

by ^{Lucy Sims} Stein + Day, N.Y. © 1978

difficult—but, of course, now, I think it's pretty well verified that John Kennedy was married and divorced before he married Jackie."

"But something like Kennedy and Carter being related, you're really not sure if that's true or not?" I pressed.

Stoner conceded, "I think Doctor Fields checked up on that some—I don't know how much," and then quickly changed the subject to the clippings on "nigger" crime.

"Niggers don't belong in the United States in the first place," he said flatly. "They're trying to destroy the white race. The more I fight 'em, the better it is for the white race."

"How are you fighting them?"

"In politics, with propaganda . . ."

"You mean by running for office?"

He nodded. "And by stirring up white people to stand up for their rights."

Stoner had offered himself for political office a half-dozen times, first running in Tennessee's Third Congressional District in 1948 and then as NSRP's vice-presidential candidate in 1964. But it was in his home state that he had campaigned with vigor and, to the embarrassment of many Georgians, increased his votes with each bid: polling seventeen thousand votes in 1970 for governor; forty thousand in 1972 for the U.S. Senate, and seventy-one thousand in 1974 for lieutenant governor.

Each campaign had been used as a platform for his hatred of blacks and Jews, and each had been marked by controversy. During the governor's race, his campaign manager—Jerry Ray, brother of convicted assassin James Earl Ray, whom Stoner briefly represented—was charged with shooting sixteen-year-old campaign worker Don Black in the behind. At the time, Black—now David Duke's second in command—was sharing living quarters with Stoner and Jerry Ray, who, four months later, was arrested for a bank robbery in St. Louis.

In Stoner's bids for senator and lieutenant governor, his television and radio spots and his posters on city buses stirred up a furor that put the Federal Communications Commission and the courts in a quandary over where freedom of speech should end and censorship begin. Stoner, in the media spots, proclaimed: "The main reason why the niggers want integration is because the niggers want our white women. You cannot have law and order and niggers, too. Vote white."

Atlanta Mayor Sam Massell issued an executive order asking that the commercials be banned, the local branches of the NAACP and the ADL petitioned the FCC to modify its regulations so that Stoner's words could be stricken, and a prominent pediatrician publicly diagnosed the spots as "having an adverse effect on child development." The stations—which ran disclaimers before and after the spots—also turned to the FCC for relief, but in the end the commission ruled in Stoner's favor.

Four years later, Stoner won another legal battle allowing him to advertise on city buses in Macon, Augusta, and Columbus. On winning that point, he gloated, "I'd say this proves one thing—God loves me."

During most of his campaigns, Stoner spoke at Klan rallies, relying on the Hooded Empire's votes and its financial support. In 1970, announcing that he was prepared to spend fifty to one hundred thousand dollars to capture the governor's office, he boasted, "Not a dime of that money will come out of my own pocket." Most of it, he said, would come from subscribers to the NSRP's monthly *The Thunderbolt*.

Billing himself as "The White People's Candidate," Stoner's platform varied little from campaign to campaign. In the senatorial race, he ran on a twenty-five-point platform that included legislation "to pay and finance blacks to settle in Africa or elsewhere outside the United States"; "reduction in funds for WELFARE so only the needy and elderly will benefit and not the lazy drunken Blacks," and the repeal of civil rights laws, which "give special privileges to blacks and take rights, jobs, homes, and freedom from white people and give them to the black savages." As a candidate for lieutenant governor, he announced he was for "the death penalty for rapists so as to protect white womanhood from the army of black rapists" and "an end to busing and race-mixing insanity in the schools" and was opposed to all anti-gun laws, ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and "women's lib," and to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s picture hanging in the state capitol.

Continuing our interview, Stoner grinned over the victories he had won in spite of never having been elected. "I'm somewhat candid in my advertising," he admitted.

"If you were elected," I ventured, "what kind of governor would you be?"

"I'd make things so hot for the niggers in Georgia that most of 'em would go ahead and move out."

