

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

INTERVIEWEE: Dargan Frierson

INTERVIEWER: Kathy Hoke

DATE: November 10, 1989

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

KATHY HOKE: This is Kathy Hoke. It's November 10, 1989, and I'm here today with Mr. Dargan Frierson in his home in Greensboro. Maybe we can start out, you can just talk to me a little bit about your background, where you were born.

DARGAN FRIERSON: Well, I'm a native South Carolinian. I went to the University of South Carolina, graduated in '42 and then I went in the Air Corps until '46, then I went back to finish law school at the University of South Carolina. But I didn't practice law, I went right into the FBI in 1947.

KH: What prompted your interest to go in--

DF: Well, I had always been interested in the FBI. I have, don't have a lot in respect for or admiration of the legal profession. So I never have changed that feeling. And I just really went to law school primarily to be more properly trained, hopefully to get in the FBI, so I went right into the FBI in 1947, got my training in Washington and then went to Cleveland in my first office, '47 to '48--and then '49 to '51 I was in Detroit. And then I was fortunate enough to get transferred back to Greensboro--and was fortunate also to remain stationed in Greensboro from 1951 until 1971 when I retired from the Bureau.

KH: So you were here twenty years.

DF: Right, twenty years here in Greensboro, twenty-four years in the FBI.

KH: Can you tell me about your initial assignments?

DF: Well, when I first came here, of course, I just did the general assignments that any FBI agent would be assigned to, routine criminal stuff and then ordinary checks, applicant

investigation for people being considered for government jobs, that sort of thing. And bank robberies, those types of criminal investigations. Then in 1958, the Ku Klux Klan became very active in this area. And I was assigned the Klan to try to follow and keep up with their activities. And the Ku Klux Klan, of course, I think has been maligned justifiably in many cases and unfairly in other cases. The Ku Klux Klan was never an illegal organization. Anybody who wanted to had the right to belong in the Ku Klux Klan--and the FBI's interest in it, of course, was to prohibit violence that occurred by some Klansmen.

At some times, the Klan in North Carolina was tremendously popular. I don't remember how many thousand members they had in North Carolina at one time--but it was tremendously popular during the Lyndon Johnson administration, because they broadened their scope of their hatred from just the usual things of their ranting about the blacks and integration and stuff and started including Lyndon Johnson and blaming him for it. And I have attended many Klan rallies where there might be several thousand people present in a cow pasture somewhere. They might have a flatbed truck and a P[ublic] A[ddress] system and the Grand Dragon--who was Bob Jones, who was from down at Salisbury--would speak among other Klan leaders. And they broadened their theme from opposing integration so much as blaming Lyndon Johnson and the government in Washington for all of their troubles.

KH: The civil rights legislation?

DF: Yeah, all the civil rights. And you see that struck a very respondent chord in a lot of people who were not in the least bit interested in violence, but were just fed up with Lyndon Johnson and what was going on as far as they felt it here in the south. And so the Klan got extremely popular and I devoted all my time for years in developing informants who would keep us apprised of what the Klan was doing and what they were planning to do. And the Klan would always go in cycles. And about 1965, '67, '68, somewhere along in there, the Klan became much less active and the black militants invaded our area here. And at [North Carolina] A&T State University, I had many, many wonderful friends among the faculty and administration at A&T and of course also at Bennett, but Bennett was much smaller.

But there were an influx of Black Panthers from New York who came to A&T, and, you know, we had to then find out what they were up to. And found that they were certainly espousing violence. You know, the whole Black Panther movement at that time in the late sixties was "Out with the Pigs!" and "Kill the Police!" and that sort of stuff. They totally advocated anarchy. They had a film that they had made--that Huey Newton and that crowd out in California had made--and the title of the film was *Off the Pig*:

How a Young Bitch Could Kill a Policeman. So we had our own Black Panthers group here, and so my assignment then became, I turned over all the activity that I had as

far as the Klan was concerned, and became almost, well, was totally involved in trying to develop sources in the black militant movement to keep us apprised of what was going on here.

KH: Just for the sake of clarity, let's stick with one subject at a time and we'll go back, if it's okay with you. Can you go back to the Klan?

DF: Well actually, I was just starting to say--that's certainly right--my activity with the Klan then would have been from '58 to about '66, '67, '68, somewhere in there, I can't remember the exact time. And then I got totally divorced from my activities in the Klan and worked entirely on black militants, so that would be a dividing point.

KH: About the time that Martin Luther King was assassinated and then the Dudley [High School] riots.

DF: Well, see when was Martin Luther King assassinated?

KH: April of 1968.

DF: Well, I was working on the black militants at that time. I had gotten away from the Klan by then. So it must have been '65 or '66 that I quit working with the Klan.

KH: Ok, well, back to the Klan, your work on the Klan, you say you attended some of the rallies.

DF: Bushels of them.

KH: Were you attending as an undercover agent?

DF: They all knew who I was.

KH: They all knew you by then?

DF: They all knew who I was.

KH: But in a crowd--

DF: They didn't care, there were all kind of police there in uniform, they didn't care, they didn't mind who was at the public gathering. But when we had to have the informants of course was at the private meetings to know what their plans were. But at the public event,

I knew them all. J.R. Jones, Bob Jones, the Grand Dragon, he knew me by my first name. I knew them all. I talked with them many times and they all knew me and I knew them. The national head--the U.S. Klan is by far the largest Klan organization ever, during my career, and their headquarters are down in Alabama. And, I can't remember the man who was the Imperial Wizard. I knew him personally, but I can't think of his name now. He used to come up here--they had such an active Klan organization here in North Carolina. And I'd go out to see Bob Jones and I'd talk to this guy too. I knew them all--you know. Apparently, I had some knack for talking with people.

KH: You think they were candid with you?

DF: Well, sometimes.

KH: What did they talk about?

