Well, of course, had that happened back when Dorsett was an informant, and when the Klan was active, his life wouldn't have been worth much. But, of course, the *Greensboro Daily News* didn't care about that--all they wanted was to sell newspapers. They don't give a damn whether it kills George Dorsett or not. This picture on page 227, it says George Dorsett, another Klan member--that is not George Dorsett.

KH: This one's not?

DF: No. It certainly isn't. And not only that, this isn't at Frank Williams's house--so you know, that's typical of the *Greensboro Daily News* and the garbage that they printed also. That is not Dorsett, that is not Frank Williams's house, and I do not know whether Chafe made the mistake or what. But that is not a picture of George Dorsett. I worked with him for years. He's still a good friend--I saw him just a few months ago and he's still a very good friend.

So you see, I'm--I ran into Tony Fragola, who is in [the Department of] Communications and he teaches Italian also at UNCG [the University of North Carolina

at Greensboro]. Tony has been a friend of our family for twenty years at least. I ran into him the other night at a party, and I was talking to him about this book, and he said, "My gosh, Darg," he said, "I am on the committee that chose this book, because we thought it was such a fair representation of what had happened in Greensboro." He said, "I'm on the committee." And he said, "Would you be willing to come before the committee and tell them what you're telling me?"

I said, "Sure."

Well, he said the committee probably would not meet until April, and they'll forget all about it, too, just like Dr. Link. He wanted me to come talk to him, but he's too busy, I guess, to talk to me. So, anyway, nobody cares and I, what I would like to say now is, I was, I know this is only a book. But it just typifies the FBI and the police bashing that goes on all the time. The police did not overreact, believe me. They used incredible restraint. I was right there. See, all--this guy sitting over at Duke University in a beautiful office building writing a bunch of garbage--I was there. I saw what was going on.

He doesn't mention that the kids were busting out windows, that they were looting, that they were throwing Molotov cocktails through the windows of the businesses downtown, that they were shooting, that it sounded like a war going on down there, shooting off of the campus at the police. Three police, he says, three were hit one night. I thought it was four, but I know of a total of five police officers were shot. He even now in his book said that it appeared that the police were shot by the National Guard. [laughter] Where in the world? That's another one of his brilliant conclusions. I was right there during the whole thing--nobody ever in their wildest imagination thought that the National Guard shot the policemen. The shooting of the policemen was coming off the campus, towards the street, and there were no National Guardsmen on the campus.

It's just as I said--it's another typical example of FBI and police bashing, that the police were overreacting, that these were just a bunch of young black kids who were fighting oppression, under the brilliant leadership of Nelson Johnson, who then became, you know, a big leader of the Communist Workers Party, and now's a preacher. So, you know, that shows you how Nelson sort of bends with the wind, I think.

When I was on city council and Nelson was a leader in the Communist Workers Party, and then they had the big shootout out here in 1979 and killed the Communists, Nelson Johnson was on the scene. But one of the cameramen from the TV station told me as soon as the shooting started, the cameraman jumped underneath the van, and he said he could hardly get under the van because Nelson Johnson had already gotten under there before he did and left his children standing out on the street. So that's Mr. Johnson. That's what I think of him. That's what this TV news cameraman told me. But anyway, he portrays Nelson Johnson, you know, it says that we were unjustly accusing Nelson Johnson and Claude Barnes of being Panthers. We never said Nelson Johnson and Claude Barnes were Panthers.

KH: Claude Barnes is the student at Dudley High School who had lost the election and was forced to, the teachers would not let him take his place on the student council.

[Both are talking]

DF: That's right, the one at Dudley High School. That's right. Well, they didn't let him, and it doesn't mention that Franklin Brown, who was the principal at Dudley, was a black man. The entire administration at Dudley was black, and that Franklin Brown *asked* the police to come out there, because they were tearing up the school. They were busting out the windows. There was absolute rioting going on, on the campus of Dudley High School, and Mr. Brown asked the police to come out there. They asked them to leave the campus, and of course, Nelson Johnson and that crowd from over at A&T that had already been over there and got them all fired up.

And I was standing right by the policeman who fired the so-called terrible tear gas--it wasn't even tear gas, it was pepper gas, which is not nearly as powerful as tear gas. And they finally got them off the campus, rather than, you know, just tearing up the buildings. Then he goes on and he says that, you know, that black people said that they were sick of police brutality. Why didn't any of them ever report it? I told you on a previous interview if they had been one single instance of police brutality complaint filed, it would have come to me, because I handled all of that. And it never was any such charge ever made.

Now then he goes on, and I'll conclude now, he goes on and he says that all of this terrible overreaction and unfair treatment by the police was confirmed at the hearings before the commission that came down, the Civil Rights Commission. But of course, the Civil Rights Commission was almost a joke, in that they never went in except under one premise, and that was, you know, "don't confuse me with the facts, because I've already made up my mind the police were at fault." This was all over the country. Everybody laughed about it.

