

May 14, 1968

TO: Richard V. Marks

FROM: Fred Linsell

SUBJECT: Observations of Cobo Hall  
Police Action on Poor Peoples'  
Caravan Members

At approximately 8:30 or 8:40 P. M., Monday, May 13, 1968, as I walked with my wife toward the main, east ground level, entrance to Cobo Hall from the area of the "Indian With Canoe Fountain" I observed a large white four-door Oldsmobile sedan parked about a foot from the curb. Near and surrounding the car were several Poor People's Caravan members identified by their shirts and jackets as Milwaukee NAACP members. Standing and talking among these persons was Father Groppi of Milwaukee. Also in the immediate area of the car were four or five uniformed police officers, a couple of whose caps indicated rather high rank. I soon noticed that the policemen were requiring that the car be removed from the area and that the NAACP members were not agreeing with its removal. I learned much later that the car had a faulty battery and could not move under its own power! When the police officers insisted that the car be moved, a gathering group of approximately 40 Milwaukee NAACP members jumped on the car, sitting on its hood, top, and back calling "surround the car" and singing and clapping good-naturedly. Their mood was just "matter-of-fact", direct, and spirited. I heard one Milwaukee NAACP member call in reply in a kind of public response to a police officer, "get Rev. Abernathy on the phone"! We will talk to Rev. Abernathy"!

Within moments I observed an estimated 20 mounted policemen on horses swiftly converging on the car, converging on it from both the north and the south ends of the driveway; the mounted officers with nightsticks drawn and charging the vehicle covered with the approximately 40 individuals who had hopped on it minutes before. As the mounted police approached the vehicle with undiminished speed, which I would describe as a gallop, I drew my wife away from the confrontation and into the main Cobo Hall vestibule. At this time, responding to the direction of a NAACP leader, those 40 persons perched atop the car slid, and slipped, and jumped off of it in the direction of the vestibule doors. Next, I heard and saw the mounted police, covering the sidewalk and the driveway, pushing and crashing into the 40 demonstrators who now were walking, running, or who had fallen quickly toward the vestibule doors in their attempt to flee the horses and nightsticks.

Once in the vestibule with its six or eight doors, these fleeing individuals were met by policemen on foot inside the building who were rushing from several directions and who were unbelievably pushing the young blacks out of the building at the very same time that the mounted police were pushing them into the building! This led to the chasing and trampling of the blacks indiscriminately in the vestibule area and up and down the main hallway! I noticed at least four different instances of groups of police officers, six or eight to a group, bent over a fallen or grabbed



black person, sometimes appearing to be rolling him over while roughing him up. During this encounter, my wife and I were within ten feet of 20 or 30 young blacks being pursued by an estimated 50 or more officers on foot besides the 20 or so mounted police outdoors. I pointed out to my wife that, although every black person in the entire foyer area was being pursued at this time by police officers (that is, indiscriminately and without any reference to even alleged wrongdoing), we as the only white people went entirely unnoticed by the police! However, not one black person eluded police orders, pushing, shoving, or manhandling!

At about this time, I saw a young white woman, a caravan member, hurry onto the scene bent over holding her stomach, cursing and hurling verbal expletives against her treatment by the police. By now the crowd in the hallway was growing larger and the scuffling and manhandling was subsiding, and I noticed one tall black man hurrying to the first aid station with a badly bloodied head. As word spread through the crowd of more bodily injuries to persons inflicted by the police, I saw a number of victims being led to the Hall B first aid station. My wife and I joined the growing crowd in Hall B which for a time was reportedly sealed off and which became a temporary forum for the 500 or 600 caravan members. As the wounds of their injured were nursed, they arranged to leave by bus for New Bethel Baptist Church, Linwood and Philadelphia, Detroit, to meet separately as a caravan body and to consider next steps.

In conclusion, I wish to record my opinion that this was a totally unjustified use of force by the police, resulting in massive and serious personal injuries in meeting a routine and certainly not-unjustified situation. A further measure of the real need or lack of need to move the car can be indicated by finding out how long it was before the car was finally moved after the melee was over! Another CCR staff member saw the same car was still there at 11:00 P.M.! I further wish it recorded that this eyewitness saw not even one instance of any-black or white caravan member committing any violence; all the violence was by the police!

FL:vt