

## XII

## The Challenge of Radical Youth

While Freedom was achieving significant local success, the national civil rights struggle was increasingly challenged by black nationalism. This challenge also began to appear in Kansas City. In February, 1969, the local Black Panthers organized a public gathering at Gregg Community Center focusing on the Kansas City Police Department's lack of service to the black community. Bervin Fisher, President of the Lincoln Community Council, as well as now Chair of KC CORE, and openly critical of whites' participation in that organization, was the featured speaker. He said: "We are rapidly approaching a police state. If a white policeman will brutalize black people, one day he'll brutalize white people. If something is not good for black people, it is not good for white people." He charged the use of gas by the police in the previous summer's rioting was shocking, particularly by a "police force which has less than five per cent black officers; of the 540 men, only 55 are black."

Bruce Watkins was among the more than 700 who attended. He said he hoped to hear "what we can do as a community to bring about peace here in Kansas City." He noted that some of the Black Panthers' ideas are "similar to what we've been fighting for a long time."

In June, 1969, Rep. Herman Johnson rose on the floor of the House of Representatives to protest a "Black Manifesto" appearing in his House mailbox without an acknowledged source. It was said to have come from the Republican side. "The document under question apparently is a copy of the 'manifesto' produced by James Foreman's group delivered and adopted by the National Black Economic Development Conference in Detroit, Michigan, on April 16, 1969. It consists of seven pages of mimeographed or photocopied matter. The 'manifesto' has caused

quite a stir in religious circles throughout the country as Foreman and his associates have appeared before various church bodies seeking \$500,000 in reparations to Negroes for the wrong done them by America throughout the years.”

On August 20, Bruce Watkins called a meeting at the Wayne Minor Housing Project to begin a campaign to appoint at least two black judges to new positions created by the legislature for Kansas City and Jackson County. He noted that at present out of 47 persons executing judicial authority in the area only one, a municipal court judge, Lewis W. Clymer, is black. The meeting was well attended by church and civil rights organizations as well as such elected officials as Leon Jordan, Herman A. Johnson, Henry Ross, and Harold Holliday, Jr. representing his father, who was out of town.<sup>91</sup>

In October, Pete O’Neal, head of the Black Panther Party, claimed his organization had enough evidence to send Police Chief Clarence M. Kelley to the penitentiary. He accused Kelly of authorizing the transfer of firearms from the police department which found their way into the hands of right wing organizations.

Soon after these public charges Jordan reached out to O’Neal, telling him that he had some police reports that he had held since 1964 which might be of interest in his campaign against Chief Kelley. The reports were only part of a file that gave rise to suspicions that another police officer might have been involved in a \$5,000 insurance fraud. According to O’Neal Jordan told him that William Canaday had given him the reports several years ago for safekeeping. Two of the reports were written by Canaday. Both Canaday and Jordan denied the reports were given to Jordan by Canaday. Jordan said he received the reports in the mail. He didn’t know who sent them.

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<sup>91</sup> *The Call*, January 17-23, February 21-27, June 20-26, & August 22-28, 1969.

But O'Neal secretly taped his conversation with Jordan. In early December he took his tape to *The Kansas City Star*. Harry Jones, a *Star* reporter, wrote that a voice sounding like Jordan's clearly named Canaday as a source of the reports. When Jordan was confronted with the tape, he said, "I have never experienced such treachery before." He acknowledged telling the Panthers Canaday was the source, but then said he told them this to disguise the true source, whom he thought he knew, but refused to name. The Panthers suspected the reports revealed that Kelley had deliberately suppressed evidence to aid the officer involved.

They considered the matter for two months before calling on Canaday and Jordan in an attempt to get the information Jordan held into the public domain. Accounts of the conversations then held at Canaday's restaurant and Jordan's Green Duck sharply differ. But that the calls were made is not in dispute. During a call at the Green Duck the Panthers managed to exchange some meaningless papers they brought with them for the confidential reports Jordan held without Jordan realizing it. They then made the reports public. The reports did not indicate any fraud had been committed, and the officer involved was not charged. Jordan insisted he had not believed the reports were sufficient evidence of any crime having been committed, and that he respected the officer involved.