KH: Are you talking about Greensboro's Human Relations Commission?

DF: No, no, this is the U.S. Civil Rights Commission came down and held hearings for two days at the courthouse, the U.S. District Courthouse. Paul Calhoun was the chief of police and I had helped him prepare extensive testimony--pages of extensive testimony--that he wanted to give to refute the allegations that the police had overreacted and so forth. I sat right by Paul for two days while these hearings were going on--and at the very end of the second day, they adjourned the hearings without ever even letting Paul Calhoun testify. That was the way that they handled a fair and just hearing. They never even let the chief of police testify. Everybody else testified about what the police did, but Paul and I sat there together for two days and they never even heard his testimony.

So that's the kind of, that's the kind of prejudiced and biased opinion that of course you could always expect from the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. So sure, they criticized the police--they said that they'd overreacted and so forth. He mentions of course, the Willie Grimes shooting. Willie Grimes was killed, and I was right there the night that it happened. Willie Grimes was standing out by--

KH: You investigated that case?

DF: I investigated extensively. We never could, of course, establish who shot him. There was so many--

KH: The bullet wounds, however, were consistent with the police caliber weapon?

DF: No, they never knew what the bullet was. It was, it appeared, it hit him right--it hit him right in the back of the head. I went to the hospital. We followed him to the hospital when he left the campus. I was in the car with three police officers. We followed him over to Cone Hospital, but they were driving like mad men. And there was a curfew and they weren't supposed to be any cars on the street--so the police fell in behind them. Then we got over to Cone Hospital. I went into the examining room and he was dead--and he had one bullet hole in the back of his head. The bullet had smashed. They never could establish what kind of bullet it was. It appears to have been a double ought buck shot. One, you know a round of buck shot is big, it's about the size of a thirty-two caliber.

But anyway, they never established, there was never any positive identification of what kind of bullet it was. He says there was--there certainly was not. I investigated the case for weeks. People said that they saw a white car like the police use with the lights on it come up and stop, and that's where the shooting of Willie Grimes emanated from. There wasn't a single white police car in use. Nobody in the world uses white police cars. I interviewed, I remember when there were some kids that had said that they had seen this white police car, and that's where the shooting came from that shot Willie Grimes.

That was absurd, and in my interviews with them, they finally pretty well backed down on the fact that they could ever say that was--it was no police car. I investigated it as thoroughly as any case I've ever investigated and there was no way to establish who shot Willie Grimes. Remember, there was a battle going on down there, there was shooting, you could stand on the square in Greensboro, and a lot of people would actually go up in the buildings and listen. There was a battle royal going on out there. Nobody knows who shot him.

And I guess the last thing that I mention and then I'll shut up. They say that Captain Jackson, who had handled--they gave him credit in the early part of the book when Jesse Jackson was leading the students from A&T [North Carolina A&T State University] into town. And Jesse Jackson was absolutely right--his complaints were

valid, the police knew that, everybody knew it. But the S&W [Cafeteria] would not feed blacks--the theatres would not let them in and so forth--and they were protesting that just as they should have. And certainly the Constitution provides that right of freedom of assembly to protest. And he praises, in his book here, Bill Jackson for his efforts with Jesse Jackson. But then he says that Bill Jackson was quote, "pulled off of the investigation by those who didn't want the shooting incidents in the black power thrust"--that Jackson was pulled off the investigation because, you know, he had handled the other too peacefully, and so he was pulled off of this so that they could overreact and shoot up the kids and so forth.

That is absolutely ridiculous. I was with Bill Jackson every night that it was going on out at A&T. When the police officers got shot, Bill Jackson went out in his car alone. This one officer was really shot up, and he still, his arm is useless and so forth. Bill Jackson went out alone in his car and picked up the guy in the middle of this shooting going on all around him and took him to the hospital. When the National Guard swept the campus that morning at six a.m., Bill Jackson and I were sitting in the car together right on the edge of the campus. He was totally involved in the whole thing.

But see, he [Chafe] quotes an unnamed source as saying that Bill Jackson was pulled off of the investigation because he had handled it in too peacefully a manner in the first incident. And I've got this as an example--let me show you how he quotes Bill Jackson in here. He's talking about Bill Jackson's, Captain Jackson's rapport with Jesse Jackson and how well that was handled. "And he said"--Bill Jackson--quote, "'I didn't want no heads busted,' he observed, 'didn't want to see nobody get hurt.'" Bill Jackson is a very educated, articulate, intelligent man. Bill Jackson has never in his life said, "I didn't want to see no heads get busted." I've talked with Bill Jackson, I know he's been a personal friend for thirty-five years. And that's another typical instance of just portraying the police, you know, police bashing.

