

August 24, 1966

MEMORANDUM: For Commission Information and Action

No. 31

FROM: Richard V. Marks

SUBJECT: Commission Response to Community Issues Focused by Incident on East Side, August 9

On August 19, along with the notice of the meeting we enclosed reprints of two articles designed to place into perspective the issue of ghetto slum riots and the role of "extremist" community organizations in stimulating riot response. It is the purpose of this memorandum to briefly assert:

- (1) the role of the Community Relations as it dealt with the specifics of the incident at Kercheval and Pennsylvania which began at 8:20 p.m. Tuesday, August 9,
- (2) the subsequent community developments flowing from that incident, and
- (3) recommendation as to the Commission's role in dealing with the issues which have been focused, along with generalized program responsibilities.

I. The Events Related to the Incident

Once an incident of major proportions has occurred, it is the responsibility of a community relations commission:

- (1) to see that proper and effective policing takes place so that such violence as has occurred is brought under control,
- (2) to insure that the mass media treatment of the incident and its further development in no way distorts the incident either for those persons who are participants or those persons who, while untouched, may, nevertheless, react and respond to the incident,
- (3) to maintain the effective community leadership communication and trust which is essential to the law and order consensus which must be maintained and mobilized.

On Tuesday, August 9, three members of our staff went to the scene of the incident and maintained continuous communication from the area and the police precinct. The Director made initial contact with the wire services, raised immediate questions with United Press International (UPI) for its distorted and inflammatory treatment of the incident. He later met with the Commissioner and Police officials who were responding to (a) the gravity of the initial incident involving the Afro-American Youth Group, (b) the response of persons who had witnessed the initial arrest, and (c) those who later were removing firearms from the AAY offices at 9211 Kercheval.

While our staff had made contact the previous night with leadership of this youth group at its headquarters, it was not until the following morning of August 10 that we were able to meet with them personally to discuss their views of the initial incident and the community response. Later we made efforts to

interview persons in the neighborhood who had witnessed more fully and completely the events and to secure from them some evaluation of the community setting. During the morning, individual meetings were held with newspaper officials with a view toward getting factual, complete, but unemotional coverage of the events. At 3:00 a joint meeting of the Commission on Community Relations was held with the Coordinating Council and general religious, Negro and Civil rights and community leadership to set forth the facts as we knew them concerning the incident and some of the forces involved as well as to discuss the issues and to suggest a course of action. Following that meeting on Wednesday, August 10, which was chaired by Commission Chairman Edward Cushman, a meeting was held with Mayor Cavanagh to discuss three concerns: (1) the issuance by the Mayor of a statement, (2) additional steps to assure responsible newspaper treatment, and (3) the negative community leadership response to the "saturation policing" evident in the area.

At midnight this latter question was again discussed directly with the Police Commissioner and he agreed to review the police approach during the daylight hours on Thursday, August 11. Thursday morning he notified us that while the same number of officers would be on the street, they would be riding two in a car and not four in a car until 6:00 in the evening.

On Thursday morning, further staff evaluation of the events in the neighborhood were taking place and a meeting of indigenous leaders was planned for 6:00 at Saunders Memorial A.M.E. Church. This meeting was to include such persons as the ministers of the area, block club representatives, professional workers in settlement houses as well as in the TAAP Program, voluntary leadership in the Poverty Program as well as in the Precinct's police-community relations organizations, and many others that word of mouth would convene. It was agreed that the Commission staff would be present along with three representatives of our Commission's Police-Community Relations Subcommittee, Rev. Allen, Mr. Szymanski, and Rev. Sheehan. The objective of the meeting was (a) to set up effective "rumor control" machinery which our staff could link or coordinate with and (b) to develop additional machinery for responding to any of the known issues of the community.

The response of the meeting indicated very clearly extensive support for the work of the Police Department and a readiness to accept some responsibility for encouraging young people and adults to get off the streets. Accordingly, in the evening a "Peace Patrol" was formed (see attached articles). Our staff helped in the formation of this effort and in keeping it related to the Police precinct so that there would be no confusion on the streets. At midnight when all street activity had ended, our staff met with the Peace Patrol to evaluate the events and developments during their tour of duty. They agreed that TAAP would do neighborhood surveys on Friday morning and that they would walk as patrol again on Friday night. While there has been some misunderstanding of this activity, people have felt that it should have been more clearly keyed in to the Police Department. Our staff was sensitive that we do not duplicate in any way with responsibilities of Police officers and that we fully utilize the identity with the community as a means of building trust and confidence.

By Friday evening, August 12, the Police had begun to faze out their mobilization and by Saturday, the matter was substantially viewed by all concerned as a major incident, but over.

