

City of Detroit

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

TO: Lonnie Saunders

DATE June 5, 1969

FROM: Lee Williams, Burke Fossee

SUBJECT: Re: Detroit News coverage of the New Bethel Baptist Church Incident.

3/30/69

The News in an unsigned story entitled "Officer Killed, 2 Wounded in Ambush on West Side," said two officers were shot when "ambushed" by a gang of 10 to 12 men on Linwood near Euclid. It stated correctly that the officers had "left their police car when they were suddenly fired upon." It quoted a Rev. David Mundy of New Bethel Church, who could only state that the church had been rented to an unknown group.

3/31/69

The Detroit News page-one story by Herbert W. Boldt and Robert M. Pawich of 3/31/69 headlined, "Ambush slayers of policemen hunted," uses the word "ambush" to describe the killing. There is no information in the story itself to indicate an attack from concealment, so the use of the word is inaccurate. In the same story they state "All but two of those arrested were ordered released by . . . Crockett . . ." giving no mention of cooperation by the prosecutor or police in the releases. Later, it states, "He released several prisoners before Cahalan arrived at 7:15," apparently intimating that Crockett was unwilling to wait for Cahalan. They also use the irrelevant information that this occurred in the area of the 1967 riot. The story runs two paragraphs: "Police said there was ample evidence that gunshots were fired from inside the church," and "Pews and walls were marked with bullet holes and windows were shattered," one after the other with no other explanation, leaving the reader with the feeling that the second represents evidence supporting the first.

Another page one article of the same date by John Peterson headlined "Black republic in Dixie is goal of militant group." The reporter again assumes that the attackers were "ambushers." The article says "you won't find the Republic of Africa on any map--not yet anyway," indicating that sometime, Brother Imari "confidently predicts," the RNA will take the states they claim. Several times The News tries to link the RNA with the Communists saying they expect "the help of African and Asian countries, especially Red China," and that Brother Imari and Robert Williams met in "Tanzania, an East African nation receiving increasing aid from Red China."

They, also, editorialize on the possibility of "a black army rivaling each (southern) state's National Guard." This seems calculated to arouse the fears of armed attack on whites by blacks. There was no editorial page comment on this date.

4/1/69

Memo

The News places three articles on the front page whose headlines tend to express a similar policy. "Police, Wives Picket Crockett" is by Leonard Levitt and Charlie Manos. Here the News joins "The public outcry . . ." of the angered citizenry in protesting and demanding action. The article quotes only one person who is critical of Crockett, while implying that there are more. At the very end of the article are four short paragraphs quoting the president of the State Bar Association. "We can't assume Judge Crockett has done anything wrong

. . . We don't have all the facts." The story then points out how Crockett can be legally ~~eliminated, removed,~~

X "Judge Stalls on Cahalan" attempts to interpret Crockett's apparent inaction on contempt proceedings. The by-line is Doug Glazier.

Herbert Boldt's "Slayer Search Stymied" is an interpretation of Police Commissioner Spreen's statement, "The judge's action did not help the investigation," and an unidentified homicide detective's statement, "How should I know?" when asked about the location of "out of towners." This story quotes ". . . Crockett may have wrecked the investigation." (No noted factual substantiation) "Crockett's speedy release of all but three of the 142 . . .," ". . . killing and gunfight which erupted during a black separatist meeting . . .," "The wholesale release of the prisoners . . . left detectives without a suspect in the slaying," and "Six of those freed by Crockett were given nitrate tests which showed they had fired guns recently" (nitrate tests do not show that someone fired a gun.). These statements all have no basis in fact and the story contains no substantiation. The story is continued on page 18A under a picture of "guns police say were taken from black separatists at shoot-out." ~~At the very end of the story is a quote of Mayor Cavanagh.~~

Page three centers a picture of picketing police over a continuation of the picket story. This story includes a reported questioning of black officers as to why they weren't participating in the picket line. Other unrelated stories on the page are entitled, "Gun ~~Charge~~ is denied in firing at police car." "Three accused of jumping policeman," and "Sirhan Trial price tag is placed at \$1 million." Next to the picture is "Removal of judge difficult--Gillis" wherein Appeals Court Judge John Gillis explains the procedures of removing "a judge."