KH: Does Bill Jackson still live in Greensboro?

DF: Yes, certainly he does. He wasn't interviewed. Chief Calhoun wasn't interviewed. Franklin Brown, he lists all the people that they interviewed. None of these people were interviewed. I don't know--let me see, maybe he did say he talked to Jack, I don't know. Let me see. Anyhow, that's beside the point. The total thrust of the book, as I said, is to bash the police and the FBI. And so, that--you know, I'll be glad to answer any questions that you have, but I have nothing, you know. I'm very disappointed that any committee at UNCG would recommend that as being such a fine portrayal of what happened, without making some effort to determine whether the damn thing is true or not. It's a bald-faced lie!

All of this testimony--all of these facts about the FBI provocateur and creating this atmosphere that would enable the police to overreact--that is ridiculous. And that is

the thrust of the last half of the book. So you go ahead and ask me questions, but I think that's about all I have to say, really.

KH: Okay, yeah, well backing up to Harold Avant. Where did he come from?

DF: He came from up New York, somewhere. He came down here with Eric Brown.

KH: He was the son of a police officer.

DF: Eric is, and he served three years for breaking into a store while all this was going on. Eric Brown was the son of a police officer in New York and an avowed Black Panther, and well-known Black Panther from New York. And he brought Harold Avant down here with him, and we assumed that Avant must be a Panther. You know when you live with a Panther, and you talk like a Panther, and you look like a Panther, and you act like a Panther--I don't care whether you've got a card in your pocket or not. You know, Chafe mentions how Nelson Johnson immediately--he disavowed himself from the Panthers.

That's a bunch of garbage. They met almost every night at Nelson Johnson's apartment on York Street--and we had informants present at the meeting when all of this talk was going on about the violence, and the fact that they were going to ambush a police car and so forth. And Avant and Eric Brown were the ones that were doing all the, you know, were doing most of the talking. And, of course, Nelson Johnson was right there. And now he said, oh, he disavowed himself from all that. [laughter] Oh boy.

KH: So, when was Harold Avant hired as an informant by the FBI?

DF: He was never an informant! Ever! You haven't caught that part yet, have you?

KH: Well, I thought when you were talking earlier, when you recognized his name, you were implying that he--

DF: Well, sure, I followed him. I know him. I followed him, but he was never an informant of the FBI. The only informants that I had were local black people whom we trusted and knew, and they were excellent. And, of course, I will never identify them.

Harold Avant was never an informant. I wish that I could get the word to some of his Panther buddies that this guy says he was. I would love to see what they would do to him. I think it would be very interesting to see just what his Panther friends would say. He was never an informant. I never spoke to the man!

KH: Yeah, well, he was mentioned in media accounts when he was--

DF: Well sure! That's from the *Greensboro Daily News* I guess! That is just about as accurate as the picture of George Dorsett.

KH: Jack Betts was the reporter at the time.

DF: What did he say? Did he say something about Avant being an informant?

KH: No, but there are some files. Well, that I guess you wrote, let's see.

DF: I don't know where he got that information, but I [laughter] I would have loved to have passed that information on to some of the Panthers who would have taken care of Mr. Avant pretty quickly if they had thought he was an informant. He was never an informant. I never spoke to the man. I followed him day and night, because he and Eric Brown were the ones that were purposing all of the violence in conjunction, while they were with Nelson Johnson, at Nelson Johnson's apartment.

KH: Okay, this story describes Harold Avant, also known as Harold Nadine--

DF: Nunding.

KH: Well two names here. Nunding and Nadine.

DF: There wasn't any Nadine, he never was called Nadine, but okay.

KH: That he came to North Carolina from New Jersey along with Eric Patrick Brown, and that the FBI was quickly taking note of this young man.

DF: We sure were.

KH: And he described himself as a Black Panther Party section chief. He began training sessions, and he, according to a January memo to FBI Headquarters--

DF: That would have been me. I wrote it.

KH: Avant was setting as the group's goal to get all white merchants off East Market Street in Greensboro.

DF: Right.

KH: Agents also reported that party members in Greensboro had discussed that some sort of

disturbance be formulated in the Negro section of Greensboro--and that when a police car answered the call that rocks and bottles would be thrown at the police car.

DF: And they did.

KH: And this in turn would cause additional cars to come to the area, and when a fairly large congregation of police had been assembled then, Black Panthers would cut down on them with rifles from hidden positions. So, where did that information come from? Was Harold Avant actually saying that, that kind of stuff?

DF: Well, I don't know. No, I don't know where they got that kind of information. They said it came out of my memorandum? Sure it came out of my memoranda, I guess is what he's saying. But that came from other informants telling us what had gone on at these meetings. Avant never said anything like that. I never spoke to the man, nor Eric Brown either. I know Nelson Johnson. I talked to him many times, but I don't know those other fellows.