DF: They'd be very candid about anything of course that had to do with nonviolence. They would not be very candid if it planned burning crosses in somebody's yard or something like that. But they would certainly be very candid when it came to talking about their legitimate goals, you know, deterring, as much as possible, integration and their contempt for Lyndon Johnson and the administration and the Civil Rights Act and that kind of stuff.

KH: So 1958 was when you pretty much started focusing on the Klan?

DF: You see, that was a different Klan then, which was the North Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. A guy by the name of Catfish Cole started it again in North Carolina about '58 and that's when I got started.

KH: Now where was Catfish Cole from?

DF: He was originally from down near New Bern, down in the eastern part of the state, and I knew Catfish Cole too. He was a spellbinder on the back of a flatbed truck. He was a real spellbinder. His group was growing pretty fast and in the late fifties and very early sixties. And then they had, they made their very unwise mistake of going to Maxton, North Carolina, and taking on the Indians and the Indians down there--

KH: Maxton is near Lumberton?

DF: Yeah, Maxton is near Lumberton. And they had a big rally down there planned and the Indians all came with shotguns and shot the place up and that sort of broke up the

enthusiasm for Catfish Cole's organization. Nobody was ever charged or indicted or anything, but they shot up this rally pretty good. I had an informant who told me that he jumped under a truck and he didn't think he was getting paid enough to go to a meeting like that. But, anyway, the Indians broke up that group pretty much. And then the U.S. Klans became very, very active. So the old original group that I started with in '58 sort of petered out, the North Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Catfish Cole.

KH: Did that group, the Catfish Cole group, Klan group, draw many folks from Greensboro?

DF: Yeah, yeah it did. They had quite a few folks from here. There was a fellow named George Dorsett who was a, he was a minister, a Baptist minister, he claimed. He became their chaplain, their Knightly, known as the statewide chaplain, they called him the Kludd. All of their officers started with a 'K': there was the Kleagle and the Kludds and the Kladgrast--he was the Kludd, k-l-u-d-d, who was the state chaplain of the Ku Klux Klan. That was the North Carolina Klan. Then, like I said, it sort of pooped out. And then there were the people who were interested, members of that gravitated to the U.S. Klan, and I can't give you dates on any of this stuff.

KH: After Maxton?

DF: After the Maxton thing, which must have been about '59 or maybe early '60, that group sort of lost interest because of that shootout down there. So there went the enthusiasm for that organization. But then the U.S. Klan was much better organized. Shelton, Bob Shelton, was the Imperial Wizard of the U.S. Klan, and he was from Alabama. He came up here and he got J.R. Jones from Salisbury. And then he and the Grand Dragon, the head man of the U.S. Klan in North Carolina, and George Dorsett that I was telling you about, he became the Imperial Chaplain and that was a nationwide chaplain. See, Shelton was the nationwide head of it, the Imperial Wizard, and then George Dorsett was the Imperial Kludd, the chaplain.

And then there was another guy from North Carolina, a guy named Bob Hudgins, who was an Imperial officer; he was an Imperial Flygraff, I think, or something like that. But North Carolina became "Klansville U.S.A." They all, Bob Shelton, all of them admitted it--that North Carolina, because primarily of the charisma of this guy Bob, Bob Jones. They'd have a rally and have five thousand people out in a pasture--now you want to know about a crowd, now they had tremendous rallies.

KH: What years are you talking about?

DF: We're talking about '60--let's see, I can remember the car I was driving probably better--'65, maybe '63, '65, somewhere in there, I would say was when they were most active.

KH: And where were these rallies?

DF: Oh, all over the state of North Carolina. They didn't go into the western part of the state. I don't think they ever had any as far west as Asheville. They had them certainly out in Hickory and that area, Lenoir, I believe, I know they had them as far west as Hickory. There was an extremely active group in Winston-Salem. Greensboro, of course, was extremely active. Raleigh and then on down east they had, I don't know, a couple of hundred klaverns at least, and then--a klavern of course would be a unit. And they must have had at least a couple hundred klaverns. They were busy.

KH: Tell me about the Greensboro klavern. What were they up to in these years?

DF: They must have had five or six in Greensboro, at least five or six, they had so many members. There were, you know, they met in various locations and I can't go into much details because I think it might disclose who my sources were. But I had excellent coverage of what was going on, not only in Greensboro but, my job was to go all over this eastern--from Greensboro east and develop informants who would tell us what was going on. As my good wife can tell you, I was gone an awful lot, day and night, trying to keep up with what these people were doing.

KH: And what did your informants tell you about what the five or six klaverns were--

DF: Ninety-nine percent of it was just mouthing. Ninety-nine percent of their meetings were just mouthing, talking big, and, you know--

KH: Talking about the--

DF: --complaining about integration--

KH: Talking about the *Brown* [v. *Board of Education*] decision, and the integration. They were fighting integration at the time.

DF: They never, I don't think, ever heard of *Brown v. Kansas* [*Board of Education*], but they just knew what was happening and I certainly must say that I think that we, in the south, and particularly in Greensboro, didn't want integration but accepted it with less trouble than anywhere else in the country. We had a few crosses burned on some peoples' lawns and that sort of stuff and some rowdy Klansmen did shoot into some houses where some black people's children were going to school. But, you know, they never have integrated Massachusetts yet. They never have integrated

any of those other places. We were up at Cape Cod at my son's wedding just a few months ago. They didn't have any integration. We did what the court said, and we get penalized for it. There were only thirteen states, you know, that were ever really involved under the *Brown v. Kansas*. And those are the thirteen states of the Confederacy, which happens to be just a coincidence.

But nobody ever integrated Los Angeles, nobody ever integrated New York, they never tried. Detroit--they're still going to their neighborhood schools. But we in the south accepted it and did it and nobody gave us--much a, much appreciation for the way we handled it, I don't think. But anyhow, I'm going to [mumbles]--but that's what happened. When the court said that you had to integrate, we integrated. And a lot of the Klansmen would go out and picket some in front of the schools at first and then everybody just accepted it and it's going on, but not in other parts of the country. So, the Klan, as I said, I had informants at all of these meetings and 99 percent of the talk was just talk. They would talk about how they are going to fight for, you know, white womanhood and all that sort of stuff and nothing ever came of it much. Every now and then--

KH: When they talked about fighting for white womanhood, can you elaborate on that? What were they saying?

