

Houston Police Admit Having Citizens' Files

By Tom Curtis
Special to The Washington Post

HOUSTON, Jan. 7—Houston's police chief said today that his department has maintained files on substantial numbers of this city's citizens "in all walks of life"—including federal, state and local officials, business people and a newspaper editor.

Mayor Fred Hofheinz Monday said these files included one on U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan (D-Tex.), and at one time included one on Hofheinz. The mayor said he ordered the chief to purge political information from criminal intelligence files, which he said include the names of "some of the city's most distinguished people."

Police Chief Carrol Lynn said all such files were accumulated before he was appointed to office in January, 1974, by Hofheinz, then newly elected. Lynn said the files will be destroyed after being delivered to the U.S. attorney for possible use as evidence before a federal grand jury investigating illegal police wiretapping, corruption in the department's Narcotics Division and other matters.

Lynn said he has "absolute knowledge" of the existence of files on Jordan and Hofheinz, but he declined to elaborate or to name others on whom files were kept. He said an investigation had just begun, but that the non-criminal files number "between the hundreds and the thousands."

The police chief added that "thousands of police hours were wasted" by keeping politicians, federal and state judges and others under surveillance and recording their activities.

"We won't do any more of

demonstrations, antiwar rallies and other gatherings." He said plainclothes officers noted the names of "known" persons who attended such events, and said that information, along with their name, address, height, and weight, was recorded on 5x7-inch index cards, which police filed. "There were no dossiers or jackets," he said.

"The fact that their names are there doesn't necessarily mean anything derogatory about the people," Singleton said. "We just accumulated information that we thought might be useful in connection with additional facts obtained in future investigations."

Singleton said the data on Hofheinz was gathered by a person he declined to identify outside the Police Department, and was "personal information, political trash. I ran it through the paper shredder." He said it was likely that Rep. Jordan and other politicians' names were in the files because of surveillance of meetings or events they attended, but he said he could not say for sure.

Rep. Jordan, a member of the House Judiciary Committee, said any spying on political figures was "improper and illegal." She said she had heard of the mayor's statement.

"If there's a file on me, I would like to have it," Rep. Jordan said. "Then I could see the nature and extent of it and determine whether it was a violation of my civil rights."

James C. Calaway, president of the Texas Civil Liberties Union, said he is concerned that the Police Department may destroy the files before the public knows what was in them. "If they can do this [surveillance] in secret and destroy the records, they can do something else in the future and destroy the records," he said.

Last August, the Texas Department of Public Safety announced that it had destroyed all its files generated by non-criminal investigations. The department declined to say how many files were destroyed, but it said the effort had taken a year and a half.

The admission by the Texas police agency was precipitated by disclosure that the department had maintained a file on Robert W. Pomeroy, a former Marine captain and Continental Airlines pilot who formed a group opposed to construction of a nuclear power plant near Dallas. He and the Texas CLU have a suit pending in Austin federal court seeking damages for a civil rights violation.

this while I'm chief of police—we've got criminals to catch," Lynn said. He said files containing information on "extremist groups" or significant criminal information will be retained. Lynn declined to say why he thought non-criminal files were kept.

Former Police Chief Herman Short, who served nearly 10 years as chief under Hofheinz's predecessor, Mayor Louie Welch, said his department "did routinely watch anything that looked like it might be a significant danger to the city." He said, however, that he knew of no files on Hofheinz or Rep. Jordan.

M. L. (Joe) Singleton, who headed the department's Criminal Intelligence Division (CID) between 1965 and 1972, said "We didn't do surveillance on any political figures per se, but we observed