KH: There were several, several informants I guess, and maybe they agreed to go undercover?

DF: Oh sure. We had a bunch of them. You don't ever just have one informant--because, you know, they try to sometimes aggrandize what they're doing a little bit, so you always had one or two checking on each other. They don't know it of course, they don't know--so that you can be sure that the information they're furnishing is accurate.

KH: The Charlotte Office of the FBI was heavily involved in--

DF: Well, Charlotte covered the whole state of North Carolina. But the only--

KH: Did you report directly to Charlotte?

DF: Well, I reported through Charlotte to the Bureau. But the, Charlotte was the, the Division Office was in Charlotte, and we were a resident agency here. And I was in charge of all of the black militant investigation. And that's why I quit the FBI.

[Another voice is heard in background]

KH: Hi. This story also says, and there's other stories here.

DF: Well of course this there is almost directly quoted in his book, what you just read there.

KH: Right. Except that Harold Avant's name is not mentioned.

DF: No, he says it was that FBI provocateur, yeah.

KH: In Chafe's book, but the description of what Avant was doing fits with the description of Mr. X.

DF: What a perfect way to--oh it wasn't! Mr. X, the guy that they described in there--I can't remember exactly which one of these footnotes. Is he describing--got to be Harold Avant. Big, black, big beard, well, couldn't be anyone else.

KH: Someone from outside the area, it's clear from Chafe's description that Mr. X is not a local person.

DF: No, no he's not. He came down here with Eric Brown, that's right. They came down together as Panthers, and of course, we had, you know, the Black Panthers that--they didn't have a computer printout of who their members were--and of course, we never did establish whether he was a Black Panther or not. But, you know, he was with Eric Brown, who was well known as a Panther, and he was also espousing exactly the same doctrines that Eric Brown was, and advocating, you heard what he said, that he was saying that they, you know, called one police car, and then when the others were called, and they would, quote "cut down on the police." They had a daggum [sic] war going on out there! And the police used incredibly good judgment. There was no paranoia. He says there was a near, a near paranoia that developed primarily from the FBI provocateur's information which I had passed on to the police. So of course that's asinine! But nobody really cares. [laughter]

KH: J. Edgar Hoover took a real keen interest in the Black Panther movement.

DF: Oh absolutely. Everybody in the country did. They were, you know, they burned down Detroit, they burned half of Washington, D.C. They were burning cities all over the country. You're darn right the FBI took an interest--

KH: But he took a particular interest in Black Panther power, I'm sorry, the Black Panther, black power movement in North Carolina.

DF: Well, we started it here. I mean, you know, it all started right here with the first sit-ins and so forth, yeah, sure. Because this is where it all started, and we had more than our share, but then of course, when it got--

KH: Wait, wait. J. Edgar Hoover equated the sit-ins with what later became the black power movement?

DF: Well, it started, I mean, it was the first instance where the blacks had--

KH: Challenged the--

DF: Challenged the whole system. It started right there at Woolworth's. And I was sitting right there when that happened, too, every day that they were down there. We were trying to be assured that these young blacks' rights were not being violated and so forth. And they never were--the police never did--there was never even one single allegation that the police interfered or anything else. The FBI was the only organization that was protecting the rights of these people who were doing these things.

But when it came to violence, we sure as heck weren't going to protect that, whether it was the Klan, or the Black Panthers, or the Purple Gang! We don't care, as long as it was a legitimate activity, like Jesse Jackson coming in and protesting, and these kids sitting in. We were there to see that their rights were not violated, that they had the right to do what they were doing and we protected it.

And then, of course, when that situation, which was in '63, and that was all over--and we still had sporadic trouble from '64 and up until '68 and '69. And that's when it really broke loose out at A&T. And Martin Luther King was killed--they had the big riot the night that he was killed. I was sitting right there with the police when the word came on the radio that he had been killed--and we knew that it was going to happen then. And they all came pouring out of, you know, all over the black community, and came downtown and busted out store windows and so forth. But there was a very definite interest in what was going on in Greensboro because this is where everything started, and where it spread from Greensboro to Winston-Salem to Charlotte to Wilmington. But it all started right here in Greensboro. The sit-ins, the riots and everything all started here, and we didn't equate the kids sitting at the counter with what later went on in '68 and '69. But this was the center of the original movement of blacks and of course everybody was interested in what was going on here.

KH: This story, written in 1977 by Jack Betts of the *Daily News*, quotes documents released by the FBI. Jack Betts had had a two-year request for--

DF: Freedom of Information.

KH: Freedom of Information. You probably are aware of it because you were--

DF: There were thousands of those requests--and it took them a long time to get the information together, right.