While this report highlights the function and role of the Commission staff in the events that followed, we are not in any way minimizing in part the confusion

and in other part the helpfulness which was generated as our community sought to come to grips with the crisis that it faced. The Police Department acted independently and unilaterally convening some ministerial leadership on August 10. Flowing from that meeting, a second meeting was held at 2:00 on Wednesday at Macedonia Baptist Church, without coordination with the meeting that the Commission was itself at that time also convening. Similarly the CCEO also took independent and unilateral action in holding a meeting with the mass media, particularly radio representatives, to express concerns with the dangers of the inflammatory treatment of the incident. While these events led to some confusion, they all, nevertheless, contributed to an appropriate community response. Similarly on Thursday, when community representatives approached Commissioner Girardin concerning the amount of police manpower on the streets and their belief that it was itself provocative and unnecessary, this was matched by other public statements of groups in the area asking that the level of police services be maintained for the community.

In the afternoon on Friday, representatives of the Afro-American Youth Movement called a press conference objecting to what were described as "insinuations" that one person or organization was responsible for the incidents. Alvin Harrison, the spokesman is quoted as saying "The police department instigated them" and the community response was described as "a rebellion by the black community against an oppressive situation." Harrison is reported to have said that he does not condone violence, but Negroes have an obligation to protect themselves from the Police, and riots do bring aid to the Negro ghetto (see attached Saturday FREE PRESS article).

Over the weekend, on Sunday, August 14, the FREE PRESS and the NEWS (see attached articles) attempted to assess what had transpired during the three nights of most obvious community reaction and danger. As the FREE PRESS said "There is no denying that Detroit experienced a sharp, violent, and potentially explosive disturbance. It didn't explode, and that too is significant." The sharpest focus, however, of the three nights remained on the group known as the Afro-American Youth Movement and those persons identifiable with their organization who were arrested in conjunction with the major, most dangerous events of each of the three nights. By Friday, August 19, a group known as the Citizens for Fair Law Enforcement had taken a newspaper advertisement to state their side of the case and held a public meeting to discuss the Kercheval incident. About 200 persons attended.

II. Subsequent Community Development

As unscientific as the TAAP survey among the residents in the Kercheval-Pennsylvania area of Friday morning, August 12, was it, nevertheless, points clearly to the essence of genuine problems in that geographic area as well as in other aspects of our common community life. And as relieved as all of us must have been that no major injury to persons or destruction to property occurred, we all acknowledge that the potential did and still does exist. The fact that we all deplore violence is no assurance that there are not those in our community (as we have witnessed in other communities) would engage in it.

The organized community reaction to the incident has not focused on the four men charged with inciting to riot. To quote from an editorial in the August 20 issue of the MICHIGAN CHRONICLE under the heading "THIS IS AN INDICTMENT OF THE MAYOR, POLICE, CCR, TAP AND SOCIETY," I want to quote four paragraphs suggesting their editorial view that appeared on the front page along with headlines

"NEGRO LEADERS TO ACT," sub-headlines, "Meet to Outline Program for Eastside Area," and "Demand 'Crash' Program."

The real criminals are not the four youths who are accused of 'inciting a riot,' but the Mayor, the CCR, the Police, exploiting shopkeepers, biased teachers, the white papers which did not tell it like it was to the white community the poverty program officials who didn't set up a program in the Kercheval area, which they acknowledge as one of the worst in the city and who established the nearest community action center miles from there, and members of the Negro middle-class who want no part of their brothers' jammed into the ghettos.

The city rests peacefully tonight. The 'agitators' are caught, and Detroit can go back to its 'excellent race relations.' Or can it?

Read the stories in this issue of the people on the street, who were hoping a full-scale riot would break out 'so we can raise enough hell so they'll change things,' who hate the police and explain why, who 'dig' Al Harrison. They don't dig anybody else. Who else really tried to dig them and listen to them?

Arresting Al Harrison hasn't solved anything. The ghetto has learned from the experience and is bitter that their point didn't get across this time -- or did it? If not, what will it take?

This Negro community leadership formed as an Ad Hoc Committee for Community Peace and following several preparatory meetings scheduled a meeting with Mayor Cavanagh for Thursday morning, August 18. The Chairman of the group was Rev. Roy A. Allen. Four presentations were made: Robert Tindal of the NAACP spoke on the need for a crash program in the area of police-community relations; Arthur Johnson, State Civil Rights Commission, spoke of a need for a crash program in the area of equal employment opportunity; Rev. Charles Butler, New Calvary Baptist Church, spoke of a need for a crash program to deal with the issues of the ghetto housing and slum living; and Ernest Brown, Michigan Consolidated Gas Company, spoke on immediate steps that need to be taken to assure equal educational opportunity and recreation. Each of these men presented well worked-out statements of specific issues and goals which they believe appropriate as actions for our community. They asked the Mayor to undertake leadership in achieving these goals in each of the areas. The Mayor agreed that it was his proper role and responsibility, and without implying any defensiveness, cited the record of his and City Government's efforts to move decisively forward in achieving full citizenship rights and the conditions of equal opportunity. All present agreed that there is more to be done and that significant efforts must be initiated now.