Jones's story focused on Jordan's relation to Canaday and his animus against Chief Kelley, not on the Panthers' duplicity. Both Jordan and Canaday insisted that they had talked to each other only once in the last several months. Jordan said that was a year or more ago, and Canaday estimated it was six months ago. "Jordan spoke highly of Canaday, 'I'm fond of Canaday, I like him.'" But Jordan made clear he did not respect Kelley, and added that if he did have something substantial "to hit him across his bigoted nose with" he would want to do it himself. While Canaday denied having any animus against Kelley, Jones reported that during

Canaday's closing days with the department the tension between him and Kelley was common knowledge. Canaday was indicted on a federal tax charge in March, 1964, and later convicted. But before his conviction he was allowed to retire with his pension benefits. While Jordan brushed off the importance of the story, it suggests Jordan was having more than a little trouble navigating the swiftly changing political currents.<sup>92</sup>

The Panthers' sensational campaign against Chief Kelley overshadowed Bruce Watkins' announcement in November that he had fulfilled his campaign pledge by accumulating a surplus of \$15,000, primarily from his investing money deposited in the circuit clerk's office for litigants in interest bearing certificates of deposit. He returned that surplus to the operating budget of the County Court, although lamenting his lack of authority to use that money for badly needed improvements in employee salaries and modernization of office equipment.

The manner in which the Panthers were garnering the public spotlight, while Freedom's more mundane achievements were going relatively unnoticed might well have been on Leon Jordan's mind when he was interviewed on January 12, 1970, by Richard A. Shaw, an investigator working for the United States Congressional Committee on Internal Security, which was concerned with the Kansas City Black Panther Party. Shaw reported:

Jordan emphatically characterized the Panthers as a group of gangsters intent on preying upon the community through emotionalism and deceit. He said that the constant Panther programming of confrontation with the police and the administration is, in his opinion, designed to get for themselves sympathy through improper news coverage by the so-called responsible news media. . . .

However, Jordan was quick to point out that in his opinion the Negro community is absolutely not supporting the Panthers financially or morally to any significant extent.

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<sup>92</sup> *The Call*, October 10, 1969; *Kansas City Star*, December 4, 1969.

He explained that he believed white liberals are being duped through Panther deceit far more than the responsible faction of the Negro community. . . . He said that considering how the Panther membership is comprised of thieves and degenerates, it is amazing the foot-hold they have gotten while operating under the guise of racial justice and freedom. . . .

Jordan said that what angers him the most is the fact that the Panthers would use as a guise the issue that is so important to all of us (justice and equality) in an effort to serve their own selfish and—and that so many so-called responsible and well-meaning people would permit themselves to be taken in.”

Then the interview morphed into a significantly different area. Jordan apparently became particularly angry as he described the leaders of the Panthers as “users,” not “pushers” of narcotics. Sergeant Parker of KCPD was present during the interview, and Jordan, becoming furious, told of a narcotics pusher who operated within a block or two of the Green Duck. He said he had provided police information about this man and the police had done nothing. He felt the amount of narcotics traffic in Kansas City was a great public danger. Sergeant Parker made no comment, but acknowledged he was aware of the man Jordan referred to.