KH: Well anyway, finally in '77 they were released. And Jack Betts quotes the documents indicating that Hoover believed that the Black Panther Movement was starting in Greensboro, and that he had asked his agents to start developing contacts, informants, in October of 1968. How did Hoover make that request, in a memo or in a meeting?

DF: Well, oh, we had, this is nothing. You make it sound like it's a big deal.

KH: Well, I was just looking at how the communication worked within the department.

[Both are talking]

DF: Well, any time--okay, back in the early sixties when they had the Klan, they were potentially violent. The FBI had the responsibilities for the security of the country. The Klan was obviously a threat to the security of the country in that they, although in this area there was not much violence, but we automatically, we didn't have to have any requests from Hoover or anybody else. As soon as we knew that the Klan had a group going in your area, you tried to find out what they're doing, and the only way to do it was develop informants in it. So then as soon as we saw that the black militants were getting, coming in here and going to cause trouble, nobody had to tell me to have informants. I started getting them immediately, and I had excellent informants.

Now we didn't have any informants during--I had made no attempt whatsoever to get any informants during the period when Jesse Jackson in '63 and all was doing the legitimate, valid protests. There was no violence, no reason for informants. I was out during the night to see what was going on and reporting it to the Bureau. But there was no reason to get informants then. There was no violence going on. But then when we saw what was happening then in '68 and '69, nobody had to tell me to get informants. I had them immediately. I got them and they were excellent.

KH: So how did Hoover communicate to his agents his desires?

DF: Well, we had, you know, [laughter] by, you know--he had FBI teletype, memoranda, letters, and so forth that came out all the time from the Bureau.

KH: But you don't ever remember meeting him personally?

DF: Oh, I met, no, he never--I met him once when I first went through agents' school, but, no, no, nobody ever, he didn't come out and visit the divisions or anything, nobody ever

saw him.

KH: Okay, this is on a different aspect of FBI work, but in the mid-seventies there were some Senate hearings, Senator Robert Morgan was involved in them, and--

DF: Yeah, he said the FBI was--

KH: I think it was around '75, I'll have to double-check that, but there was talk at that time that the FBI helped set up new Klan klaverns in North Carolina.

DF: That's, that's absurd. We hadn't, we had [laughter] hundreds of them, we didn't need to set any up. At one time I think we estimated there were two or three hundred klaverns in North Carolina. We never set up any.

Bob Morgan, I wrote Bob Morgan a letter after—see, he was the Attorney General when that decision was made to sweep the campus with the National Guard. And they had a control center at the police department where all the organizations are--I was there from the FBI. The attorney general came over from Raleigh. The adjutant general, who was in charge of the National Guard, was there, of course. The chief of police, the sheriff, military intelligence was represented, the SBI Director was over here, because we had a riot going on, you know, that went on for three or four days, and they had to do something about something about it.

So they called out the National Guard--and the decision was made about one or two o'clock in the morning then, that at six a.m., the National Guard would sweep the campus and--[door opens]. Hi honey, this is Miss Hoke. This is my wife, Jo.

JO FRIERSON: We met before didn't we?

KH: Yes, hello. It's nice to see you.

DF: The decision was made that the National Guard would sweep the campus.

[DF speaking to JF, his wife] I told Kathy we'd let the dog have the den [laughter]. Oh Honey, she's in the utility room if you want to let her out. She's been in there for, okay.

Anyway, and Bob Morgan got to be a senator and votes were very important. And then he comes out with the fact that the FBI had overreacted, and the investigation of the Klan, that he knew a lot of Klansmen. They were okay people--there was nothing wrong with the Klan, a lot of Klansmen that he knew.

And he had called the FBI one of the worst, most, I don't remember the language that he used, but it infuriated us former agents. So I wrote Bob Morgan a letter, and I said, "I don't guess you remember me, but you and I sat by, right alongside of each other the night that the decision was made to sweep the campus at A&T." And I said, "at that

time you didn't express the opinions that you seem to be expressing now about what was necessary." I said, "Those were terrible times, the violence was going on unabated, and you all decided that you had to sweep the campus."

The decision was made by the adjutant general, the attorney general, the chief of police--and you know, I was just there representing the FBI. I didn't express an opinion on that decision. But anyway, I said, "It seems that your opinion has certainly changed now with the FBI since the time that I sat by you in the control center." But anyhow, see everything--everybody now just likes to bash the police and the FBI. So I'm going--my good wife over there's been living with me for forty-five years, almost forty-six, and she said, "You know, Honey, don't let it get you upset."

But the thing that upsets me about this, this man is talking about ME. Now if you're just talking about the FBI generally, or talking about the police generally, that's one thing--but he says that I did things, that, what he's saying is that I, with Avant, created all of this false information which I then turned over to the police which caused them to overreact and abuse these demonstrators. And, you know, that makes me mad! That's a bald-faced lie! And I'd like to see Dr. Chafe. I assume that--they said he must be a doctor. I would like to see him face to face and tell him he's a liar, but I'll never get the chance, and my wife says it's going to run my blood pressure too high anyway, so.