Stoner attributed his escalating votes to a growing awareness among white people that "they need to do something to stop the niggers."

"What do you suggest?" I asked.

"I think we need to move 'em out of the country, some place like Central Africa."

"And what do you think should be done about the Jews?"

"I've always advocated sending 'em to Madagascar. Of course, if they'd rather be resettled at the South Pole, why I think the nations of the world could get together and settle it."

"You said that you differ from the Klan in that it is too moderate, and then you say you don't believe in violence," I started.

"Most of 'em in the Klan don't believe in violence," he interrupted, continuing, "I take an open anti-nigger stand that I advocate the repeal

of all civil rights laws and that people fire niggers instead of hiring them. Some Klan members are strong racists like me and wouldn't hire niggers to work for 'em, but I know other Klansmen who have nigger cooks, nigger maids and all."

"You wouldn't hire one to do housework or anything?"

"I wouldn't hire a Jew or a nigger, either one," he re-emphasized. "Or I wouldn't hire any of these Vietnamese refugees or anything because they have been brought over here to mongolize the white race. Most of 'em didn't want to come over here in the first place. They oughta be resettled somewhere back in Asia."

And the Chinese? The Japanese? The Mexicans?

"They should all be in their own country, or at least not here."

"How old were you when you first started feeling this way...?"

He cleared his throat. "When I grew up, I never did know of any nigger lovers because if there were any nigger lovers they didn't say anything. It wasn't popular. Everbody I knew back at that time—relatives, where I went to school, church, ever'where—ever'body was opposed to associating with niggers. A lot of 'em believed in having niggers for servants. Some still do, even though niggers aren't willing to be servants any more." He chuckled. "My mother use to have a nigger maid."

"What did you think about her?"

"I always thought we'd be better off without having her around. I didn't like to smell her." He made a face. "When I was growing up, I used to talk to the niggers quite a bit—or listen to 'em, more so, because they did most of the talking. And I found out way back then that the nigger was dissatisfied with his position. I never been fooled like so many Southerners into thinking that nigger servants loved 'em. I know better."

"So your racial views haven't changed at all?"

He shook his head, and when I asked if they were possibly stronger, he laughed. "If they got any stronger, I'd have to start killing niggers."

When the interview was over, and Stoner walked me to my car, I asked if he devoted all his time to his work.

"Fighting Jews and niggers and chasing women," he chuckled.

"Oh, you chase women?"

Stoner blushed. "See, I'm trying to stop the aging process. I decided about twenty years ago to stop getting older." He laughed in a vain attempt at humor. Never married, he said he had "come close" a few times but had always decided against it. "I've handled a few divorce cases, and in court I've heard parts of others. That's why I'm afraid to get married." In the end, he insisted, he thought everyone else should marry, but in his case, it was better to only have girl friends.

"Do you find it hard to find women who agree with the way you feel?"

"No, ma'am," he assured me. "I know quite a few women that feel like I do. In fact, in places where there's been a lot of street fighting going on—like St. Augustine—women, generally, were better fighters than the men because they're not as much targets as men when it comes to fighting niggers."

"Have you had any girl friends, though, who were worried that you might get in trouble or hurt or something?"

"There's some that might. In fact, that's a problem that white organizations have had over the years. Men's wives are afraid they'll get in trouble."

"Would you say that's one of the reasons you haven't gotten married, also?"

"I know girls that wouldn't be worried about that at all, that would get out in the street and fight and all."

"To protect you?"

"Yes, ma'am. I've had women bodyguards at times."

When I asked if he always had bodyguards, he answered no, only when things got stirred up and he felt he needed them.

"You never know what some crazy Jew or nigger will do."

"Are you ever afraid?"

"I'm not afraid at all," he was positive.

"I never heard of anyone having women bodyguards," I observed.

He chuckled. "They're much more interesting than men," and slammed my car door.

As I drove off, he opened a pen and let out two German shepherd watchdogs: one the usual brownish-black, the other pure white.