Jordan’s strong views on the Panthers apparently interested the Congressional Committee on Internal Security. Robert M. Horner, Chief Investigator of the committee, wrote Jordan on February 27<sup>th</sup>, regretting that the committee could not invite Jordan to come to Washington to testify, but inviting him to submit his views on the Panther Party in writing “for possible inclusion in the hearing record.” About the same time that Horner was writing his letter, Investigator Shaw was interviewing Everett P. O’Neal, prominent businessman and long time friend of Jordan’s. O’Neal called Jordan over to talk to Shaw again. Before Shaw could

mention the possibility of testifying, Jordan said: “You have the wrong man; we will handle our own problems,” and in general showed a reluctance to become further involved with the Committee on Internal Security. O’Neal “gave Jordan hell” and told him if the black community did not speak out the Panthers would take over. Jordan, however, refused any further discussion. He did not submit a written statement of his views on the Black Panthers to the committee.<sup>93</sup>

Jordan had long felt skeptical about how much help he and the black community could expect from the Kansas City Police Department. He probably had no more faith in the work of congressional committees. But by this time he may also have begun to have doubts about his own judgment. James Phillip “Doc” Dearborn had won Jordan’s friendship and trust. Sergeant Lloyd DeGraffenreid, perhaps mindful of Irene Smith’s testimony, later described Dearborn as like a son to Jordan. Dearborn had shown an interest in Freedom as early as 1966. And Freedom found a job for Dearborn’s wife, Rita, in the Jackson County Collector’s office in January, 1970.

But Dearborn had a cruelly sinister streak that Jordan for some time seemed blind to. He was in fact a key figure in a group that began to organize itself in 1968 and eventually came to be labeled the Black Mafia. The leaders of this group were identified as Eugene Richardson, James Phillip (Doc) Dearborn, and Eddie Cox. They saw controlling the narcotics trade in the black community the path to power, the very threat that Jordan feared most. In May, 1970, just a few weeks before Jordan’s murder, federal agents and police made several well-timed raids uncovering extensive evidence of the groups’ trafficking in narcotics. Suddenly the group’s activities became public for all to see.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Interview by Robert A. Shaw, letter from Robert M. Horner to Leon Jordan, February 27, 1970, FBI file, LJC.

<sup>94</sup> *Kansas City Star*, July 31, 1971.

The second Kansas City Police investigation into Jordan's murder uncovered a particularly telling interview of the son of Joe Centimano, who was known by such names as Crazy Joe, or Cokey Joe, but who preferred the title of Mayor of Vine Street. Centimano had a liquor store on 19<sup>th</sup> and Vine, in the heart of the black community, just a block from where Jordan's father once ran his Autumn Leaf Club. It is not certain whether Centimano was a "made" man, a true initiate of the Mafia, but he was close friends with several Mafia members, and more important, he lived the life of a low level Mafioso. He paid off police; he murdered those who crossed him; he fenced stolen property, particularly guns, which included the shotgun that was used to kill Jordan; and he dealt with contraband liquor and narcotics.

He was a close friend of Frank Mazucca, the North end politician, whom Jordan scuffled with in the state legislature in 1965. That incident was considered by many sufficient cause for a hit on Jordan, but higher ups at the time decided against it, particularly after Jordan apologized. But Centimano had many other reasons to resent Jordan and what he was doing. The mayor of Vine Street had a vested interest in resisting Jordan's effort to give the black community political and economic control of its own future.

Centimano's son, Danny, had spent weekends with his father at his liquor store as he was growing up. Danny's mother was divorced from Centimano and had remarried several times. Every Friday afternoon a yellow cab waited for Danny outside Knott elementary school to take him to Joe's Liquor Store. Sometimes Doc Dearborn or Eddie Cox would be in the cab to chaperon young Danny.

Danny was often impressed and fascinated with the fast life he witnessed, the beautiful women, the glitzy cars, the ready money, and often sumptuous good food, but he also was deeply disturbed by the brutal violence. His troubled youth led him into a life of addiction and petty

crime, but the memory of seeing his father, consumed by rage, cold-bloodedly murder another human being weighed soddenly on his soul. He stepped forward during the second Jordan investigation with the encouragement of *Kansas City Star* reporter, Mike McGraw, who had befriended him. After giving the police much information in a long interview, he asked particularly if they were interested in clearing a long unsolved murder. When they expressed interest, he told the story of the death of an unknown man later identified as Richard DeLeon Hill.