Do you have any other questions? I'm about ready to quit.

KH: Yeah, just a few more.

DF: Okay.

JF: Where did you get your questions? Who formulated your questions?

KH: Oh, I did.

DF: I believe she did.

JF: With who's help?

KH: My own research, reading and stuff.

DF: [laughing]

JF: You did consult with Dr.--

DF: Link?

JF: Link?

DF: That's all right. Go ahead. Let's finish.

KH: No, not directly on questions, no.

JF: What else?

KH: There was a group in Greensboro called the Greensboro Association of Poor People [GAPP], Nelson Johnson--

DF: Founded by Nelson Johnson and some of his cohorts, right.

KH: Yeah, did the FBI look into them in any way?

DF: Sure, because they were meeting right with Eric Brown and Nunding and all of them were working right together. You know they had, oh they had Black Liberation Front [BLF], they had Foundation for Community Development, they had GAPP, they had Students Organization for Black Unity [SOBU], and all the same people were running it all.

Sure, we were interested in them. We were interested in any of them who might cause violence, because we had enough of it here. We had four or five riots in three years, I think it was.

KH: What about GAPP led the FBI to think that there was potential violence?

DF: The same people were running GAP that were running SOBU and BLF and everything else, the same people, Nelson Johnson and his crowd. That's why we were interested in them. Because they were the ones that were causing, you know, causing the trouble.

KH: Okay.

DF: And they all met at this, they used to meet up at this *Carolina Peacemaker* office. A lot of the meetings were held there, and they were the same group of people at every meeting, it didn't make any difference what name they called it, it was, you know, the same people running the whole show.

KH: I'm sorry to jump around in questions, but--

DF: That's all right.

KH: I'm going to go back to the Klan, what the Klan was up to in the sixties.

DF: Okay.

KH: Speaking of George Dorsett, Mr., Dr. Chafe's book mentions that Mr. Dorsett was head of the Klan in Greensboro, and--

DF: No, that isn't accurate. He was the chaplain, but that's about as accurate as Chafe usually is. Go ahead.

KH: The chaplain?

DF: He was the chaplain of the Klan.

KH: So he led prayers?

DF: Oh yes, he was a reverend, George Dorsett. He's a minister.

KH: Of a church here in Greensboro?

DF: Well, no he used to have one, but he wasn't at that time. But he was--he is a minister.

KH: What church was he a minister of?

DF: Well, he was a, what do they call those Baptists down there, that, where they just, they don't--

KH: The Independent Baptist?

DF: Independent Baptist, yes.

KH: But that church doesn't exist anymore?

DF: He still calls himself Reverend George Dorsett. And he was also the chaplain of the United Klans of America, the whole nationwide organization--

[to JF] Did she open it up?

DF: Go ahead.

KH: That's a cute cat! Anyway, I'm sorry, what were you saying?

DF: Well, you were saying that about Dorsett and Chafe said something about me and Dorsett, and that--

KH: Oh no, not about you and Dorsett, because you're not mentioned in the book at all.

DF: Well, but I'm the man that handled him, so I'm the one--

KH: But there was something in there about, there was some description of George Dorsett's role in the harassment of Frank Williams, the cross burning in 1967 at Frank Williams's house, and--

DF: Yeah, they were all out there.

KH: Why is it that the Klan, this man, George Dorsett being an FBI Informant, how could he go on to lead this harassment against Frank Williams?

DF: How would we know what was going on out there if he wasn't there? You see, well, there's no use to try to explain it. People who have never worked an informant--I'm sure Mr. Bush right now wished to God Mr. Noriega had not been his informant, because you wait until he gets through talking about what happened between Bush and Noriega. When you're working a top level informant, George Dorsett was the Chaplain, the Kludd, they called him, K-l-u-d-d, of the national United Klans of America. He was getting the information about the top level operation of the Klan. Now do you think he could have done that by sitting at home and reading it in the newspaper? He had to be out there, where it was going on. He had to talk like them, he had to act like them, he had to give fiery speeches. And as they said in there, he was a fireball when he got started. But how would he have ever gotten to be a top level informant if he had sat around and not done anything. Nobody here would have known nothing. He wouldn't have been worth anything. He said he talks about how much money I paid him. I didn't pay any--

KH: He implied that he was making as much as an agent.

DF: Oh that's a bunch of garbage! It never was anything like that!
[to JF] Honey, that darn kitten's out.

JF: Well, I can't catch him.