DF: Well, they just said that they didn't want, you know, they were very bitterly opposed to intermarriage, interracialism, that sort of stuff. The thing that I think has been so unfairly categorized as far as the Klan is concerned, and I knew these people personally for years. They used to talk about the disloyalty of the Klan. Now those guys, most of them were poorly educated. They were prejudiced, they were any adjective you wanted to use, but when it came to loyalty to this country, they thought they were doing the right thing. The Ku Klux Klan leaders were misguided but still sincerely felt that this whole movement of the civil rights thing and the black integration at the white school and so forth was all Communist sponsored, Communist controlled, and they felt they were fighting Communism. I don't care what all your sociologists and what all your philosophers and psychologists want to tell you. I'm telling you, I knew these people, I talked to them every day for years, they thought that they were fighting Communism in their own stupid way. And they were ignorant, they didn't know what they were doing, but that's what they thought. You talk about loyalty--these guys were all former GIs, they'd all been in World War II--not all of them, but 90 percent of them. You know, talk about disloyal, that's absurd. They were misguided, ignorant people is what they were, and they did things that, of course, that were absolutely deplorable.

They had an incident down in New Bern where they put a bomb outside of a black church where the NAACP was meeting. They weren't meeting at the time, nobody was hurt--but they put a bomb out there, you know, to intimidate them and so forth. And I

arrested, myself, I arrested the Grand--what do you call them--the head of the New Bern klavern, I can't remember his name, he identified and I asked him and I have nothing but contempt for the man for doing things like that. But for all the talk, and I'm not trying to be an advocate of the Klan, but I'm just saying, these people, when you question their loyalty to this country, that's absurd. They never intended anarchy, they never intended over throwing anything. They just wanted to try to straighten it out and protect what they thought was the rights of the white people--who were misguided, of course-- but the rights of the people against Communist domination of the civil rights movement. And I know these guys, I talked with them hours on end, and I know that's what they were thinking. So it was misguided, it was stupid, but don't say that the guys were disloyal. They just didn't understand, that's all it was.

And I have no--I don't want to say it, indicate it in anyway that I condone in any way their violence--but they certainly had the right to stand up in a cow pasture and say what they thought. And they called a bunch of them before the House Un-American Activities Committee up there and they took the Fifth Amendment and they put several of them in jail. J.R. Jones, the Grand Dragon here, served time for not telling them about his activities.

I noticed that we've had a lot of other people who've taken the Fifth Amendment recently, like the head of HUD [Dept. of Housing and Urban Development], and nobody seems to be talking about putting him under the--in jail. I get angry, I guess it's my southern background, but I get angry when I see how everybody is so glad to kick the Klan. And I'm not supporting them, but I'm saying that there are other people that did just the same sort of stuff and the horrible violence and nobody's seems to have done anything about that. So, I'm through preaching now.

KH: Just getting back to some of the basic things that the Klan, [vacuum cleaner in background] Klan members were doing back in the sixties. Can you hear? Let's talk about some of the things that the local klaverns were doing in Greensboro in the early sixties.

DF: Well, I would say mostly talking.

KH: Mostly talking.

DF: They would have meetings where they would rant and rave, opposing integration. They would have some cross burnings, a lot of them. They would go around and like I remember the superintendent of schools here, they burned a cross on his lawn.

KH: That's the--let's see--the superintendent's name is--

DF: I can't remember his name. He lived over on Cypress Street. Is it Phillips? Weaver? No--

KH: It wasn't Weaver.

DF: It was before Weaver. But anyway, they burned a cross on his lawn, maybe a couple of them--he lived over on Cypress Street near Aycock School. I know I went over--

KH: Let's see. I hate to forget his name, but I have forgotten it. He was the superintendent at the time of the *Brown* decision?

DF: He was the superintendent at the time integration occurred. It was during *Brown v. Kansas* in 1954, but it took about four years before they ever got around to integrating--nobody integrated for several years after that. North Carolina had the Pearsall Plan, which was a freedom of choice thing that was ruled unconstitutional.

So, it was about 1958, I think, when they finally started integrating the schools. One of the first ones was Gillespie Park School, down off of, what that street down there, Asheboro Street, is I guess. Anyhow, that was one of the first ones, and they had this George Dorsett and Clyde Webster and a few other Klansmen were out there with picket signs, they didn't get arrested, they didn't cause any trouble, but they were out there picketing. And then, you know, they burned crosses, I don't remember a single instance of real violence that occurred in the Greensboro area. Now, out in the county, we had some instances which were absolutely intolerable and unacceptable and inexcusable. We had some black parents' children who started to school out there, the white school, and somebody shot into their house.

KH: And what year was this again?

DF: I don't know, it must have been in the sixties, early sixties I guess. And the case was assigned to me and I know, I knew who the Klansmen were who had done it. We had some rowdies who came up here from, one of them was from Alabama, they used to call one of the guys Alabama, I don't remember the names right now, but we knew who they were.

KH: The informants let you know after it happened?

DF: Yeah, that's right. And but we never could prove it and they finally moved out of town. As I said, the Klan saw, they saw that we were going to integrate and it was foolish to try to stop it. I guess this is how they were thinking and the people just lost interest in it. And by '66 and '67 or so, I know I was off the Klan by then because I know the Black Panthers had come. So from the period of '58 to about '65, '66, '67, somewhere during that period,

the Klan was extremely active in North Carolina, had just several thousand of them. You go through Harnett County down here, down near Lillington, when you entered the county, they used to have a big roadside sign, "You're in Klan Country". They were everywhere, everywhere.

KH: I want to make sure I didn't misunderstand something you said fairly early on--that I believe you said the Klan was very popular in this area?