Danny remembered that it happened in late November, either 1968 or 1969. Doc, Eddie, and his dad had taken him hunting. They hunted squirrels, rabbits, and ducks, but Doc and Eddie would also scope out small town appliance or jewelry stores for possible robberies. They returned to the store and had homemade squirrel stew to celebrate Danny's thirteenth birthday. Apparently Eddie then left, but Rita, Doc's wife was working at the liquor store. Danny says of Rita, "I was a kid, and she was so beautiful." Late that night just before closing time, 1:30 a.m., a black customer came in. Danny waited on him. He bought Budweiser with a twenty dollar bill. Suddenly Danny's dad grabs his long barreled .38 and his face fills with rage. As Danny is counting out the customer's change, his father charges around the counter and puts his gun to the customer's head. He accuses the mother fucker of stealing from him and the woman across the street. The father orders Danny to get the old coat he wore over his dress suits.

When the man protests frantically he doesn't know what Joe is talking about, Joe responds, "Nigger, shut up! I'm gonna put you in the fucking river. I'm gonna put you where they'll never find you."

Danny is scared. His dad orders Danny to get him a bolt action .410 shotgun from off the safe. He tells Danny and Rita to lock the door behind him and turn out the lights. When he



opens the door and the man starts to blubber, his dad says, “You know, nigger, you run down the street and I’ll shoot you down right in the street.” Then they took him to the Cadillac with Doc driving and Joe in the backseat with the guy, and drove off.

Danny and Rita are left in the dark. Danny says to Rita, “I guess they’re gonna, they’re gonna take him to jail.” Rita said, Dan, “They’re gonna kill that man. Didn’t you hear your dad say. . . .” Rita was near crying.

After about forty-five minutes they returned. His dad ordered Danny to get a wet towel so he could remove the blood from his hands. “Doc has just got this weird look on his face and Rita’s watching him like you know she’s scared.” Dad and Doc took the shotgun apart. “Doc took the bolt and dad took the, the other part of the gun, and they cut the barrel down there on Vine Street, I mean they did, they put the paper down there, cut the barrel, folded it up and kept the shavings, destroyed the blade they cut it with I mean they were very thorough.”

Danny Centimano woke up the next morning and saw a story in the *Kansas City Star* of an unidentified body found under the ASB Bridge. Robbery was ruled out, since \$67 cash was found in the victim’s pockets. The police had no leads until Danny Centimano told them his story 32 years later. The police and Mike McGraw quickly were able to identify the murder victim from the information Danny gave. It was 38 year old Richard DeLeon Hill, an attendant in a nearby parking garage, with an alcohol problem, separated from his family. The body had been found November, 30, 1968. Danny died in February, 2011, but he rested easier having given the Hill family some final information about what happened to the husband and father.<sup>95</sup>

On May 19, 1970, the FBI raided the homes of leaders of what had come to be known as the Black Mafia. The FBI published a full scale investigation of this group a year later. Leon

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<sup>95</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Kansas City Police Investigation into Leon Jordan’s Murder, Interview with Danny Centimano, pp. 194-266, particularly concerned with Hill murder, pp. 252-266, LJC; *Kansas City Star*, July 24, 2011.

Jordan was murdered July 15, 1970. The investigation revealed that Eddie Cox and Doc Dearborn met in Lansing prison in the mid-sixties. When Gene Richardson was released from Leavenworth after serving a one year sentence for violating the Mann Act in January, 1969, Cox recruited Richardson to join him and Dearborn in a bid to take over the narcotics trade and hence most major criminal activity in Kansas City's black community. Cox, originally from Joplin, had a tested IQ of 162, and was considered the brains of the group. Richardson was the putative leader, but all three had their own people talents and independent personalities. Danny Centimano, when asked if there was a hierarchy, replied, "No, each one of em had their own strength."