III. The Commission's Role

The Commission on Community Relations has the crucial role of assuming responsibility for the development of priorities and effective program response for the achievement of the specific goals of equal opportunity, both as we would define them and as cited by the Negro community leadership that met with Mayor Cavanagh. These goals should be achieved simultaneously, if possible by working on every front simultaneously. These goals should be achieved in sequence, if some problems are more resistant to solution than others. The issues laid

before the Mayor are in fact those issues on which the work of the Commission is premised. Any less than a full commitment to the achievement of community change will indict us in the eyes of the community as being too little and too late to deal with the next or subsequent crisis which this community will yet face. The demands of Negro community leadership is for action. The demands present precisely the agenda for civil rights and community relations efforts in this community.

The Community Relations Commission, which has added four new staff members in its current budget, must assess its ability to initiate change or carry out and police those programs which are directed at remedying long-standing inequities. Our Commission structure is appropriate to the challenge laid down. We have effective operating committees in the areas of POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS, HOUSING, EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, and HOSPITALS.

In the area of POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS, the agenda for the Commission's subcommittee (composed of Rev. Allen, Father Sheehan, Mr. Szymanski, and Mr. Winkelman) is precisely the same as that of the community group that met with the Mayor. Our dialogue has been directly between the Committee and the Police Commissioner. The record shows continuous results flowing from the orderly discussion of issues with Commissioner Girardin. At a recent meeting of the Committee, the subject of community representation was discussed and the decision made to include organizational and community representatives in these discussions. The decision was premised on the belief that community leadership must know the issues being confronted and the substance of these discussions. Without the involvement and knowledge of community leadership, government's efforts to build in orderly change go almost unnoticed. The Commission Committee and community leadership recognized the key issues at this point as being (1) recruitment, (2) total integration, (3) promotions, (4) training and police performance, and (5) professional standards and departmental discipline. Community leadership would perhaps state each of these issues differently than the Commission's Subcommittee, but the focus for discussions and action must remain sharp, though the language and the relationships must be friendly and positive.

In the area of EMPLOYMENT, major steps can be taken by both the Mayor and the Community Relations Commission. The Mayor has been asked to convene a conference with industrial and commercial leadership. This effort should have both private as well as public aspects, but it must happen. As a part of the full identification of the Mayor and Commission in this effort, the achievement of equal employment opportunity, both appointments and assignments throughout agencies of City Government must be vigorously reviewed and opportunities utilized for achieving the fact of equal employment opportunity, consistent with the Mayor's Executive Order on equal employment and the results of two employee surveys. The Commission Subcommittee on Employment has been engaged in specific discussions with the Civil Service Commission with a view towards significantly implementing the departmental reviews, parallel in form with the successful negotiations of the Commission's Committee with the DSR. In the community discussion there exists concern regarding passage of an ordinance introduced by Councilman Hood to firm up and give ordinance backing to the affirmative action policy and the contract compliance program which is clearly a responsibility of the Community Relations Commission. Staff and Commission efforts directed at other aspects of employment discrimination must be stepped up appreciably.

Commission efforts to clarify law and pursue vigorously a program designed to achieve equal housing opportunity must now be matched by equally vigorous

Commission efforts at ending the conditions in our community ghetto slums where the essential humanity and dignity of every person and child is at stake. Commission focus for the achievement of community consensus as we move ahead on the crucial human rights issue in housing requires a markedly expanding role for the Commission on Community Relations and its staff.

There can be no denying that Commission activity in focusing actionable issues in the area of education and hospitals has been particularly evident in the past, but the persistence of major problems in both these areas requires major re-thinking before we can say that the problems have been significantly modified or changes developing consistent with the community crisis focused in each of these major areas of service; i.e., education and health care.

Whether the mobilization of the full Commission potential will be an adequate response to the human rights crisis in our community must be measured by staff efforts, and the commissioners' willingness to see the program through. In order to change the community it will be necessary to involve many more persons than the Mayor, our commissioners, and staff in this effort. In a very real sense we have a unique opportunity to work on specific issues and to develop, consistent with that work, educational programs which will maximize the efforts of all persons of good will in our community to see that appropriate change does in fact come about NOW.