DF: Extremely.

KH: During the Johnson administration--

DF: --extremely--

KH: --roughly between '65 and '68. But then I believe, later on you said that it declined?

DF: Well, it began to, sort of, you know--

KH: --at that time--

DF: --at that time, you see, the Klan has always gone in cycles. I don't know whether you happened to see on the television the other night this movie, *Cross of Fire*. Back in the twenties, mid-twenties, in Indiana, they had six million Klansmen in the Klan in Indiana in 1925. You know, it goes in cycles. Some guy who is charismatic and smart and wants to make some money will get it started again and it will get real popular again and it will, I don't think it will, I think it probably had its last peak.

Now we had, of course, in '79 here the Klan shootout with the Communist group here. I was told, I'd been out of the FBI for eight years when that happened so I didn't know anything about that. But there were, you know there's still always a bunch of intolerant people who are going to get together and talk about it, I guess. The Klan, the popularity with the Klan certainly began to wane about '65 or '66 or so, whenever I got--I was still working on it when Martin Luther, I mean, I had quit working on the Klan completely when Martin Luther King was shot, so it must have been about '66 that they pulled me off of it and put me on the black militants because they were such a threat. And so by that time the Klan was nowhere near the popular organization. I remember for instance that the Durham klavern used to claim that they had four hundred members--but by this time, I'm sure if they had thirty or forty at a meeting it would have been very unusual. You can't put your finger on that stuff--nobody has any exact record of any of it. It's what we were told and we had every reason to believe, certainly, that the information was accurate.

KH: As an FBI agent, and in your research as an FBI agent, and through your contacts, your informants, what did you learn about money coming into the Klan?

DF: That's what broke it up. As soon as it started getting financially successful, well then everybody gets greedy and that's really what usually breaks them up. You know the Grand Dragon at first, old Bob Jones, they gave him, the members contributed, gave him a brand new Chrysler automobile and all that--and his popularity, he was so popular, it was at its peak. But then a lot of money started coming in. You remember these rallies where there were four or five thousand people, they would take in an awful lot of money. Now I never was privy to know exactly how much, but they used to pass these buckets around, you didn't see many, much change in there, it was paper money, so they would collect a heck of a lot of money. They would have a rally every night, yeah, and during certain summer months they would have a rally every night somewhere in the state of North Carolina.

And so they were making an awful lot of money, and then greed would kind of rear its head, and pretty soon, you know its one group or one guy would start talking about another guy, he's getting more money than he was. I think the thing that was really very responsible for its breaking up was the fact that money became, there was so much money involved, that everybody wanted their share of it. The Grand Dragon, they thought, was getting too much. I think that's essentially what happened.

KH: You described the Klan members as basically ignorant--

DF: --intolerant people, right.

KH: --intolerant white men.

DF: Not all ignorant. You know, this guy, this guy Duke down in Louisiana just got elected to the legislature down there. That boy's smart, but I tell you, J.R. Jones was not an educated man, but he could give one heck of a speech on the back of a flatbed truck.
[laughs]

KH: What about members from Greensboro, were there any prominent members?

DF: No, no, I don't think that--no, in all of my action in the Klan and knowledge of it, I don't remember anybody that you would say here was "prominent," who was involved in it. There were a lot of people who were very supportive, who would be as surprising if people knew that some of the, more affluent people in Greensboro had been financially supportive of it.

KH: Could you describe that in some detail?

DF: No, I don't think I better identify any of those people.

KH: Just in some general terms without any names?

DF: Well, some of them were quite successful businessmen and so forth. But they never--

KH: What were their motives?

DF: Well, I think they probably felt just like the Klan about Lyndon Johnson and integration and that kind of stuff. A lot of people thought, "Well, I can't get in it personally, but I'll help them a little."

KH: How? By giving money?

DF: Financially. Right. I never knew, I can't say if I ever knew anybody that you'd consider "prominent" or well-known in Greensboro who was ever actively affiliated within the Klan.

KH: In terms of attending the rallies--

DF: There were a few people--

KH: --and doing acts of violence.

DF: There were a few people who put some money in the pot and were very supportive at times.

KH: And so the people who were behind the scenes and their role mainly was giving money. And their basic reason for doing that was they wanted to fight integration in the schools?

DF: I never talked to any of these people.

KH: What did you learn through the grapevine?

DF: Well, I mean just that they obviously must have been sympathetic to what the Klan was saying or they wouldn't have contributed money to it.

KH: How many prominent people?

DF: Well, I wouldn't want to hazard a guess about that.

KH: Well, you have a guess.

DF: No, I don't know. I wouldn't say that. I couldn't say that. I don't want to go on record, because I have no positive proof of any of that. It's just that's what my informants told me that they had people who were very supportive and they never identified some of them, some of them they did, but I'm not going to go into that.

KH: Okay, well, backing up a little bit, was it Superintendent Benjamin Smith who's--

DF: --Ben Smith--

KH: --Ben Smith who had the cross burning?

DF: I believe it was. Ben Smith. He lived on Sycamore, I mean out on Cypress Street--he was the one that, yeah, Ben Smith, that's right. And then Weaver took over I believe after him.

KH: Smith, I believe, resigned.

DF: I think he did. There was a lot of pressure and a lot of stress, particularly burning crosses on your front, on your lawn.

KH: What were you hearing from your informants about the Klan's attitudes toward Superintendent Smith?

DF: They never intended to hurt him--they were just trying to intimidate him. They were just trying to, you know--

KH: As you probably know--I'm sorry.

DF: No, no; that's all right.

KH: --that Superintendent Smith was a leading supporter in official Greensboro of integrating the schools.