The FBI report said: "Between 1968 and 1970, 20 people were killed . . . mostly by gunshot. Men and women. There were no hired killers . . . it was done by the principals of the organization." At the height of their operation in January, 1970, "it is estimated these men were taking in approximately, \$100,000 a day. The major source of their income was through narcotics." While there was a second tier of group members, these three kept control within their small group.

When Danny was asked about the relation between these three and his dad, he said, "they had their own thing going on and they ran a lot of things by my dad." He represented the relation between his dad and both Dearborn and Cox as very close. His dad was a little suspicious of Richardson.

Joe Centimano began to worry about the safety of his fiefdom on 19<sup>th</sup> and Vine when the windows of his store were broken out and looting took place during the riot following the death of Martin Luther King. The final straw came just before the FBI raid in May, 1970, when he began to hear there was a mole in the narcotics operation. Walton

Ireland Froniabarger, a second-ranked member, played both sides of the game. Cokey Joe decided to close his place on 19<sup>th</sup> and Vine and move to a store on 55<sup>th</sup> and Troost. Ironically, even as the aging Leon Jordan began to sense that there were strange and terrible forces threatening his political movement so did the aging Mayor of Vine Street.<sup>96</sup>

The 2011 Kansas City Police Investigation in Leon Jordan's murder concluded that Doc Dearborn was primarily responsible for Jordan's death, with Joe Centimano passing along the order for the hit from the mafia who were still protecting their power base in the black community. That raises the question why did the streetwise Jordan come to admit Doc Dearborn, who became a leader in narcotics trafficking while befriending Jordan, but who already had engaged in cold-blooded murder, so closely into his affairs. As he grew older Jordan apparently found it more and more difficult to understand what was going on on the street. After his murder Irene Smith told police that Jordan believed Dearborn would protect him and complained that while Dearborn was in jail his information about what was going on was cut off. When Dearborn was arrested on a burglary charge, May 18, 1970, Jordan interceded with Judge Clymer and requested that an extensive pre-sentence investigation of Dearborn be conducted. Then on May 25<sup>th</sup> the charges were increased to include conspiring to purchase and sell cocaine. Jordan, who was strongly anti-drugs, then told Clymer to withdraw his efforts on behalf of Dearborn. Orchid Jordan reported that Leon was surprised and indignant to learn that Dearborn was involved with narcotics. It may also have been his first serious intimation that he had coddled a viper in his inner circle. Dearborn and his partners were able to raise bail through Jimmy Willis. They were released from jail shortly before Jordan's murder. Danny Centimano

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<sup>96</sup> *Kansas City Star*, July 30, 1971, Danny Centimano quote, 2<sup>nd</sup> Kansas City Police Investigation, p. 204, LJC.

described Willis as a close friend of his father's. Dearborn and Willis had worked closely together in the past.<sup>97</sup>

When their operation was in its heyday, O. G's Lounge was a favorite night spot for Cox, Richardson, and Dearborn. Bruce Watkins met Dearborn there and Ollie Gates, the lounge owner, described Dearborn to him "as a player." In another interview Watkins told police that he had seen Jordan talking with Dearborn on a couple of occasions, but what stuck in his mind was an incident involving Lee Bohannon. "Bohannon was in front of the Green Duck Tavern campaigning. Shortly after he arrived -another police character named Maynard Cooper arrived with three other Negro males and made Bohannon leave." Maynard Cooper, Jimmy Willis and Doc Dearborn were all indicted for Jordan's murder two years after it happened, but when Willis was found innocent, the charges against the others were dropped.

Danny Centimano said that Leonard Hughes was well acquainted with his father. Hughes also became Dearborn's attorney.