After the news of Stoner's indictment, I again thought about the man I had studied that afternoon, hoping for a glimpse into his inner mechanisms, the psychology that ground out the hate he never shrouded with euphemisms or subtleties. He was no intellectual, but neither was he ignorant or uneducated, like so many Klan members and sympathizers. Although, unlike them, he didn't lack material possessions, he had suffered the early death of his parents, and he had endured the lifelong misfortune of the horrid limp. Had these factors unleashed the anger he aimed at others? Was he emotionally ill? Was he genuinely hateful, a thoroughly evil man?

One lawman had told me J. B. Stoner was *the* man behind all the bombings. After having spent an afternoon with Stoner, I found it easy to believe he was capable of the blasts that so unmercifully ripped the South and its people apart, needlessly taking lives and property and creating ill will and hurt.

His ties to explosives were extensive. He had admitted his familiarity

with dynamite to more than one newsman; two months before the Sixteenth Street Church blast, he had instructed an audience at an NSRP rally outside Birmingham on how to make a bomb by using a candle to regulate the time of detonation, and he had legally represented, or was closely associated with, scores of men accused of bombings: Emmett Miller, charged with an attempted bombing at Philander Smith College in Little Rock in 1961; the four klansmen accused of a blast at the home of a black boy who integrated an elementary school in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1964; Robert Miles, the former UKA Grand Dragon of Michigan, currently imprisoned for the 1971 school-bus bombings in Pontiac; Byron de la Beckwith—twice tried but never convicted for the slaying of civil rights leader Medgar Evers—who, in 1973, was arrested just outside New Orleans with both a time bomb and a map tracing in red the route to the home of a Jewish leader in his car; Roy Frankhouser, the former Pennsylvania Grand Dragon and NSRP member whose career as an informer ended with his arrest for allegedly selling two hundred forty pounds of explosives to Miles; one-time body-guard; William M. Chaney, former UKA Grand Dragon of Indiana and Imperial Wizard of the new Confederation of Independent Klans, who, in November 1977, lost an appeal for an earlier conviction of fire bombing; and Richard and Robert Bowling—indicted but never tried in the 1958 bombing of an Atlanta synagogue—who once lived with Stoner and helped the Christian Anti-Jew Party and NSRP. (George Bright—tried for the same bombing and represented by James Venable—with whom Stoner briefly shared a law office, was also an NSRP member.)

According to a *Los Angeles Times* clip, Stoner also spoke at a rally sponsored by the Americans for the Preservation of the White Race in Meridian, Mississippi, in May 1968, at the height of a series of Klan-suspected bombings of synagogues and Jewish homes in that city and nearby Jackson. That same summer, after a shoot-out with the FBI and Meridian police, Thomas Tarrants—a member of the White Knights of Mississippi and formerly linked with NSRP—was captured with a time bomb like the one found in the car of Byron de la Beckwith, also an NSRP member.

During the HUAC hearings, Donald Appell questioned Stoner on his knowledge or involvement in the Sixteenth Street Church blast and in two explosions ten days later that, Appell contended, were intentionally set "to injure FBI agents and other law enforcement personnel in retaliation for their vigorous investigation of the church bombing, including the questioning of many Klan suspects." When Stoner refused to answer, citing his constitutional rights, Appell proceeded to "place" him in Birmingham "immediately prior to, and including, September 15, 1963," and in March and April of 1965 when a series of bombs were uncovered in that city.

