



## “We Know Who They Are”

**Date:** 1965-03-26  
**Conversation:** WH6503-13-7162  
**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson  
**Participant:** J. Edgar Hoover  
**Start Time:** 08:10  
**Duration:** 03:26  
**Place:** Mansion

SCENE SETTER: On 25 March 1965, after the march from Selma to Montgomery, a group of Ku Klux Klan members murdered civil rights activists Viola Liuzzo and Leroy Moton in their car as the pair traveled along U.S. Highway 80. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) director J. Edgar Hoover reported to President Johnson on the progress of the investigation and revealed the involvement of an FBI informant.

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**J. Edgar Hoover:** —to have one of our men [Gary Thomas Rowe Jr.] in the car. Fortunately, he, of course, had no gun and did no shooting. But he has identified the two men who had guns and who fired guns. I think there were about 10 or 12 shots fired into the car in which this woman [Viola Liuzzo] was.

**President Johnson:** Six-shooter or shotgun?

**Hoover:** I think they're revolvers.

**President Johnson:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

**Hoover:** And they discussed after it was over that if the woman died, that they were going to throw the guns into the blast furnace where they work, in those steel mills down there. And that's what we're laying for now, to head off these individuals when they come to work this morning and shake them down. If we are lucky enough to find a gun on them, that'll be the big break in the case.

**President Johnson:** Mm-hmm.

**Hoover:** But in any event, whether we find the gun or not, we know who they are, and then we'll bring them in and shake them down in interrogation.

**President Johnson:** Mm-hmm. Thank you so much, Edgar. As usual, you're right on top of it. And this is 8:15 now, and you call me and make them get through to me. I checked last night about one [o'clock], and they gave me the full information, and I've just heard a little while ago about this fellow [Anthony James "Jim" Liuzzo Sr.] calling me. I didn't know anything about it, and I think I'll call him. [*Hoover acknowledges.*] You see no reason why I shouldn't, do you?

**Hoover:** I see no reason why you shouldn't. As the radio said, he was very angry, because they wouldn't put him through to you last night. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] I don't see any reason why he shouldn't have been expecting to be put through. He could've called the Department of Justice or the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], anyone there. I don't know whether anybody's on duty in the Department [of Justice] at night, but we're on duty 24 hours a day there.

**President Johnson:** Yes. I talked there several times. Agent Swanson was very helpful to me.

**Hoover:** Yes, yeah. There—We always have one or two men on duty all the time so that if anything does break, they can . . . at once alert me, and I was alerted during the morning to make certain. I've talked with [Joseph A.] Sullivan, who was inspector in charge down there, to immediately move in and take hold of this case. He's been on the march from Selma to Montgomery. But this thing has now broken, and he is over there by this time and has taken charge of it. We've got the informant in the office, and we're talking to him, because he's scared to death, naturally, because he fears for his life. But—

**President Johnson:** What is an infiltrator and a[n] informant? You hire someone, and they join the [Ku Klux] Klan, and keep . . . ?

**Hoover:** We generally go to someone who is in the Klan and persuade him to work for the government. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] We pay him for it. Sometimes they demand a pretty high price, and other times they don't. Now, for instance, in those three bodies we found in Mississippi, we had to pay 30,000 dollars for that.

*Five seconds excised by the National Archives and Records Administration as classified information.*

**Hoover:** —and who gave us the identity . . . and give us the place where the bodies were found. And then after we found the bodies, we ascertained the identity of one man and from him, we broke him down, and he gave us the identities of the other 19, two of whom confessed.

**President Johnson:** Mm-hmm.

**Hoover:** Now, this man that we have now, this informant—he's not a regular agent of the Bureau—but he's one of these people that we put in just like we do into the Communist Party, and so forth, so they'll keep us informed. And fortunately, he happened to be in on this thing last night, otherwise we'd be looking for a needle in a haystack.

**President Johnson:** Mm-hmm. That's wonderful, Edgar. Thank you so much.

**Hoover:** All right indeed, Mr. President.

**President Johnson:** Fine. Bye.

**Hoover:** Thank you.

*End of excerpt.*

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