DF: Yeah, sure. You see, well, everybody had to, the court said they had to. And so he, that's

what I say, in the south, we accepted it, we knew we had to, and we did it. Smith, I don't know what Mr. Smith's feelings were originally, but I don't remember that he was particularly anxious to do the integration and all before *Brown v. Kansas*. But, sure, he was very, he was very, and that's why they burned the crosses, because he was supportive of it and no one said "We got to do it, so let's do it peacefully and get on our way," and that's why they--

I'm sure that nobody ever intended to hurt Ben Smith. They were just trying to intimidate him and show how they were protesting it and that sort of stuff. But nobody, I never heard from any of my informants, contacts, and enumerable hundreds of contacts and reports and I mean hundreds and hundreds, that any of them ever planned to do harm personally to anybody in Greensboro, ever. But you know, they were intimidating and were burning crosses and, but I don't remember any instance that they ever planned to physically hurt anybody.

Now something might have slipped my mind, but you know back, there was an old Klan movement, a long time ago, back in the fifties down in eastern North Carolina where they did. They thought they were the moralist of the community and if a man who was being unfaithful to his wife they would take him out and beat him up and that sort of thing. Well, this was back in the fifties, this had nothing to do with the civil rights Klan, this was the Klan who were the protectors of womanhood and that sort of stuff. We arrested a bunch of those guys, I arrested, I don't know, but the FBI just busted up that movement. They're from down around Whiteville and that area, below Fayetteville.

Now that crowd would take somebody, take them out, and beat them up. But they would do that for infidelity to, for, they felt they were such just Christians and so forth. There was one incident, I want to back up, there was one instance I believe that an Elon College student was beaten by some Klansmen over there at Elon College. But I don't remember what the details about it were, but I remember that this guy, I don't think I ever talked to the guy, but there was one instance where somebody certainly alleged that the Klan had taken this guy allegedly that he'd been taken out by some Klansmen and beaten up. But now, I don't remember, I mean, it must not have been any major thing. Maybe I was just so busy with everything else that I didn't even go into that, I just don't remember any details but I think there was one instance where guy claimed that the Klan had taken him out and beaten him up in the woods about something, it had nothing to do with integration, I can tell you that.

But it was--I don't know what it was. It really was not a part of this fight against integration and *Brown v. Kansas*. But I do remember that some guy down there did claim to be beaten up but I don't think that I did a heck of a lot of work on that, because in the first place, apparently it didn't carry much weight. I don't remember the details of it, but it was not a particularly significant incident. That's the only one I remember in all the years I worked on that.

KH: Now, when you were first assigned to work on--to focus your attention on the Klan, what were your higher-ups saying? Did you report directly to''

DF: Some of my reports went straight to the White House, that's right.

KH: But who put you initially on the Klan assignment?

DF: Well, you know, the Department of Justice got very active, very interested in it, when they saw it was getting difficult in the late fifties, '58 and so forth. And the FBI, the Bureau in Washington, wanted to know what the heck they were up to, and so that's how we went in there. We did not have any jurisdiction.

If we saw a Klansman beat up somebody right in our presence, actually, we didn't have any jurisdiction. That was a local matter, an assault like that. Now if we could see some overall effort on the part of the Klan to intimidate a group who was planning it, there might have been some civil rights violation that we might have got into. But we had no jurisdiction in the actual workings of the Klan. We were interested in it only as a threat to the security of the country in that we had this group of people, that many people, involved in a movement that was so bitterly opposed to the civil rights movement that the Department of Justice was vitally interested in what was happening in so far as the security of the country was concerned. So that's what our basic, we had no jurisdiction whatsoever in the actual acts that might have occurred.

Now later on, as I said, I arrested the guy who put the bomb outside of the NAACP building down in New Bern, North Carolina, because that was a specific instance where they were threatening the people who were actively participating in the civil rights movement. But early on we had no jurisdiction and our interest in it was just to keep the Department of Justice apprised of what was going on.

KH: What reports did you send directly to the White House? Eisenhower's White House?

DF: Well, I mean, later on, when the, this was more when the Black Panthers were rioting and so forth.

KH: Johnson's White House then?

DF: Yeah, it was Johnson's White House then. This was just shortly--'68--you know they had four riots I guess in Greensboro in three years and that's where, at that time the stuff I was sending by teletype was getting to the White House the next morning. That was during, this was not during the Klan activity so much, this was when the black militants were shooting up the city and burning and stuff.

KH: What information about the Klan did you send directly to the White House?

DF: Nothing that I can remember. The only thing that went straight to the Department of Justice, and I'm sure they disseminated it to the White House.

KH: How much involvement did J. Edgar Hoover have in the affairs?

DF: He was the FBI, he made every decision.

KH: Did you make any direct contact with him?

DF: No, no, no. The supervisors, you know, they have a Domestic Intelligence Division and the Director of Domestic Intelligence was the man who supervised all of us. I never had any contact with Mr. Hoover though.

KH: What was your understanding through the bureaucratic, I shouldn't say that, the FBI channels--what was your understanding through the FBI channels of what Mr. Hoover wanted to accomplish?

DF: We were trying--we were not going to tolerate violence. That was what we were primarily involved in, you know. When I was talking to these Klansmen, I'd say, you know, you've got a right to join the organization, there's no question about it, it's a legal organization. There's nothing on the books or anything that says the Ku Klux Klan is illegal. But we're not going to tolerate violence. And that's what we, that was the thrust of our whole interest in it, was to prevent violence.

KH: Okay. So it was, I guess for now we can move out of the Klan and on to other subjects. It was around 1965 or '66 that your assignment changed to--

DF: Well, let's see, I know that by '68 I was working entirely on the black--I would say it must have been about '66, '65 or '66, somewhere in that area.

KH: What prompted the change in assignment, do you recall?

DF: Well, because they were burning up Greensboro.

KH: Do you recall a specific event?

DF: I don't know nothing particular. I mean I just, you know, I had been--it might sound egotistical, but I had been very successful in developing informants in the Klan. And so

when the black militants came and the shooting started and the burning started, they said, "Well Darg, you better quit working the Klan and get into that field."

