

1 Whereupon, what groups are you affiliated with?

2 A I am the SPURGEON CAMERON of the Plainfield

3 called as a witness, sworn, testified as follows:

4 League in Elizabeth EXAMINATION

5 Jersey and By Mr. Fortunato:

6 Q Your age, please.

7 A I was born in '38.

8 Q That would be twenty-nine. Your address?

9 is go A 1022 Rose Street, Plainfield, New Jersey.

10 now Q How long have you lived in Plainfield?

11 will A I have lived in Plainfield now for over three

12 years. first, there was a young man whose name is Glasgow

13 Sherr Q. And before that?

14 Other A New York City. which is a local newspaper, while a

15 policeman Your education?

16 been A Graduation of high school, graduate of North

17 Carolina Agriculture and Technical, a State University,

18 Greensboro, home of the sit-ins in 1959.

19 right Q Your occupation?

20 Muhle A I am an administrator for the Middlesex County

21 Economic Opportunities Corporation, County Anti-Poverty

22 Organization in Middlesex County.

23 Q What funds sponsor that organization?

24 A The Office of Economic Opportunity in Washington,

25 D.C. the incident had taken place?

1 Q What groups are you affiliated with?

2 A I am the first vice-president of the Plainfield
3 area NAACP. I am also a member of the Union County Urban
4 League in Elizabeth. I am a member of the Edison, New
5 Jersey and the New York City Jay Cees and the 69th
6 Veterans Association in New York City.

7 Q What started the Plainfield riot?

8 A The actual thing that started the Plainfield riot
9 is going to be a series of incidents, and I hope that by
10 now I can get my dates together. Having been there, I
11 will do my best.

12 First, there was a young man whose name is Glasgow
13 Sherman. He was struck by a white youth at the White Star
14 Diner on Front Street, which is a local hangout, while a
15 policeman stood by and watched. This policeman would have
16 been off duty, a well known policeman in the City of
17 Plainfield. His name, Piatt, who did nothing.

18 I only observed the youngster, and he did have on the
19 right or left side of his face scratches and went to
20 Muhlenburg Hospital to receive stitches. This was on a
21 Friday night.

22 Q Did you see the white fellow beating the Negro?

23 A No.

24 Q When you said you saw the Negro, you saw him
25 after the incident had taken place?

1 A Right. July 14, 1967. The following day through the

2 good, Qers Do you know how long afterward?

3 LattiAore. It was within a maximum of two hours.

4 civilQdiso When you say Friday night, bear in mind that

5 Friday night was the height of the disorder in Newark. Is

6 that the Friday night you are referring to?

7 This Aest! That's right. That was the Friday night involved.

8 the RQcres Are there any incidents or incident prior to

9 Friday, July 14, that you can think of?

10 The Astin There had been several which I can't say were

11 directly attributable to the cause of disorder in the City

12 of Plainfield. However, they might be supportive thereof.

13 was sQt. What about the alleged beating of Mrs. Mary

14 Brown and circulation of pictures of her beating?

15 A The alleged beating of Mrs. Brown was reported to

16 our NAACP Executive Board at its July meeting, which would

17 have been the second Tuesday of that month.

18 A I chi BISHOP TAYLOR:(PRESIDING): Off the record.

19 (Discussion off the record.)

20 By Mr. Fortunato: I don't recall his specific

21 Q Will you mention then additional incidents which

22 occurred which you consider to be factors in causing the

23 Plainfield disorder?

24 A Number one was on Friday night.

25 Q That is Friday, July 14?

1 A Friday, July 14. The following day through the
2 good, persuasive efforts of Plainfield Councilman Everett
3 Lattimore, who is not a councilman of the predominantly
4 civil disorder area but who happens to be a black man like
5 myself -- he did secure a meeting of the Mayor and fellow
6 councilman Harvey Judkins at the Teen Center on Saturday.
7 This meeting was attended by the Mayor, the secretary of
8 the Recreation Commission, and other people of the official
9 city body. Young people were there who asked questions.
10 The meeting ultimately broke up I would say because of a
11 sense of frustration because the answers coming forth were
12 not meaningful answers to the young people, and the tone
13 was set. That was Incident Number Two.