The editorial "Judges Conduct Questioned - An Abuse of Power?" uses its first paragraph to delineate the reportorial and editorial policy of The News. It states in relation to this matter:

"Have law enforcement and justice taken another beating from Recorders Judge George Crockett, Jr.? It looks that way. Certainly the Judge owes the community an explanation of his disturbing conduct of last weekend."

Other Quotes:

". . . Crockett rushed downtown and began releasing arrested persons . . .," ". . . Wholesale and indiscriminate releases . . . might prevent the case ever being solved," and "Doubt exists whether the judges action met these requirements."

The editorial ends by asking a series of questions which it has already answered for itself in earlier paragraphs.

4/2/69

The News front-page story by Boldt and Berl Falbaum is headlined "Mayor defends raid on church; Abernathy raps tactics of police." It states unidentified "Negro leaders . . . have contended that police initiated the firing, imperiling the lives of many women and children inside." The writer editorializes an answer to Rev. Ralph Abernathy's charge that Police "invasion of the church violated all constitutional and religious traditions of the nation" by stating, "He did not mention, however, that the church on Saturday night was being used by a secular

group for secular purposes" (The writer actually has no idea of the "purposes"). The article ends with a lengthy comparison of statements of Police representatives and Rev. Abernathy. It is presented as a dialogue. It concerns who shot first and where the shots came from.

Page 15A is devoted entirely to New Bethel and other stories which the News consistently classifies together. The page centers on a picture of a mother and child who "get involved" by protesting Crockett's actions at the U. S. Attorney's office. The story underneath is captioned, "They Have a Dream, too--24 mothers plead for law and order." The racial reference is obvious. It is written by Charlie Manos. Surrounding this picture and story are articles with the following headlines: "Milliken Joins call for Crockett inquiry," " 'Help, help . . . ow . . . oh'--Tape recalls scout car's death drama," "Sincavich ordered to army duty," "Reports asked by Crockett stall ruling in Tyler case," "Pope rips rebels as church peril," "ACLU stands fast on 'South End' rap" and "Crockett drops case against Cahalan." The article on Milliken by Al Sander ^{thru} Milliken, joining the "outcry." What Milliken actually says is that the State Judicial Tenure

Commist ~~Committee~~ is the proper body to investigate the situation and he encouraged them to do so. He is quoted, "I have not made a judgment in the case myself" The story goes on to describe House and Senate debate over the incident. The press release of edited tapes of Patrolman Worobec are the basis for the Boldt story. News headlines insist that a request by Crockett for a report by the Records Court Probation Department is stalling ("stall ruling") on Crockett's part. This case was made controversial by reporting by The News. This is the basis for the "Tyler Case" headline.

In the Cahalan contempt case, Douglas Glazier states that Crockett called Cahalan's conduct "racially motivated." This is a misquote of Judge Crockett's statement that the Prosecutor's conduct had racial overtones. Attempting to put the case into some kind of perspective, the writer states, "The action (dropping the contempt charges) came amid mounting criticism from state legislators and police organizations objecting to Crockett's quick release of eight prisoners . . ." The entire page puts strong emphasis on actions of persons presumed to be a threat to the white middle class.

Page 16A has the Michael Czapski funeral story over pictures of the hearse and of Mayor Cavanagh and Commissioner Spreen, who is apparently crying. Below the picture is the continuation of the story on the Cavanagh statement with a headline, "Mayor defends police raid on church."

The News editorial attempts to muster "local Negro leaders" to make a statement of what the writer feels is an "aroused and angry" citizenry. The News attempts to interpret the feelings of what it terms "many responsible but lesser known black citizens." "These responsible, voiceless citizens feel as much dismayed as their white neighbors . . ." The editorial makes the following assumptions:

- (1) The black community is outraged by the presence of "most radical militants of the nation,"
- (2) The black community "feel no kinship with Robert Williams" nor "the Republic of New Africa's naive view that the way to solve the racial problem is to secede from the union,"
- (3) That black leaders aren't concerned over the death of Patrolman Czapski,
- (4) That blacks and their leaders should be concerned about "Crockett's haste,"
- (5) That the "black leadership" is intimidated by the "militant minority." The News evidently bases its conclusions on "telephone calls, letters and picketing" aimed at "public officials and the press." "These expressions of public feeling, by the way, come from blacks as

well as whites." There is no notation as to the nature or extent of the "common revulsion" in the black community.