Besides the bombing ties, one investigator also had commented, "You know Stoner's part of the conspiracy in King's death, don't you?" Over the years, Stoner had slithered from one right-wing group to another, speaking, before meetings and rallies, representing their members in court, sharing offices. His ties were like a bowl of venomous spaghetti. Was there an underground right-wing network that perhaps had plotted King's assassination and other violence? On several occasions, Robert Shelton and Robert DePugh, former leader of the Minutemen, announced plans for such a network, and a meeting supposedly was held in Kansas City, Missouri, with Shelton and David Duke, among others, present. In 1976, Tony Laricci also had told the press about the formation of a coalition of right-wing groups in Maryland. The FBI and many law enforcement officials scoffed at the idea of such a network existing, even in view of the Shelton-DePugh efforts and a coming together of right-wing leaders from around the world at an International Congress convened by Duke in New Orleans in September 1976. Were they wrong? Or were they concealing information? Was there indeed such a network? And could J. B. Stoner be the knot that tied the pieces together? Was he the key to more than the bombings? Was he part of a conspiracy? Was his tie to James Earl Ray more than that of attorney and friend of Ray's brother Jerry?

An overall look at clips and photocopies and newsletters and bits and pieces of information gleaned from interviews and conversations provided grounds for speculation.

In an article written less than two months after King's assassination, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* quoted the FBI as saying Ray had entered into a conspiracy "on about March 29" to kill the civil rights leader, the other party being "an individual whom he (Ray) alleged to be his brother." The article stated that the FBI had, itself, injected the word "conspiracy" into the case on April 17 when it filed its original complaint against Ray, then identified as Eric Starvo Galt—one of at least seven aliases he had been known to use—and noted that "a day-by-day reconstruction of the movements of James Earl Ray indicates co-conspirators were active both in Memphis, where King was killed, and in Canada, where Ray lived the next month."

Soon after his arrest in London on June 8, 1968, law enforcement agencies released a partial breakdown of Ray's movements from the time of his April 1967 escape from a Missouri prison—where he was serving a term for armed robbery—through the April 4, 1968, slaying of King. As a fugitive, he had flitted from Birmingham to New Orleans to Los Angeles and on one occasion had seemed to be in two places simultaneously. The *Inquirer* article said that Ray first assumed the Galt alias in July 1967 when he turned up in Toronto several days after two men robbed a bank in Alton, Illinois, his home town. A man legally

named Eric St. Vincent Galt lived less than two miles from the apartment rented by Ray. The two were said to be strikingly similar in appearance, including scars on their noses and their right-hand palms. Two years earlier, the real Galt had vacationed in Tennessee. He insisted he had never met Ray, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police could find no connection between the two.

Later that summer, the article continued, Ray used the Galt alias to check in at the Economy Grill and Rooms in Birmingham, to obtain an Alabama driver's license, and to register a white Mustang he reportedly purchased with cash. Next, he showed up in Atlanta on March 25 and five days later, according to the original FBI complaint, entered into the alleged conspiracy. The getaway car—described as a white Mustang—appeared in Atlanta the morning after the assassination. When neighbors finally reported the vehicle to police as abandoned, the registration was found to be in the name Eric Starvo Galt.

Ray returned to Canada on April 8 and during the month he lived in Toronto, before fleeing to London, assumed two aliases—both names of actual men who resided in London, bore physical resemblance, and insisted they had neither met nor heard of him. On May 3, he flew to London as "Raymond George Sneyd"—the alias he used to get an easily obtainable Canadian passport.

During my research, I also came across a provocative article from the July 1968 issue of *Inside Detective* magazine about a Russian spy who—also using a Canadian passport obtained for him in Toronto—had posed as both a Canadian journalist and tourist in South Africa the summer of 1967. His true identity, the article claimed, was Yuri Nikolayevich Loginov, born in Moscow in 1933 and considered one of the Soviet Union's top spies. At the time of Loginov's arrest, South African authorities discovered a list he had compiled of boys born in 1933 and intended for use in obtaining new identities and passports. After a long solitary confinement, Loginov broke down and told the South African authorities his ultimate destination had been Canada and the United States. He allegedly told Major General Hendrik Van den Bergh, South Africa's security chief, that Canada was to have been only his place of entry. His "real work" was in the United States. "I believe that it was to do with assassination," he reportedly told Van den Bergh. "I gained the impression I was to be a key man in an assassination plot not aimed at one particular man, such as the president of the United States, but at a number of big men simultaneously in order to confuse, dismay, and cause panic among the people if a number of their great men died suddenly." Seven months after Loginov's revelation, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, and Robert F. Kennedy, the