14 Q These were the answers of the Mayor?

15 A The Mayor and -- hearing this sort of noise

16 Q Could you be more specific as to in what way he
17 was deficient in his answers, or is that hard to say?

18 A I think he was being a good politician.

19 BISHOP TAYLOR: Could you illustrate it?

20 THE WITNESS: I don't recall his specific
21 answers for that. I think one of the crying
22 things there -- I remember him being asked
23 pointedly, "How about a pool for the City of
24 Plainfield?" And his answer was, "We don't make
25 that decision. We have to await the decision of

1 the Union County Park Commission," which is very
2 good. This is my interpretation at this time.
3 He was speaking to people who don't necessarily
4 understand the relationship between the Union
5 County Park Commission and the City of Plainfield's
6 government. What they do understand is he is the
7 Mayor; he is the top guy; he is the head of the
8 city, which means that answer was the wrong
9 thing to say to those people at that point. It
10 is fine for me. I understand him perfectly. I
11 happen to be fortunate. I was a little more
12 educated, but the young people to whom he was
13 speaking, and if I had been one to whom he would
14 have said that, that is a point of frustration
15 and I am tired of hearing this same old noise
16 from the white man.

17 BISHOP TAYLOR: Had you been in the Mayor's
18 place what kind of an answer would you have given?

19 THE WITNESS: I think I would have given
20 them a more detailed explanation to make it ulti-
21 mately clear until I had stopped seeing frowns
22 on faces and I would have used any words of the
23 English language there necessary to portray, "if
24 you want to go down to the Park Commission to try
25 and get it for us, why don't you go? We will get

1 money for a bus to send you down there." I would
2 have utilized several other alternatives, but I
3 do feel the answer that was given us was too
4 general. That is how it hurt the young people.
5 Plain That meeting broke up. They walked out.
6 That is Number Two. That is Saturday.
7 which There was some breaking of windows again
8 Saturday night. I don't recall specifically and,
9 of course, then at this point after lasting
10 through Saturday we come into Sunday, which is a
11 weekend day. People are not working, which means
12 then a lot of people who are either church goers
13 or non-church goers who are going to be home.
14 The weather is warm. They are very capable of
15 not having that much to do because Plainfield does
16 not have a recreation program that will involve
17 people, although they do have a recreation program.
18 The climate more or less was set. There is
19 nothing on TV; there is not that much on radio.
20 If you don't have a car, you are just out on the
21 streets. It was his duty to say, "What are you
22 doing The complaints from that meeting -- a group
23 of people decided they would go over into. There
24 Greenbrook Park, which happens to be in Plainfield
25 but not Plainfield because we are divided by a

1 county line. It is in Somerset County. We are
2 Union County. As a result it is in North
3 Plainfield, but it is still the same community
4 where at either two-thirty or three-thirty our
5 Plainfield NAACP had scheduled and we had secured
6 a permit for an open air picnic type meeting,
7 which was Sunday afternoon. I had been informed
8 because I was not there; I was at my residence in
9 preparation for the open air meeting of the mem-
10 bership, and our membership meetings of the NAACP
11 are open to all people -- I was preparing for
12 that, and I had been told there were upwards of
13 at least from 150 to 200 kids, young people, over
14 there, kids being anyone over twelve years of age
15 up. It sort of ran the gamut of twelve up to
16 twenty-nine and above.
17 At this gathering in the park, there being
18 that number of people, a Union County Park
19 policeman came over, knowing there was a permit
20 for a gathering which began at three-thirty.
21 Logically it was his duty to say, "What are you
22 doing here?" because no such gathering was
23 authorized for the park. I assume he did. There
24 was some type of confrontation between himself, a
25 second type policeman and to the best of my

1 Q knowledge that I have been able to ascertain --
2 what you I think the fact is minor to me at this point --

3 A another policeman or something came on the scene
4 this type to help, and I think he might have been in plain-
5 that in clothes. I am not sure. Again, I was not
6 go by our present. That is second-hand information, but a
7 feet from statement was made, "Come on, boys, let's go."

8gregating here; At this point, I have been told again,
9 by there someone in the crowd said to him, "We are not

10 I came boys; we are men." At this point again that is
11 and what when the frustration ended. The groups that was
12 in my life trying to formulate their grievances to hand back
13 standing up to the city council in a perfectly logical demo-
14 Avenue was cratic order was then told to get out of the park,
15 name I don the term "boys" was used.

16 had all removed There is nothing more infuriating to a black
17 makes them man than to be called "boys." When somebody calls
18 me a boy, I will knock him in the mouth myself
19 because I stand six-four, and that is ridiculous.