So I just took my--I assigned all of my Klan work to a new agent here and I started working on the black militants. I don't know when that was. That must have been in '65, '66 because I know--well, you see, first off, of course, Jesse Jackson, was the president of the student body at A&T in '63 or '64 during that period. And that's when--

KH: He led the silent march?

DF: That's right, and I was down there every night, every day and every night that that was going on and he had every right to do that. There's, there's no question about it. They were discriminated against and they had every right to do what they were doing. During the whole period that Jesse Jackson was out there in the '63-'64 era, we never had any violence of any kind. Then, as I said, it must have been about, Jesse Jackson graduated, this was the time I guess that Vincent McCullough, during that period, became president of A&T student body and a guy named Nelson Napoleon Johnson arrived in town and--

KH: He's now a minister and he--

DF: Yes, strange combination. He used to be a Black Panther and then he became a Communist Worker's Party member and now I see in the paper Nelson is now a preacher. He plays the field, wherever the money is he's there, that's for sure. To see Nelson Johnson calling himself Reverend Nelson Johnson, after having been the leader of this whole shootout thing back in '79 is sort of a strange switch for a man who's a very active Communist Worker's Party movement and a vowed leader of it, and all of a sudden he's a full-time Christian, that's a real switch. But anyway--

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

DF: After he graduated and all of the nonviolence protests, which he had every right to lead and which were very successful--the restaurants certainly had no business not serving blacks, and the theatres had no business not permitting them to sit anywhere they wanted to, and Jesse Jackson did an incredible job. And the half of it was a Captain William Jackson, who was the captain of detectives here at the time, the Greensboro P.D. [Police Department]. And he and Jesse Jackson got to be very close friends. And Bill Jackson was one of my best friends, and Bill Jackson has said repeatedly that he had absolute confidence in whatever Jesse Jackson told him. If Jesse Jackson would tell him "Captain Jackson, we're coming into town, there'll probably be two thousand of us" or whatever it was, they'd be there. They would come in and I would be right there with the police every night. And they would come in and march around, and sing "We Shall Overcome"

and then usually by the end of the marching they would sing “We Shall Not Be Moved” and would sit down right in the middle of Elm and Market Street and then we’d have to haul them off. And I’d certainly want to say one thing--

KH: Were you involved in those arrests as an FBI agent?

DF: No, no. We had nothing to do with that.

KH: So when you say “we”, you’re talking about law enforcement.

DF: Law enforcement. But let me tell you the Greensboro Police Department arrested hundreds in one night--I think they arrested five or six hundred at least. And there was never one single allegation of police brutality involved in the Greensboro Police Department. Let me tell you, that’s amazing because what they had to put up with--the verbal abuse, the whole tense emotional situation that existed at that time. And I was out there every night with them during this whole period and there was not one single allegation of police brutality. And I’d like to see any other city in the country that can claim that that happened. We had the most incredible, disciplined, finest police organization in the country right here and I was out there every night watching them. And I would have known that there was a single instance of police brutality, not only because I was there watching them, because if such an allegation was made, the FBI would have investigated it and it would have been assigned to me. But there was not one single instance in those two or three years where they must arrested over a couple of thousand people and not one instance of alleged police brutality, which I think ought to be recorded somewhere. Nobody’s going to give them any credit--nobody gives police credit for anything but that was--

KH: It’s being recorded right now. It will show up on a transcript some day.

DF: Absolutely, I hope somebody will read this someday because, by God, it happened and it was true and it was tough out there because the tension was terrific and, you know, these youngsters were all lying out in the street and hollering and hooraying and so forth and a lot of them were very abusive and the police never used undue force.

KH: Just to put this into chronology, would you agree that this was 1963 when the focus was changed?

DF: I know it was '63 that Jesse Jackson was doing it, '63 and '64 I think was when he led it, so that’s when it started.

KH: Okay, and you were still with the Klan?

DF: And stayed on the Klan, because, you see, after Jesse Jackson accomplished his goals and the restaurants and the theatres integrated and all, then the black movement sort of just quieted down because there really wasn't a hell of a lot to argue about. And then when the Panthers came in, that must have been '66 or so, it really got rowdy because the riots, I think were in '67, '68, and '69. During the three years, we had four full scale riots in Greensboro. Three or four police officers were shot.

KH: I'm sorry, which year is this? '69?

DF: Well, it's during the period of '67, '[6]8, and '[6]9. And there were, there was one black student killed out at A&T [Willie Grimes], nobody ever knew who did that. The shooting that going on out there was so violent that anybody could have hit him but nobody, I investigated that case myself and never did know who shot him. But there was one black student killed.

KH: You're talking about the 1969 National Guard riot?

DF: Right, that was the National Guard and that was the last one. Right, that was the last big riot, '69. And then--but we'd had three riots before that. That was the last one. We'd had about, at least three riots I know before that. Pretty rowdy riots too--burning, shooting, and then this was the culmination in '69. That was the worst of all when we called in the National Guard.

KH: Okay. Let's back up and talk about the FBI's information on the black militants, the Black Power Movement, the Black Panthers. How did the FBI get its information? Well, and can you discuss the existence of a Mr. X, who is--

DF: Well, I had bushels of them.

KH: Okay, so there's more than one Mr. X?

DF: We could have never, you never get along with just one, you've got to have them telling on each other so you know whether they're telling the truth. I had, I don't know, dozens of them. At one time I had twenty two Klan informants working for me alone. But I don't know how many black informants I had, maybe ten, twelve, fifteen or so. But, you know, the FBI's interest in that was because, again, these people were burning down the country. You remember Detroit, Watts in Los Angeles and all.

And you see, it all started right here in Greensboro, everything always started

right here in Greensboro. So the Bureau was vitally interested in what was happening. I don't know how many burnings we had in Greensboro, but there were enumerable stores burned, and looting and stuff, and so that's what the Bureau's interest in was, again, the security of the country. These people, they were anarchists, the Black Panthers and all, their whole program was, "Off with the pigs, kill the police, destroy all semblance of authority, let anarchy take over and then we'll run it!" That was the whole philosophy of the whole Black Panther movement. They had films—I know we could get copies of those films and that kind of stuff. They had Black Panther coloring books where the little children would color pictures of killing policemen and stuff. So that's pretty heavy stuff, so we were vitally interested in that.