following June 6. Loginov also stated that the KGB—Russia's version of the CIA—knew thirty-six hours in advance that John F. Kennedy would be shot in Dallas. "I was not involved in any plot," he told Van den Bergh, "but I was in the same room as a number of KGB officers, and I heard two of them discussing the death of the president. They were speaking as though he were going to die within a day or so. I did not pay attention to it. I heard the word Dallas several times. It was only after we heard the news of the assassination that I put two and two together and knew that my superiors in KGB had known well before not only that President Kennedy would die but almost to within the minute when he would die." An article in *Newsweek* of September 25, 1967—two months after his arrest—confirmed that Loginov's real mission was in the United States and quoted an anonymous U.S. official as saying "the interrogation is far from over."

Was Loginov's story all fabrication, or was it based on fact? In a telephone conversation, James Venable had confirmed a tip I had received from still another Klan source that a man fitting the description of Lee Harvey Oswald had visited Venable's Atlanta law office shortly before the assassination and requested the names of right-wing leaders.

Toronto seemed to play a key role in the stories of both James Earl Ray and Yuri Loginov. It was also headquarters for the far-right Western Guard and home of John Ross Taylor, the sharp-faced little man I first met at Dale Rensch's rally in West Virginia and later in New Orleans at David Duke's International Congress. The *Toronto Star* described Taylor as "Canada's High Priest of Hate." In 1965, the Canadian government terminated use of the mail by him and another man because of their distribution of *The Thunderbolt* and other anti-Semitic literature. At a hearing preceding the ban, Taylor and David Stanley said they were not members of NSRP but had agreed to represent the American group in Canada. Back issues of *The Thunderbolt* carried stories that Taylor had been a speaker at NSRP's 1973 convention, along with Buddy Tucker and Byron de la Beckwith. The Western Guard reciprocated by inviting Stoner to speak at one of its dinners in March 1974.

Could the Western Guard have lent a helping hand to a fellow right-winger? Could it have aided James Earl Ray in obtaining the falsified passport and his sundry "identifications"? As for the baffling question of where Ray got money for his extensive travels, Stoner himself had boasted that *Thunderbolt* subscribers would pick up the tab for his 1970 governor's race. Over the years, the tabloid also had carried letters of appreciation from various recipients—including de la Beckwith—of NSRP defense funds. Could the NSRP also have picked up Ray's financial tab?

When Ray escaped June 10, 1977, from the Bushy Mountain Prison, northwest of Knoxville, his last visitor had been his brother Jerry, Stoner's former campaign manager and roommate and guest of honor at a 1973 NSRP meeting in Chicago. At the time of his escape, prison officials acknowledged an inside conspiracy and speculated on the possibilities of outside help. The case bore similarities to that of one-time NSRP member Tommy Tarranis, who, after a 1968 conviction for his role in several bombings in Meridian, successfully escaped from Parchman Prison in Mississippi with the help and planning of fellow members of the White Knights, many of its members closely tied to the NSRP. Could the Klan or the NSRP or a coalition of right-wing groups have attempted a replay with James Earl Ray?

My speculations were bolstered in January 1978 when the House Assassinations Committee indicated it would subpoena Stoner—along with several NSRP associates—to testify in its investigation into the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. An unidentified congressional source told the press that the panel wanted to find out whether Stoner's activities "are in any way directly connected with the assassination of Dr. King." The source indicated the committee would question Stoner both about his allegations that an FBI informant had offered him twenty-five thousand dollars to have King killed and two thousand dollars to blow up the Birmingham church and about his relationship with James Earl Ray. A month later, *The New York Times* disclosed that Ray's brother, Jerry, was acting as bodyguard for Stoner, who announced he would again run for governor of Georgia.

