

MEMORANDUM TO: Commission on Community Relations

August 25, 1966

FROM: Field Division

SUBJECT: Disturbance in the Kercheval area

BACKGROUND:

For the past 2½ years the Northern Student Movement has been attempting to organize an indigenous civil rights organization among the adults and teenagers on the east side.

Early in 1964 several members of NSM were arrested along with several members of the Barber Community Student Movement (an NSM affiliate) because of an altercation with police arising out of the demonstration in front of a store on Mack.

In May of 1965 we reported to the Commission that NSM had organized the Adult Community Movement for Equality (ACME) with headquarters on Kercheval. At that time, we reported to the Commission that a member of ACME had been arrested for driving without a license and that ACME members were arrested for fighting with police officers when they went to the Jefferson station to inquire about their friend. The ACME members alleged that at a subsequent demonstration at the Jefferson station, the police did not adequately protect them from harassment by a group of whites.

In May of 1966 we reported to the Commission that ACME had been changed to the Afro-American Youth Movement and that a member of the organization reported to police that he had been shot and wounded by white youths in a passing car. The youth later admitted to police officers and a reporter that he was shot in the basement of the AAYM office. At that time, the AAYM distributed a flyer in the Kercheval area alleging continued harassment of the organization and saying, "A black youth has finally been shot in broad daylight by whites." The leaflet said further, "Since the police department is not going to protect us from these white racists, then we must use whatever means necessary to protect ourselves and our community."

INITIAL INCIDENT:

On August 9 at approximately 8:20, according to the police report, the Fifth Precinct cruiser, manned by four white officers, approached approximately seven Negro men on Kercheval near the office of the Afro-American Youth Movement at 9211 Kercheval. The officers asked the men to disperse; and when three of them, Wilbert McClendon, James Roberts and Clarence Reed, did not, the officers started to issue them loitering tickets. When they refused to identify themselves, the officers decided to take them into the precinct station where the tickets would be issued in the presence of the desk lieutenant. (This is understood to be a fairly usual procedure.)

Because there was not room in their cruiser to convey the three men, the officers called for assistance. Two Tactical Mobile Unit cars responded and found a crowd of about 50 milling around the cruiser. When one of the cruiser officers notified James Roberts that he was under arrest and tried to put him in the car, a scuffle broke out in which there was much pushing and shoving and in which Clarence Reed allegedly slashed at one of the officers with a knife. Mr. Reed was subdued and in the process received two minor lacerations.

Police on the scene report that members of the crowd were shouting, "This is the start of the riot." "Whitey is going to kill us.", and things of that nature. One of the rumors found circulating in that community later in the evening was that the police had killed a man. Another rumor they found with even wider circulation was that police had broken the arms of either one or two Negro men. There was not any substance to either of these rumors, as the only citizen that was hurt was Clarence Reed who was treated for superficial cuts at Receiving Hospital and was released within two hours. No other citizen received injuries.

The three men claim that they were standing apart from the other group that was on the sidewalk and that they were not blocking the sidewalk or violating the law. They claim that the police officers were abusive and were out to precipitate an incident which would justify their arrest.

THE DISTURBANCE SPREADS:

While police were arresting the three men, the crowd grew to approximately 100 and bottles were thrown at police officers. The crowd was finally dispersed from this point by Tactical Mobile Unit and precinct officers and re-grouped at locations over a half-mile stretch of Kercheval where rocks and bottles were thrown at police and private cars.

A white civilian motorist got out of his car to inspect damage inflicted by a rock and was beaten by Negro youths.

From about 10 p.m. until 3:30 in the morning, there was periodic reports of crowd gatherings and rock throwing on Jefferson, Kercheval, Mack and Warren. There were approximately 20 windows broken, but no verified report of looting. One fire bomb was thrown but did no damage. There were no known cases of arson in the area, although, there were many false fire alarms. There were also several reports of gunfire there, but none were verified except for a minor gunshot wound of a young white man at about 10 o'clock Wednesday morning near Jefferson.

Two Negro men and a Negro woman were arrested for siphoning gasoline from an automobile into bottles for the apparent purpose of making bombs. While one reporter claims that he was informed that one of these was from Cleveland, police records show that all were Detroit residents. At approximately 3:30, police arrested four Negro men on a tip that they were carrying concealed weapons. They had just left the office of the Afro-American Youth Movement, and their car was found to contain rifles, pistols and bricks.

