

MEMORANDUM

Civil Rights Commission
Division Community Services

TO: Miss Wilma Ray, Asst. Director
CC: Dr. Burt Levy, Director
Mr. Thomas Johnson
FROM: Mrs. Vivian Pope, Detroit West

DATE April 1, 1969

SUBJECT: Republic of New Africa Shootings

On April 1, 1969, I went to the New Bethel Baptist Church and discussed the shooting of March 29, with Mr. Ralph Williams, telephone number 931-3112 home, 894-5788, church. Mr. Williams is the janitor for the church and was present when police officers made their entry at the church on Saturday night. Mr. Williams told me that when police officers first arrived he was in the lobby because the meeting of the Republic of New Africa was breaking up at that point and he was standing near the doors in the outer lobby.

Mr. Williams told me that on that night, at approximately 11:30 p.m., he actually saw the policemen get out of the car, go up to the building and fire into the building. Mr. Williams is adamant in stating that prior to the officers arrival, there had been no shots fired from inside New Bethel Church. He further elaborated that when the officers fired into the building, there were between 25 and 30 people in the lobby who were in the process of disbursing for the night. Mr. Williams showed me the door and showed me the steel bar on the door which he felt reflected at least one bullet from hitting the person who had been standing at the door. This outer door had the metal completely riddled with what appeared to be bullet shots.

Mr. Williams is quite articulate and showed me the direction in which the bullets had to have come from the location of the bullet holes. Incidentally, in the church proper, which is right behind the lobby, there was no glass broken. Mr. Williams pointed out that if indeed shots had been fired from within the church, due to the two narrow aiseways there would have to have been broken glass or bullet shots in the rear of the auditorium. From my examination of the area, it did indeed appear that all of the shots had been fired into the church rather than in the opposite direction.

Mr. Williams told me that there were women and children who were screaming and completely hysterical trying to get away from the shots. He also said that the white policemen continually used racially derogatory epithets. Examples given were, when policemen had Mr. Williams against the wall, with his hands in the air, and said to him "all right you black m.....f....., move and I'll blow your brains out." Another example given by Mr. Williams was when some of the persons were on the floor and white policemen leveled guns at them and said "move Nigger and I'll blow your brains out."

*New Bethel
Incident
papers*

In addition to this, Mr. Williams stated that approximately four persons were shot by policemen and in one incident a young adult male was following instructions walking out with his hands over his head, but walking slowly because of the congestion when a policeman deliberately shot him in the side for moving too slowly.

Mr. Williams was particularly disgusted over the fact that practically all of the doors of the church were shot open by police if they were locked. Mr. Williams said that this was unnecessary in view of the fact that he, the janitor, was present and would have gladly opened the doors if requested. Mr. Williams was also quite upset regarding the role of black policemen who were present. He said they saw and heard everything and yet remained completely passive.

Rev. C. L. Franklin's telephone number is TY 7-1710. Mr. Williams kept saying that he knows that had this been a white church, there would not have been all of this destruction and lack of concern for the safety of all of the persons present.

VP:tjw