Dearborn could be personally persuasive. Jacqui Moore, the daughter of Jordan's longtime friend Chester McAfee, came to know Dearborn after she was married. He gave her a ride home one day and told her he would protect her. He seemed earnest. He looked after her and when she told her husband about his offer of protection and her husband questioned why, Dearborn called and talked to her husband. As far as she was ever able to determine his offer was genuine and carried no price.<sup>98</sup>

Jordan's affair with Irene Smith was sufficiently well known to add to his reputation as a lady's man and probably prompted talk about his relation to Rita Dearborn. Orchid told police what she heard about Rita's employment from Freda Vermont, a former employee at the Green

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<sup>97</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Kansas City Police Investigation, pp.3-5, Judge Clymer interview, p.224; *Kansas City Star*, May 25, 1970.

<sup>98</sup> Watkins interviews, 2<sup>nd</sup> Kansas City Police Investigation, pp.1318 & 248, LJC; author's interview of Jacqui Moore, September 18, 2004.

Duck who had moved on to a good job in the County Collector's office. The police then interviewed Freda Vermont. According to Orchid, Rita was dismissed from her county job because of her possible involvement with Tom Neely, the leader of Freedom's youth group. Rita was pregnant at the time of her employment. Orchid reported that Neely made several phone calls to George Lehr trying to get Rita reinstated. Freda Vermont told police that there was much gossip about how Rita obtained her job, but she said that Rita was dismissed after she was arrested with her husband on the narcotics charge.

Vermont also told of an ominous visit she received from Arkansas Cleaver, a man she considered on the fringe of Freedom's activities and a close associate of Doc Dearborn. She happened to be in the hospital for a heart operation when Rita was placed in her county job. After she returned to work, Cleaver called on her and told her she was talking too much about Dearborn's wife at the Collector's office. She protested that she was not even acquainted with the circumstances of Mrs. Dearborn's employment, and when he learned that she was recovering from a serious heart operation he told her that he had advised Dearborn not to bother her. She insisted that Cleaver did not threaten her, but she seemed to have taken his concern as an implied warning. She advised police she was moving to Houston, Texas, in October.

When the FBI interviewed Orchid about the women in his life in August, Orchid told them that the Musicians Union had a memorial picnic for her husband on the Sunday prior to the interview in a park adjacent to the Jordans' home. Doc Dearborn introduced himself and his wife to her. Later an associate of Dearborn's brought Dearborn's baby girl and placed her in Orchid's lap. He then asked if Orchid knew whose child the little girl was, and she said yes, meaning the Dearborns. But she thought this person intended a different message since he made a point of being seen placing the child in her lap.

Irene Smith said she heard the rumor of Jordan and Rita Dearborn having an affair from another employee at the County Collector's office; however, she added that Jordan "seemed really fond of Mr. Dearborn and she assumed that because of Mr. Jordan's affectionate nature, someone had probably seen him hug or kiss Mrs. Dearborn and made too much of it." Rita Dearborn Jackson later vehemently denied any sexual relation with Jordan, but there had been enough talk to make Doc Dearborn resentful.<sup>99</sup>

In March, 1970 Jordan tried to squelch a story that made it into the press that Freedom might ally itself with the Democratic factions in the coming Democratic primary. Jordan admitted that conversations had taken place and said he would talk to anyone. But he said "It was highly unlikely that Freedom would join forces with the factions which it had been fighting for many years."

However, in early July Freedom made a point of endorsing George W. Lehr, the presiding judge, against the challenge of Dr. Charles Wheeler, plus a slate of candidates for the August primary that according to the *Kansas City Times*, "fall into the pattern of the old-line factional ticket." Was Jordan in these final weeks of his life trying to close Freedom's war with the factions? After Jordan's murder, Bruce Watkins discouraged the Kansas City police from believing the "North Side" might in some way be involved, by telling them that Jordan had switched Freedom's voting strength from the Committee for County Progress to the Regular Democrats who represented the "North Side." He was quite specific. A campaign chest of \$39,000 "was to be split four ways with Jordan and state Rep. William Royster each receiving \$12,000 and \$7,500 going to Alex Presta and Harvey Jones."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> KCPD interviews of Bruce Watkins, July 31, 1970, Judge Lewis Clymer, July 16, 1970, Orchid Jordan, August 7, 1970, Freda Vermont, October 5, 1970, and Irene Smith, July 19, 1970, Jordan Murder Files, KCPD, LJC.