DF: Well--anyhow, he is still a good friend. I saw George just a few months ago. He's still a

good friend and I will always consider him a good friend. He did a job to help the FBI and to help this country like nobody else around. And, of course, this guy portrays him as a, trying to create violence and so forth. George could, he was one heck of a speaker and he could really fire up a crowd. And that's how he got to be the head of the, you know, of the United Klans of America, because he could portray himself as one of them. And he would tell me everything that was going on. So, sure, he'd made some fiery speeches, there's no question about it. But if he hadn't, he would have been worthless. He would have been sitting around just as, I had some informants who obviously were just low-level. But he was top-level.

KH: He was chaplain of the United Klans of America?

DF: Right, out of Montgomery, Alabama. He was--

KH: And he was the local--

DF: He was the local state kludd, chaplain for the state of North Carolina.

KH: And what was his role in the Greensboro Klan?

DF: It wasn't the Greensboro Klan, young lady, there were twelve units, I think, and there were twelve of them right here in Greensboro, you're talking about a, you know, he was a sort of the spiritual leader [laughter] for all twelve Klans. He was the, you know, he was so much above these units here, he--

[End Tape 2, Side A—Begin Tape 2, Side B]

DF: --top level informant by living right at the foot of the cross, you got to be an informant who's worth anything by being a darn good actor, and getting in with these people and letting them think that you're right in with them a hundred percent. And then you turn right around and give the information to your contacts.

KH: Did the FBI try to put any brakes on the Klan, I mean, how can you put--

DF: I was at a public gathering in Greensboro. The assistant director of the FBI pointed to me and said, "Darg Frierson did more to break up the Klan in the United States than any other single person." Sure we broke it up. We broke the thing up by getting dissention and getting the groups fighting one another and so forth. So, you know, now, my God, I think they figure the FBI must have helped the Klan. You say we organized units. We had [laughter] so doggone many units that we didn't need to organize any, believe me!

This is typical. Nobody understands it, and so there's no use to talk about it. Have you got any other questions?

KH: Just one more.

DF: All right.

KH: And this is on the Black Panthers again. There's a story that ran in the *Daily News* ten years ago, about, I guess it was Jack Betts who wrote it.

DF: I didn't know Jack. I thought I knew all those biased reporters, but I didn't know Jack.

KH: Right, he was in the Raleigh bureau, maybe you never got a chance to meet him.

DF: Oh yeah, that's right, he was in Raleigh, I remember, right.

KH: But there was a--there was information from those Bureau files that he requested that the, about how closely the Black Panthers were watched. And included in there was something about how the FBI had its agents write bogus letters to black people in Winston-Salem, to discredit a Black Panther fundraiser for children.

DF: Yeah, that happened.

KH: Why did that happen? What was the goal?

DF: Well, I'm not going to go into the details of that--I never did it. But some of the agents did that. They thought that was a good way to break it up, by causing dissention, by writing letters to wives and telling them that their husbands were out with other women and stuff. I never did anything like that. So, I don't know anything about that. That was all in that stuff that they got from the Bureau, you know, under the Freedom of Information Act. But some of the--

KH: There's a lot of that stuff that was etched out in black.

DF: Oh yeah, well sure, well anything that had to do with informants, there was supposed to have been, you know, excised from the memorandum--but I don't know. They got all about George, how much I paid him, how long he worked for me, everything, they got this, even his code names and everything, and put it all in the paper. I got a picture, you know, I don't guess you, I don't know where that book is now, but we had a scrapbook for a while with a picture of me and George right on the front page of the paper. And as I

said, of course, the *Greensboro Daily News* didn't care whether that jeopardized George's life or not.

All they wanted to do was be sensational, and you know, cause a few more pigs to be sold. George called me that morning and he said, "Darg, I can't believe this." He said, "Have you seen the paper?"

And I said, "I sure have, George."

And he said, "You know, you promised me I would never, that my identity would never be disclosed."

I said, "That's right. That's what I promised, because that's what I was told, and I'm sorry."

But thank goodness, by that time, the Klan had ebbed. You know, it goes in cycles. I see now where the Grand Dragon from Connecticut is moving to North Carolina. That's good, that's interesting. [laughter]

The--so, George's life would have definitely been in jeopardy. I had one of my informants one time, that the Klan suspected him, took him out to a tobacco barn, put a rope around his neck and threw it over a rafter, and threatened to hang him, trying to get him to admit he was an FBI informant. And he denied it and got away with it. But you know, you weren't, you were dealing with some pretty--characters prone to do almost anything, and for the *Daily News* to publish all that about him, and everything that he did, and of course in a most biased and--

KH: What year was that?

DF: You know, totally biased against him and me and everything that we did. It would have jeopardized his life five years earlier, but thank goodness the Klan had pretty well faded out by then.

KH: Do you remember what year that was that that photo was published?

