

COMMISSION ON COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
WORK SHEET

CASE

NO. 65-83

OPEN (date) 7-7-65

CLOSED                     

CLASSIFICATION: CD (Police)

DESCRIPTION: Police shooting of James Sabra, Sr.

INITIAL INFORMATION BY: Joe Coles

SOURCE OF INFORMATION: Mayor's Press Secretary

ASSIGNMENT: Jimmy McGowan

**DETAILS, WORK PLAN, PROGRESS, ETC.:**

On July 6, 1965 Coles received a call from the Mayor's office requesting a Commission investigation of the shooting of James Sabra, Sr. on July 5, 1965. The case was assigned to McGowan for investigation. Staff went to the community and was able to ascertain the following facts. The Sabras were having a family picnic in their backyard which included several non family members. Sabra, Jr. and Sr. became engaged in an argument and subsequently a fight late in the afternoon. The fight continued until early evening with each man striking a few blows but not doing any harm to each other. During the course of the fight Sabra, Sr. picked up a hunting knife and Sabra, Jr. a barbecue fork. They did not injure each other.

Two police officers answering a call of "family trouble" arrived on the scene about 6 PM. They attempted to break up the fight and subsequently called for help. Two other officers arrived. One officer, Norton, hit Sabra, Sr. with an object and later shot him. Sabra, Jr. was arrested and held on a charge of felonious assault. On this charge he appeared before Judge Scallen in Recorder's Court on July 27, 1965 and was held for examination. (See attached account of Commission investigation in file)

There were several investigations of this shooting: The Michigan Chronicle, the NAACP, ACME and the Police Department. (See complete police report in file) The Michigan Chronicle investigated the shooting and found that the police officer was derelict in his duty when he shot Sabra. Supported by the fact that all witnesses interviewed by the Chronicle said that Sabra did not have a weapon in his hand when he was shot and that the fight had been successfully stopped by the first two officers. We have no investigation on the ACME investigation



The NAACP agreed with the Chronicle. All investigations turned up conflict in testimony on the part of the witnesses. The police officer was exonerated by Prosecutor Olsen. The shooting was ruled justifiable. Officer Norton was subsequently exonerated by Police Board of Inquiry.

The neighbors organized a protest of the shooting and filed a complaint with the Citizen Complaint Bureau, and the NAACP. The NAACP has taken the case to Attorney General Frank Kelley and are demanding a trial by jury for the officer who did the shooting. Newspaper accounts of the shooting are included in the file.

McG:em