<sup>100</sup> *Kansas City Call*, March 20-26 and July 2-9, 1970; KCPD Interview Bruce Watkins, July 20, 1970, LJC.

In May the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* honored Harold L. Holliday along with seven other legislators for meritorious service. G. Duncan Bailey, publisher of the *Globe-Democrat* stated:

“Harold Holliday is the recognized leader of the 13 black members of the House of Representatives. He has been particularly effective in all matters relating to legislation for the poor and oppressed, black and white. He has become one of the few members of the House, who commands the attention of the entire body when it (*sic*) rises to speak.

“Harold Holliday, a black man who has struggled for his own higher education, is recognized as one of the strongest supporters of education at all levels from grade schools through college and universities for the State of Missouri. Finally, Holliday has won the respect of many members and observers in the House because of his sincere desire for good government without regard to race.”

Gov. and Mrs. Warren Hearnes were guests at the luncheon honoring Holliday and the other representatives.<sup>101</sup>

That July there was another incident, seemingly minor, but an incident that anticipates a political controversy in the investigation that was to follow Jordan’s murder on July 15. Tom Neely headed Freedom’s youth group. In May he very publicly resigned his position in district attorney, Joe Teasdale’s office:

Dear Mr. Teasdale:

Last Friday afternoon when you came into my office in the “Wife and Child Support Division” you told me that you would fire me and others in your office if Freedom, Incorporated does not support you for Western Judge.

When I got back from Viet-Nam, I appreciated the opportunity to go to work in your office. It gave me a chance to do the type of work I like and to go back to school.

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<sup>101</sup> *Kansas City Call*, June 19-25, 1970.

Now I see that it doesn't matter how good a job I do. You are only interested in political support. If you get it those of us who belong to Freedom can keep our jobs—if not we will all be fired.

My wife and I have talked this over and have decided that we don't want the job on your terms. It is hard to quit when you are expecting another child and still have a couple more years in school but I know that there is no such thing as job security in your office.

There are people who work for you who need their jobs even more than I do. I just hope that by making my resignation public I can keep you from firing all of the people in your office who happen to belong to Freedom. They are caught in the middle. Mr. Teasdale, if you want support in the black community you should campaign for it, rather than threaten your staff.

Thomas J. Neely

Teasdale denied making these statements to Neely.

Irene Smith later told FBI agents that she and Jordan went out for a drive on Monday evening, July 13<sup>th</sup>. When they returned to the Green Duck Jordan went to the second floor and cut a political tape recording critical of Joe Teasdale. It was to be played in response to dialing “Dial Truth,” or UN 1-2222. After Jordan's murder on July 15th, Joe Teasdale would quickly charge two men with the killing against the advice of many in the black community. After a few days the charges would unravel, and Orchid Jordan and other leaders of Freedom would sharply criticize Teasdale for delaying and confusing the effective investigation of Jordan's murder. Neely's charge and Jordan's telephone tape suggest that Teasdale's problems with Freedom began before Jordan's murder.<sup>102</sup>

Just a week before Jordan's murder the *Kansas City Times* decided that Lee Bohannon's challenge to Jordan's Democratic candidacy as state representative in the August primary created

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<sup>102</sup> *Kansas City Call*, May 8-14, 1970; ?



a convenient opportunity to pose the dramatic question: “Just who are the real leaders of Kansas City’s black population?” The story opens with photos of Leon Jordan and Lee Bohannon. The article plays up the obvious contrasts between the dashiki-clad, twenty-six year old black militant and the seasoned, conventionally suited, sixty-five year old President of Freedom, Inc. But the article concludes: “Tangled within the intricate, paradoxical web of the contest is the irony that the two opponents are closer on most issues than either realizes.” Jordan probably understood that quite well, maybe Bohannon did as well, so the reporter’s statement seems questionable, but it made good copy.