The political cartoon next to the editorial shows a heavily pigmented judge with glasses allowing heavily pigmented, armed guerillas to run from under his bench, much to the astonishment of an officer who shows no apparent pigmentation. The judge states "Next case."

4-3-69

^{4-3-69.}
The News has two front page stories. "Action by U. S. is ruled out in black separatist gunfight" by Eric Ludvigsen, quotes several Detroit area Congressmen on the possibility of "federal intervention." After noting a negative attitude on the part of the Congressmen, the writer quotes Diggs, then editorializes. Diggs--"I'm sure the federal government and the state watch these things." Ludvigsen--"They do. But from the federal end, the watching is done with the same kind of controlled frustration that attended public demands last year to 'do something' about the seemingly unreasonable pronouncements made from foreign sanctuaries by Stokely Carmichael." He goes on to note that two men released by police after the mass arrest were on bond while appealing convictions in New York of "plotting to overthrow the New York State Government." The distinct reference is that guilt in a New York sedition case ^{is not} ~~is~~ guilty of any other crime, ^{wherein} ~~wherein~~ he is in the area. The story goes on to point out some legalities which would be involved in possible persecution of RNA.

David L. Jackson in "Rival Negro police marchers ring court" estimates B.U.F. (Black United Front) marchers at 300. (The Free Press estimated 2,000). The story tells of picketing by B.U.F. and counterpicketing by D.P.O.A., and a meeting of the Interfaith Action Council. It also mentions the William Patrick letter in support of Crockett. It states "Crockett has been under fire for his release of persons police wanted held for further questions . . ." The only noted support of Crockett is Patrick's letter. The article concludes by identifying "other activists at the press conference" including Frank Ditto, Lonnie Peek, Ebony Lumumba and others "dressed in green fatigue uniforms with leopard epaulets--the uniform of RNA's Black Legion."

Page three, in addition to the continued picketing--B.U.F. story has one picture of picketers ringing Kennedy Square, and two pictures of William O. Greene, a black police officer --one with a picket sign--and the continued story on the U.S. Congressmen. It also displays a Herbert Boldt story "Shells from gun battle inside church disappear." This tells of police statements that "Someone picked those shells up." The story later points out that all suspects were searched and the building secured and searched by police. Editorializing, Boldt states "Four Negroes suffered minor injuries," (two were shot) and "Later, 62 of those arrested were found to have criminal records on file with the F.B.I." (against the inference that a person with a criminal record is already "guilty") The story produces police evidence that someone fired at police from inside the church. Boldt states later " . . . Crockett provoked a storm of criticism . . ." Toward the end of the story, Boldt reveals "A source in the . . . Prosecutor's Office, while criticizing Crockett for his action, expressed belief that there is no evidence that he spoiled the investigation" ^{as} ~~as~~ . . . it was unlikely that any of the eight would have supplied additional information to police and officers have their names and fingerprints."

Page 4B has a picture from the Czapski funeral story of a cash presentation of \$1,000 to Czapski's family.

On page 5B the News presents a page of what they must consider related stores. At the top is "Black Panther bombing plot broken up by New York Police." To the right of this is a picture nine persons arrested for breaking into a Dow Chemical Office in Washington and destroying property. Below the "Black Panther" story is "New Bethel raid reveals N.Y. charges against 4" This story exposes criminal records of four of those arrested at New Bethel. They are all members of RAM and are either accused, or convicted and appealing charges of plotting to murder Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young. Below this story is one entitled "RNA militants use state rifle range" wherein Leonard Levitt exposes the use of a state rifle range by members of the RNA.