Shortly after the official charges were brought against Chambliss and Stoner in September 1977, a source familiar with the bombing investigations told the press that the latter's indictment was designed as "psychological warfare" against the others as much as it was to convict the arch-segregationalist. "Stoner is a symbol," the source explained. "A lot of these people look on him as the most hard-nosed guy of all. If we can get him, then it's a signal to all those other guys that we can get them, too."

At the time, investigators had narrowed the bombing suspects to no more than thirty, twenty of them still alive. There was also speculation that the suspects might have been part of Nacirema—"American" spelled backwards—formed in 1961 by klansmen who wanted "more violent action" in their fight against civil rights. During the HUAC hearings, investigator Philip Manuel had said Shelton and UKA Grand Dragon Calvin Craig were among the klansmen instructed by Nacirema in the manufacture and use of firearms and explosives. He described it as "an organization of black-robed klansmen suspected of participating in racial bombings across the South."

Meanwhile, the black community—reluctant to get its hopes up—adopted a wait and see attitude as the state prepared its case against Chambliss, and Stoner fought extradition from Georgia for the earlier Bethel Church bombing. Chris McNair, one of a dozen or so blacks elected to the Alabama House of Representatives since the Sixteenth Street bombing, refused to comment on the eve of the Chambliss trial for the death of his daughter. And while Claude Wesley, Cynthia's father, expressed satisfaction that "some progress has been made," he, too, was guarded: "Of course, no one has been convicted. I've waited this long: I'll wait some more."

At the church, Pastor James T. Crutcher had remained quiet when *New York Times* reporter Wayne King asked his own feelings. "Ambivalence," he finally answered. "Always, deep down, there was the hope that justice would be done, that the climate had changed, that white Southerners, decent white Southerners who feel that they were degraded by this, can feel better. But there is also the pain of bringing up the bygone fear, the remembrance of atrocity and horror. You tend to forget; the mind blocks those things that are beyond remembering. But this is the time, the particular time." He picked up a worn Bible and read from the third chapter of Ecclesiastes: "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up . . ."

In mid-November 1977, Robert Chambliss—who had angrily lunged at a black cameraman while leaving the grand jury room just months before—showed little emotion as the state unfolded the first of its four cases against him; the murder of Denise McNair.

Kirihus Glenn, a retired laundry worker from Detroit who had been visiting friends in Birmingham at the time of the bombing, identified a 1963 photograph of Chambliss as that of one of three men she had seen in a car parked outside the church during the early hours of the morning of the bombing. Another witness, Yvonne Young, testified that she had seen the defendant with several bundles of "oversized firecrackers" in his home two weeks before the bombing.

But the most damaging evidence had come from Chambliss's niece by marriage. In a soft, halting voice, Elizabeth Cobb, an ordained Methodist minister, recalled that her uncle told her the day before the bombing "he had enough stuff put away to flatten half of Birmingham." Then twenty-three, the Reverend Cobb remembered Chambliss as being "in a very angry and agitated state" over the recent integration of Birmingham's schools. She had urged him not to do anything violent, but "he looked me in the face and said, 'You just wait until after Sunday morning and they will beg us to let them segregate.'" She asked what he

if a black man skinned his arm, it healed black; if a white skinned his, it grew back white. "There's something in your blood that's different."

Venable picked up the argument. "That's the characteristic of the white and the black. These doctors will tell you, 'Just pump the same type blood from a nigger to a white man.' They say, 'Ooooh, it's no difference.' Well, I don't want any that nigger blood pumped into me."

"How are you going to know the difference?" I challenged.
"I'm not gonna take it." Venable refused to budge. "I'm gonna git some from Gene or somebody else."

To support their argument, Gene Hall noted that for years the Red Cross had indicated race on its donor cards. He pointed out that Louisiana even had a law that the Red Cross had to segregate blood. When I informed him the law had been changed several years ago, he fumed. "Well, the only way to fight that is to refuse to give blood to the Red Cross. I wouldn't give 'em a drop!"