Jordan seemed assured throughout the interview that Bohannon was no real threat to his political seat. He mocked the contrasts the reporter tried to dramatize. “Maybe I don’t wear a dashiki. . .but then I lived eight years in Africa, so I guess I don’t have to.” Bohannon insisted his running was not a vendetta against either Jordan or Freedom. He praised Freedom for the caliber of its members. But he added, “If Leon had run a couple of young cats in his organization, I never would have run against him.”

To which Jordan countered by agreeing that it was time for young people to take hold. “But you’ve got to take hold of something. We have young people in Freedom. Lots of them. And they’re sharp, let me tell you.” He insisted he would like to see a man with Bohannon’s energy “come through Freedom. But he won’t be able to talk his way through. He’ll have to work his way through. And he’ll have to climb over the backs of some awfully sharp youngsters.” Jordan added that this would likely be the last time he ran for his seat.

To Bohannon’s claim to represent the black man on the street, Jordan pointed to the order and respect he maintained at the Green Duck. “I’ve got some awfully tough guys working for me down there. They don’t let anybody get picked on. If two guys are determined to fight, they

know the routine. They come to me, I shake them down for weapons, and then they go out back and beat hell out of each other. They know when they come back in they'll each have a drink waiting for them—on the house.” That tough-love policy seems reflective of Jordan’s many years of police work as well as his experience managing the Green Duck.

At the end of the article, Jordan admitted to feeling a few aches and pains of age, noting that the time was not distant for him to step aside as President of Freedom, Inc. But, “When a young man takes over, we’ll pick the man—not the white community.”<sup>103</sup>

Phil Jay Cohen regularly supplied Jordan with supplies of food and drink he sold at the Green Duck. Cohen told police that he talked with Jordan about an hour on July 6<sup>th</sup>, when Jordan picked up his usual order. He said Jordan told him, “Things are just crazy,” and he talked about sealing up his building. Cohen thought he was going either to board or brick up the windows of his tavern. In fact, Jordan did just that. On Monday, July 15<sup>th</sup>, Jordan again stopped by and talked about “his nephew, Richard Tolbert.” Tolbert was not in fact his nephew, but many of Leon’s young associates habitually referred to him as “Uncle Leon.” Jordan told Cohen that this would be his last year heading Freedom, and that “he hoped Richard would slip into his shoes.”

David Gilbert Hall was Jordan’s accountant. He told the police that Jordan was troubled by a \$220 monthly cash shortage that had begun to appear early in the year in the Green Duck’s accounts and that he could not account for. He asked Hall to conduct an audit that then showed the Green Duck operated at an annual loss of \$2,000. Hall thought this was odd since he considered Jordan an excellent businessman. Hall indicated that a group of attorneys had made

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<sup>103</sup> *Kansas City Times*, July 8, 9, 1970. It is notable that Cliff Warren, Jordan’s close partner on the police force, retired from the KCPD and assumed a position as manager of the new security department of Kansas City’s School District in January, 1969. He would suffer a serious heart attack the following year, a month before Jordan’s murder.

an offer to buy the Green Duck. Hall did not name the attorneys, but Leonard Hughes told police that he had discussed buying the Green Duck with Jordan about six months prior to his death. Hughes said Jordan was tired of the business and was asking \$40,000 for his tavern. When Hughes looked at the books he saw the Green Duck earning an average \$2500 per week. These different accounts of the profitability of the Green Duck do not add up, but it is clear that just before he was murdered Jordan was looking for a way out of both politics and the Green Duck.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Interviews with Phil Jay Cohen, July 15, 1970, p. 92; David Gilbert Hall, July 18 & 21, 1970, pp. 553, 554, & 855, and with Leonard Hughes, July 22, 1970, p. 994, KCPD file, LJC.