KH: So, tell me about Mr. X.

DF: Well, there were so many Mr. X's that I couldn't categorize any one of them. These guys, they were paid.

KH: Where'd they come from?

DF: Well, they were people who were willing to become involved in the movement. Now this was the Klan and the blacks, you know, you use the same sort of tactics with the Klan and the Black Panthers. You get somebody who is sincerely concerned about what's going on and they either join the group to help you or they're already in the group. And I look to them to help. Money was often one of the main reasons that they agreed to help.

KH: And what were their instructions?

DF: Well, their instructions were just to tell us what the hell was going on and what was planned. We had stuff during '67, '68, and '69 when something was going on all the time. I mean we just had one instance after another of burning and looting and meetings where there was--just the whole theme of the Black Power Movement, the Panthers and all, was, you know, let's destroy everything. Anarchy, that's what they advocated. So there was always something going on. No problem in finding something to ask the informants to check on. But, of course, after you train them, they knew what we were interested in--we were trying to keep violence down. But finally, the last riot is when they called out the National Guard and they cleared A&T campus, that was in June of '69 I think, something like that? I believe it was June of '69 and they swept the campus at about 6 a.m. And that was pretty much the end of it after that, they didn't have any riots after that. Of course they're still actively meeting and all, but there weren't any riots after that.

KH: What involvement did the FBI have when the National Guards raid on A&T?

DF: Well, we had, we were all--we had a meeting, in the basement of the Police Department they had the emergency operation center, the EOC. And there, the representatives of the FBI--I was there--the State Bureau of Investigation, the local police, the county, the fire departments, the adjutant general sent people over from Raleigh, from the National Guard that was going to be used. We had Mr. Roy Marvin, who was the attorney general, he was down there meeting before the Guard was used. And they made policy--they decided what are we going to do. We didn't, I was always there, but we didn't get much into the policy making field, that was not really our job. We were, again, there to monitor and see what was being done to try to stamp out this violence.

They had a regular war going on out there between A&T campus and the police. They called Scott Hall, "Fort Scott." It was a battle royal. You could sit downtown--you know, they had, one year, I don't know which year it was, it was right during the GGO [Greater Greensboro Open golf tournament], they had to declare curfew. And you could sit down there in the police department parking lot and it sounded like a battle going on out in the eastern part of the city. So it was tough times, I'm telling you, those were.

KH: Can you elaborate on what you mean by "Fort Scott?"

DF: Well, they just had so many guns and all in there. I had one informant that went in there who said that he knew there were a hundred or so long guns and he had given every reason to believe that he'd been telling the truth. I know there was a heck of a lot of guns somewhere, because there's a lot of fire power coming out of that campus. Scott Hall was one of the biggest men's dormitories and that was where an awful lot of the activity was centered.

I don't what all was going on out there, so the police--actually, I guess, in retrospect, it probably would have been all right if the police had just sealed off the area and let them shoot. I don't know who they would have been shooting at if the police had stayed away, because they were shooting at the police of course. I guess the police, if they just all moved back away from them, let them sit out. I don't know what would have been wise now, but they couldn't, you know, they couldn't let that sort of riot--if a car went down there, if they turned it over and set it on fire and stuff, they had to stop that.

KH: How did the Dudley, the situation at Dudley--

DF: Dudley High School?

KH: --influence the decision among the FBI, the SBI, and the county?

DF: Well, what happened at Dudley High School?

KH: Because the raid at A&T, I believe, happened the day after the situation at Dudley.

DF: Well, what happened was, I was right there when it all happened. Nelson Johnson prevailed upon a group of black students from A&T to go over to Dudley High School, which is just a few blocks away, and get those kids all stirred up. So all hell broke loose over at Dudley then and they started breaking out windows and rioting on the campus and it was all led by the group from A&T and Nelson Johnson, so I was right there watching them. He led this crowd over there and that's how the Dudley students got involved.

Then after that, I guess it deteriorated into the worse situation. There's a place over there they used to call "the Grove" which is where they all used to sort of assemble, between a grove of trees in between Dudley and A&T. And these kids were just high school kids that were involved and they busted out all the windows and the teachers all got, you know, frightened and ran off. It was tough going. And then it all started when the A&T students came over to Dudley School one morning. It was in the spring, I guess, maybe '69, I don't know what year, and Nelson Johnson was leading and they got the high school kids all involved then and Dudley of course was almost totally black at that time.

KH: Well, this was before integration.

DF: No, this was '69 see. They had already integrated there, to some extent. Not all the schools, but they didn't have--

KH: Well, it was '71 before it got meaningful.

DF: Yeah, but integration had gone into effect in '58, in northern Greensboro.

KH: The free choice plan.

DF: Right, the freedom of choice and then it went on and on, so--but by '69, I think it was right much integrating. Let's see, my kids graduated, my son, let's see, my son graduated from Grimsley in '64 and then I had a daughter graduate in '66. By 1970 I know that Greensboro Senior High School was fully integrated. So, I don't remember the exact years and all, but I knew a kid who ran for president of the student body at Grimsley and was beaten by a black kid who had just come over there, that must have been in '71. But anyhow, during '68-'69, a lot of the schools were integrated. Not anywhere near totally integrated. Busing hadn't started. Busing started in about '70 or '71 I think. Up until that point they had the right to go to any school they wanted, but then they started the busing and so there was some integration, but Dudley was 99 percent black at that time. And

that's when the A&T students went over and got them all involved.

KH: Mr. Frierson, I think this might be a good place to stop for now. But I would like to set up another appointment.

DF: I don't have a heck of a lot more to say. But, you see I quit in '71.

KH: I realize it was a long time ago.