Each time I attempted to curb their racial meanderings, Hall and Venable rammed my verbal road blocks. Finally, I detoured to the subject of violence. In the early sixties, before Venable merged his Defensive Legion of Registered Americans Inc., the Committee of One Million Caucasians to March on Congress, and the Christian Voters and Buyers League into the National Knights, he had circulated a leaflet that recommended guns and ammunition appropriate for home owners. It had warned "... Blood will surely flow in the streets. Let it flow! Let us arm our homes to make sure that Negro-Jew blood flows—not ours."

Now, even though Lumpkin felt everyone should have a gun, he and Venable stressed their opposition to violence and bragged that no National Knight had been convicted of a felony.

"During this investigation in the sixties, Shelton, the States Rights party, and many others were mentioned in there." Venable boasted. "But our name was not even mentioned in there. That's why we try to keep a clean record. We always ... ever' officer of our Klan at ever' meetin', we advocate the do's and don'ts, what to do and what not to do. You can't take the law in your own hands. It's out of the question. You wouldn't have a ghost of a chance if you went into the federal court where you got niggers on the jury. You'd be convicted. Liberals and pinks, and therefore it's out. The Shelton Klan has caused more headaches and more embarrassment, and Duke has followed in his footsteps. The two things that caused the investigation in the Congress of the United States was the killin' of this ol' sorry white woman that participated in the Selma march, and the klansmen over in Athens, two of 'em, in the killin' of the nigra soldier and the officers that were passin' through there at nighttime. It was uncalled for. And it caused the investigation."

Venable had leveled the same criticism during his HUAC testimony and in interviews at the time of the killings. He told one reporter, "Shelton's ruined the Klan. He shouldn't have killed Lemuel Penn. That nigger wasn't bothering anybody. Shelton caused an investigation of the Klan." Shelton, however, had insisted the men accused of the sniper shooting of Penn—returning to Washington from military reserve training with two other black officers—had been banished from UKA before the incident on a highway outside Athens, northeast of Atlanta. While the HUAC report had identified two of the accused—Howard Sims and Cecil Myers—as UKA members at the time of the murders, they were said to have also belonged to the Black Shirts, a small violence-prone group organized within the National Knights by Colbert Raymond McGriff and Earl Holcombe. The report said McGriff and Holcombe had been expelled from UKA after a shooting incident in Griffin, Georgia.

Now, Venable said, the latter had been members of his group for only a short term because they were "undesirable." He admitted it was a mistake to have accepted them but placed the blame on the Barnesville klavens.

"They have infiltrated the Klan, our enemy has," he said. "That's the reason that if we were mean enough to do somethin', we certainly wouldn't do it. I've always told my people, 'If you got anything to do, always remember two's a crowd. If you talk on your own self, you oughta go to the penitentiary or electric chair if you're mean enough to do something.'"

In spite of his repudiation of violence and his folksy talk about grandchildren and family lineage, I remembered articles that described him as "a fiery, red-faced, fist-shaking orator" and told of his ties to men who were considered dangerous. Another klansman had told me of a visit by Lee Harvey Oswald to Venable's Atlanta law office shortly before John F. Kennedy's assassination. When I asked the Imperial Wizard to verify the rumor, he confirmed that a man who fit Oswald's description had come to see him.

"I favored him," Venable recalled. "I'm positive it was him. He told me he was goin' to Chicago. He wanted names of right-wing leaders, but I wouldn't give him our Grand Dragon's name."

When Venable walked rfe to my car, we passed the copper-colored Paer of Gene Hall, who, I later learned, was the same Eugene S. Hall arrested in connection with a series of bombings in Montgomery during the late fifties. The front license plate read "Governor's Staff" and bore a slogan about "Standing Up for Alabama."

"Do you think the Klan could ever be built up to what it was in the twenties?" I asked Jimmy Venable before I drove away.