4-3-69 In the bottom editorial on 4-3-69 headlined "Abernathy VS. Detroit Police" they present in the first paragraph, a view of the incident which is strongly slanted toward the police stand. Then, they use this view ^{reference} to condemn Rev. Abernathy's statements concerning the police. The editorial totally and unquestioningly accepts the police statements as fact. In a 4-4-69 Detroit News page one story

4-4-69 ← headlined "Crockett, Cahalan split sharply again on mass arrests," Douglas Glazier and Robert M. Pavich arrange their story in such a way as to discredit Crockett's statements. They do this by arranging the story to make it appear that Cahalan is answering and contradicting Crockett's statements in a dialogue which never took place. The two were not together when the statements were made. Cahalan is quoted as saying Crockett violated the law, but there is no explanation of the specific reference. They quote no independently researched facts to support any of Crockett's statements--which were available--but they note a Michigan Supreme Court decision which supports their case that Crockett should not have held court in police headquarters. If the reference is not Cahalan's, it represents rather blatant editorialization.

On page 8A mention of the pickets in support of Judge Crockett is buried deep in a story headlined "Spren sees progress in slaying quiz." The story concerns a Spren statement on the possibility of an imminent solution to the case. The story estimates the number of marchers at about 600. The Free Press estimates 2,000.

The editorial page comment on the same day is strongly anti-Crockett and reaches a decision based on legal principles for which they cite no source.

The front page story "Crockett wins support of 4 law groups" seems to be unbiased and is the first example of headlining of support for Crockett.

4-5-69 The 4-5-69 News has only a single news story--regarding a \$5,000 reward being offered for information leading to the conviction of the killer. This notes one further example of offered rewards for crimes against whites by the News, while the Secret Witness Plan virtually ignores crimes against blacks. There is no editorial comment.

4-6-69 In a page one news story, headlined "A quiet patrol . . . and death," John Peterson of The News editorializes that police officials, "perhaps mindful of criticism that the 1967 riot spread because police failed to act decisively made a quick decision to storm the church." The facts about the release of prisoners remain slanted to cast blame on Crockett. Several of the facts quoted are questionable or simply inaccurate. It states that Rev. Franklin and Milton Henry asked Crockett to come. All previous reports and Crockett's statement indicate it was Franklin and State Rep. Del Rio. The story states that two men jumped from Henry's car as the police approached. This is the first time, seven days after the incident, that this allegation is made. They misquote Del Rio as saying "no police brutality occurred at the church." Del Rio's statement was that no brutality occurred at the police station.

Attorney Milton Henry is impeached as a credible source of information because "he was not there." They do not mention that Del Rio was not at the church either, when they attribute the brutality statement to him. They also fail to mention that Del Rio's statement was completely out of context.

In the "Passing Show" section a long feature article by Robert Popa continues the attacks on Crockett. Without actually stating as much, obvious inferences *attempts* are made ~~which seem~~ to link Crockett with communism. The references are reminiscent of statements of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

The story quotes:

"But perhaps the most serious charges are that he is: (a) ^a Communist, or (b) ^a Communist sympathizer."

"Breakthrough alleged that Crockett was ^{an} 'enemy sympathizer', and 'enemy collaborator' and a vice-president of The National Lawyers Guild, named as a Communist-front group by two Congressional committees."

"Crockett has never denied his affinity and admiration for the Communist party's public stand on behalf of Negro rights and equality."

The article is strongly weighted with other criticism of Crockett. They quote:

"Police blame Crockett for the fact that they have not arrested the murderer of Patroman Michael Czapski."

"Again, Crockett raised eyebrows . . . when he released a four-time convicted felon . . ."

"In a host of other episodes Crockett has been accused of being soft on criminals, of browbeating policemen and prosecution witnesses . . . , and of stretching the law to the advantage of the accused and the disadvantage of the forces of law and order."

There are few instances of any favorable comment about Crockett. They quote:

"He's still proud that he is a good housekeeper . . ."

"His (pool) game is rough, but he's no hustler--evidence that he didn't waste his youth in pool halls."

They twice quote an anonymous judge criticizing him, and only quote very mild praise from Judge Wade McCree and the President of the Wolverine Bar Association. This appears at the very end of the article. The story questions his integrity stating that he refuses "to apply Michigan's search-and-seizure rules," then *gave* give all the reasons why he should not (including a mandate to support the U.S. Constitution) without changing their opinion.

On the editorial page in the top editorial, Crockett is attacked again for the release of the prisoners. The editorial calls for his removal. It states he is increasing tension and, ironically, that Commissioner Spreen has a judicious view. There are no further articles or editorials but there are eleven letters to the editor, nine anti-Crockett, and two pro-Crockett.