WEDNESDAY:

On Wednesday, August 10, people gathered in small groups on Kercheval in the early evening, but there were no incidents until about 8:30 when some windows were broken in business places and a firebomb was thrown into a drug store on Kercheval at Parkview. A crowd gathered but was easily dispersed by police so that the fire engines could put out the fire. When the fire engines left, groups of teenagers and young adults, clustered mainly around the corner of Kercheval and Pennsylvania, threw rocks and bottles for about 1½ hours. Attorney Milton Henry, who is providing legal counsel for some of those arrested for inciting to riot, and some clergy and block

club leaders circulated among the crowd urging people to go home peacefully, a continuous rain also tended to keep people off the streets.

There were two other firebombs thrown Wednesday night but neither did any damage. A young Negro man was shot in the shoulder while walking in the area; he said the gunman was one of three white youths in a passing car. Police are looking for the gunman but haven't made any arrests as yet. Seven white youths were arrested for possession of firebombs at Drexel and Mack. Fifty Negroes, including 12 juveniles, were arrested in the Kercheval area.

THURSDAY:

On Thursday night there were no crowd gatherings, but three firebombs were thrown, two of which did minor damage, and two abandoned cars were set afire. Fifteen persons were arrested, including a man who was arrested in the incident Tuesday night that touched off the disturbances. He was arrested when two youths, arrested with a firebomb in their hands, said they got it from him and a member of the Afro-American Youth Movement. On Thursday night, clergy and block club leaders had organized themselves into a "peace patrol" that circulated through the neighborhood urging people to stay off the streets.

FRIDAY:

On Friday night there were no crowd gatherings, but about six Negro youths tossed a firebomb into a residence causing minor damage. Two white men were seen firing a shot into a business place, and four white youths were arrested for shouting obscenities at a police officer. The "peace patrol" again circulated in the area to urge peace.

SUMMARY OF ARRESTS:

In the Kercheval area, police made a total of 121 arrests involving 117 persons, 98 of whom were Negro. The median age of those arrested was 19. Over the four day period, police received about 50 reports of property damage, the vast majority of which consisted of broken windows. The only looting consisted of one or two instances when someone took something through a broken window, and this was negligible. The largest crowds were on Kercheval on the first night, but we have reports from people who came through Kercheval at the time and saw many spectators and many police but no violence.

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES:

In the Field Division's conversations with people in the area, two distinct bodies of opinion were found. One opinion, held mostly by homeowners and block club leaders--Negro and white--was that police should be more vigorous in ridding Kercheval of hoodlums that make the street unsafe to walk. The other opinion, held mostly by younger Negroes, is that police are continually harassing people who have no place to meet their friends but the street corners. A door-to-door survey of about 300 residents conducted in the area by representatives of the Total Action Against

Poverty (TAAP) Center, found that a majority of the people thought that police were the major cause of tension in the area but that a third of those interviewed said lack of recreational programs was the major cause.

OTHER INCIDENTS:

In other incidents that may have been inspired by the Kercheval disturbance, about seven windows were broken in the Mack and Riopelle area, and two Negro youths were arrested in the 12th and Blaine area for breaking into a business place and carrying away merchandise. At Cloverlawn and Pilgrim, a Negro youth was arrested for urging a small group not to disperse when ordered to do so by an officer.

NEGRO FAMILY HARASSED WEST OF SOUTHFIELD NEAR JOY ROAD:

On August 24 the staff was notified by the police that a Negro family had moved into a house in the area west of Southfield and south of Joy Road and that garbage had been thrown into their yard and a cross burned on their lawn. The police are giving the house special attention.

The family reported to us that they purchased the house from the Federal Housing Administration from a white real estate broker and that they had moved in August 20. They report that several of their neighbors have been friendly and helped to extinguish the burning cross.

TAAP IN SERVICE TRAINING SEMINAR:

From Monday, August 15, through Friday, August 19, staff conducted an In-Service Training Program for Total Action Against Poverty (T. A. A. P.) personnel. Fifty TAAP personnel attended, most of whom were newly employed Target Area residents, from all four community action centers. Staff discussed the purpose and program of CCR and attempted to develop means of furthering cooperation and communication between TAAP and CCR. Response to the seminar was excellent. The ten month liaison with TAAP already developed proved itself most valuable in the recent cooperative effort in response to the Kercheval incident.