DF: Yeah. It was in 1977. If you will turn that machine off a minute, I think I've got it in here somewhere. And the *Daily News* was the only news media in the country that ever did--
[moving around to secure photo]

KH: Your cat is really cute.

JF: That's my daughter's kitty, and she lives in my daughter's room back there.

KH: Oh, I see it scampering.

JF: And I can't catch her, I can't catch her. When she gets out she just loves it! And our dog

is back there, so we try to keep the two of them separated. [laughing]

KH: I bet their being so young, they would like each other. The dog might be a little rough on the kitten.

JF: Yeah, she is, she's so of big! She's a big--

KH: Right.

DF: I can't find it. You know that scrapbook, I think we threw it away, but it was, I was on the [Greensboro] City Council at the time, and I was on the council--

KH: Did that hurt you politically?

DF: What?

KH: Did that hurt you politically?

DF: Oh no, no. I hurt myself because I was far too outspoken. I didn't last but one term because I told it like it was. And nobody likes to hear it told like it was. I was elected city council in '77. So this would have been, I guess, early in '78 or in sometime in 1978--and you had no trouble finding it. It was right on the front page of the *Greensboro Daily News*, mine and George's pictures together.

KH: Okay, there's nothing else I care to ask, but maybe there might be something you'd like to say that you haven't said.

DF: Well, I would still wish that somehow or other the truth were known about this book. But I don't guess it makes any difference. Nobody--I talked to the sheriff, who is Walter Burch--

KH: Sticky Burch?

DF: Sticky Burch, and he was a police officer at this time, and he and I worked very closely together for years, one of my best friends. And I was at a gathering of retired police officers with him the other day, and I told him about this book and how incensed I had gotten about it. And he just laughed. He said, "Dargan, oh forget it, man." He said, "We get that stuff all the time." He said, "We just ignore it, because you go out there, and you know, you put your life on the line." Now the FBI doesn't--you know my life wasn't that dangerous. But, these police officers are out there every night, putting their life on

the line--and have you ever seen a book praising the police? I never have. I never read one yet. I don't think I've ever read an article in the newspaper that said the police did a terrific job. They always try to find something that they did wrong.

And so I said, "Sticky, I'd like to try to straighten this thing out, somehow."

He said, "Darg, forget it. You'll never get it straight." And he's right. As long as it bashes the police and the FBI, why everybody's going to enjoy it. So, that's all I have to say.

JF: Darg, I think the frightening part to me, not frightening, but I think the bad part is that this book has been recommended for every department at the university.

DF: Yeah. As a most accurate and truthful--

JF: Now I think it's perfectly all right for them to recommend that book, if they recommend something on the other side, written by somebody else. And it's all right to read that. I don't--

DF: If you want to read fiction, it's all right.

JF: It's perfectly all right to read that, but they ought to have something to balance it.

DF: Well, Tony Fragola said that he was going to have, at the next meeting of this committee that chooses the book for next year, for 1990, he will have me come and say what is untrue in this book. But, I don't know, it--that won't happen. It will be just like Dr. Link saying he was going to have me come down and talk with him. They don't care. Everybody just, they just accept this sort of stuff.

JF: Well, one thing, it's ancient history.

DF: Well, that's true.

JF: And most of the young people in the university today weren't around then--

DF: They don't know what they're talking about.

JF: --so it's ancient history.

DF: Well, what I think is so unfair about all this is that somebody twenty years later will take a totally inadequate summary of what happened from these FBI reports by this unknown agent, and then just set them out as, you know, reach the conclusions that he did, based

on--

JF: --to extrapolate from that into something that isn't true.

DF: To have reached the conclusions that he did on these memos that I remember writing myself--[laughter] it's just unbelievable. How he ever got the idea that Harold Avant was an informant is just beyond me.

But, I, in the first place, I would never have used Harold Avant as an informant because he was such a big mouth liar, you know. I mean he was advocating violence all the time! Nobody didn't want him as an informant. So it's just ridiculous. Of course, that could come from writing about stuff you don't know what you're talking about. And a lot of people get a lot of money writing about things they don't know what they're talking about! [laughter]

I really don't have anything else to say, Kathy. I've said enough. I told Dr. Link that I certainly didn't intend in any way to denigrate your interview, that you had done a great job, and that I certainly appreciate the fact that the Oral History Department is trying to get some of the facts of the other side. But, I, you know, it, what is so interesting, I, turn that thing off a second. Let's look in the back here and see who he did say he interviewed. I know he didn't interview Chief Calhoun.

KH: Just one thing for the record, what is your first name, Ma'am?

JF: Jo.

KH: Jo. Okay. You're Mr. Frierson's wife, right?

DF: Right. Forty-six years! Let's see, he did not interview Bill Jackson. [Pages through book]

KH: We'll stop here.

DF: Okay.

[End of Interview II]