DF: Well, if you have any specific questions, of course, you're welcome to come back. But you see '69, the final, big riot, when the National Guard cleared the campus, I knew that I was quitting when I got to fifty. I was, you see, in the FBI you can retire at fifty if you have twenty years as an agent. Well, I had twenty-four years as an agent when I became fifty and I retired on my fiftieth birthday. I'd had it. I'd had enough of this stuff. My wife was very happy to see me get out, and I was happy to get out. And so, you see, we're getting awfully close to when I don't really have any more knowledge.

I was handling 98 percent of it myself during the whole period from '58 to '71 and some of the other agents would handle some things for me. But I was in charge of all the racial investigations in Greensboro. Not in charge--I certainly supervised all the racial investigations from that thirteen year period. But now in 1969, you know, I was ready to quit the FBI, I'd had it. And so in '69, the last big riot, I still worked on racial stuff, because it all didn't just die down immediately. But by '71 things had pretty well quieted down and I retired on June 23, 1971, my fiftieth birthday. So I got out of it, I really know nothing after that period. So we're getting awful close to what--unless there's something in that book you wanted to ask me about. Who wrote this book?

KH: Have you heard of this book? William Chafe?

DF: No.

KH: *Civilities and Civil Rights*.

DF: Is it about Greensboro in particular?

KH: It's about Greensboro in particular.

DF: I never have seen this book.

KH: Yeah, there's a little bit in there about the role, there's quite a bit about the role of law enforcement. There's something in there about the, an awful lot in here about the FBI.

DF: Does it mention many people by name?

KH: No, your name's not mentioned.

DF: Well if anybody would be, it was I. I was just curious. Well, I hadn't seen that book—I'd like to read it sometime. I guess its in the library—I'll get a copy of it.

KH: Yeah, certainly, the Greensboro [Public] Library would have many copies of this.

DF: I'd like to read some of it. I'll tell you frankly, the stuff that I have read about it was so biased that I just, I don't want to read it anymore. It was so unfair to the police officers, most of it--it was so, as most writers seem to be, rarely supportive of law enforcement and generally critical of it. And I was right out there every day and every night with those guys and I just got fed up when I read about this garbage about how the officers were you know so brutal, I just don't read any of that crap, it ain't true. I was there, I saw it, I know what happened. And so maybe this one will be a little better, I'll read his.

KH: Yeah, actually I think it might be interesting if the next time we could discuss some of the things in the book?

DF: Yeah, well, maybe I'll read it some day, but I get awfully fed up with some of the stuff that so many of the experts. And then of course, when the shootout came in '79, I'd been out of the FBI for eight years, and, I know if you've already gotten to that point in any of your inquiries about it, you'll know that there's a guy named Ed Dawson who was the principal informant in that case. I worked Ed Dawson, I developed Ed Dawson, and he worked for me. I retired in '71, I turned him over to somebody in the FBI, I don't know who. But anyhow, I wasn't working him in '71, because, see, I had already gotten off of the Klan. I worked Ed Dawson early on and he's a good friend, he's still a good friend. I see him, I like him.

KH: When did he start working? I'm sorry, go ahead.

DF: What?

KH: I didn't mean to interrupt.

DF: No, no. What?

KH: When did Ed Dawson start acting as an informant? Early sixties?

DF: I don't know, it was early, I guess back in the days when the Klan was rampant, probably '63, '64, or '65, something like that. He's still a good friend. They turned around and indicted him and they talked about him and that burned me up. Ed Dawson was the only man who told the police that the Klan was coming the day they had the big shootout. He kept them advised. A guy named "Rooster" Kinkle--"Rooster" was his nickname, the police officer who was handling Ed Dorsett at that time--Ed called Rooster and told them they were coming. Ed went with them out to this guy's house, I can't remember, a crazy guy, a really weird guy, who lived on the outskirts of town. That's where the Klansmen all met.

Incidentally, nobody from Greensboro was involved in that at all, there wasn't nobody. The people who got shot, the people who were doing the shooting, none of them were from Greensboro. But these people came from down in Salisbury, and what happened to that, the people who said "death to the Klan" had gone down and broken up a Klan rally down in Concord, down in that area, Kannapolis and Concord. They went down and broke it up. The police had to call off the rally. So nobody bothered about the Klansmen rights to have a demonstration. Let the people go down and break it up, okay.

Then they said, you know, "death to the Klan," and they'll never come back to Greensboro. Well, it's always unwise to dare rednecks to do things, because they came. Ed Dawson kept the police informed as to when they were coming, he called twice--I don't know how he got to a telephone, after they got here--to call where they were when they were heading into town, and so forth. He was with them, sure he was with them, he was in the lead truck because he was from Greensboro, none of these other guys were. And they led him to the area where the big shootout occurred. When the shooting started Ed said he got the hell out of there in a hurry. He got away, didn't fire a gun, never did anything. They turned around and indicted him along with the people who did the shooting.

And so when his case got ready to trial, I told Ed I would love to come and testify on your behalf, old buddy. And I wished they would call me. So I went over there and talked to the assistant attorney general who was going to handle the case and when I got through talking he said he didn't think he could use me as a witness and I said, "No, I don't think so, because I have an awful lot of good things to say about Mr. Dawson and I'd like to know why you people indicted Ed Dawson." He helped me for years and helped the police, he told them they were coming, he was sure he was in the caravan, what the hell, he was leading the, you know, if he hadn't had been there, they wouldn't known yet when they were coming. And then they turned around and indicted him. Well, I'll end our conversation on that. So they didn't use me as a witness, but Ed is still a good friend, I see him occasionally and he did a grand job. He was totally dependable, responsible, every bit of information he ever furnished to me was accurate and then they turned around and indicted him. That's appreciation, so I said I'll end my conversation on

that.

KH: Okay, well, maybe next Thursday at the same time, roughly the same time?

DF: Well, as far as I know, let me look at the calendar a second.

[End of Interview I]