20 The boy then returned to Plainfield Avenue
21 and at the intersection of Plainfield Avenue and
22 Fourth Street is when the barrage on all white
23 people coming through that intersection began.
24 That is the sequence of triggering incidents.

25 By Mr. Fortunato: Identification.

1 Q Can you tell us where you were during the riot,
2 what you did, what you saw?

3 A Let me begin very quickly. Not being aware of
4 this type of thing going on within our city, what I did was
5 that in preparation for going to our NAACP meeting I was to
6 go by our office located just about a couple of hundred
7 feet from where the crowd congregated. The crowd is con-
8 gregating here; we are here (indicating). I wanted to go
9 by there before going to the park.

10 I came by, getting ready to come up Plainfield Avenue,
11 and what happened was rather unusual. For the first time
12 in my life in Plainfield I saw a Plainfield policeman
13 standing up with -- they had to be shotguns, and Plainfield
14 Avenue was blocked off. I went over to an officer whose
15 name I don't know, someone who put the word around, and they
16 had all removed the name tags. This is something that
17 makes them less susceptible to identification at this point.

18 MR. DRISCOLL: You mean they had removed
19 their badges?

20 THE WITNESS: No, name tags.

21 MR. DRISCOLL: They still had their badges?

22 THE WITNESS: Yes, but not a numbered badge.
23 It is a smaller type badge. It does not have a
24 number. If it were a numbered badge, that would
25 also be a means of identification.

1 out A policeman made the comment to me -- I said,
2 "What is the matter? Why can't I go down the
3 street?" He looked at me and he happened to be
4 unfortunately, from my point of view, a white
5 person, and he says, "We are having a riot with
6 you people," which again infuriated me. I looked
7 him in the eye and I said, "You are not having
8 a riot with me; you are having a riot with some
9 people."

10 After one more second of dialogue, and I
11 tried to be sensible -- he had the shotgun; I
12 didn't. I wasn't armed. The comment angered me
13 no end. If he had a name tag on, I assure you
14 that is one policeman that would be standing in
15 court, and so help me, I would take that just as
16 far as it could go because I deeply resent that
17 comment. Although I understand it, that is not
18 the most pleasant situation to be in.

19 By Mr I then snuck in by another street. I didn't
20 know it wasn't blocked off. I could not proceed
21 to Plainfield and Fourth Street, so I went around
22 and got back in.

23 As I approached there I began to see the
24 people, all white occupants coming through with
25 of white cars, a barrage with rocks. I saw better pitchers

1 Q out there than Sandy Koufax actually. Even with
2 those heavy bricks -- I don't know. It was a
3 sense of anger, but they were really scoring in
4 terms of letting that thing go and being a direct
5 stop it. thing. They were not missing too much. A case
6 in point is if you have an automobile and you are
7 throwing at it, I am amazed at how you can let
8 something go, which means you will have to throw
9 off in advance, and how you won't hit necessarily the
10 bottom of a car but you will go straight into the
11 window, which somebody has a good arm. There were
12 plenty of good arms that afternoon. I think our
13 baseball teams could profit from this.

14 BISHOP TAYLOR: Who was doing the throwing?

15 THE WITNESS: All Negroes at this point. I
16 could not identify them specifically other than to
17 say they were in all probability residents of the
18 area.

19 By Mr. Fortunato:

20 Q This so-called ghetto-type area, what people have
21 been referring to -- or is that word distasteful to you, too?
22 A No, it is not distasteful to me. I guess it would
23 be considered ghetto so long as you would add "Black ghetto."
24 Ghetto means people of one group. The United States is full
25 of white ghettos, so let's start talking about them, too.

1 Q Is this a Black ghetto area?

2 A Yes, this would be considered in the Black ghetto
3 area of Plainfield right by the public housing.
4 There being so many individuals, I realize I could not
5 stop it. The only thing I could do was stop one. I then
6 bumped into again a councilman and after discussing it,
7 again Mr. Harvey Judkins, he and I decided the best thing
8 we could do, because the Plainfield police had not blocked
9 off every street and people were continuing to come through
10 this intersection and get barraged -- we at best had better
11 try to head off white people coming in and turn them back
12 around. I am not sure which direction he proceeded in
13 other than to know he went one way and I went another. This
14 is it. We didn't hear the sirens. Evidently they did not put
15 their We started waiving people back. That was Sunday. This
16 continued throughout Sunday afternoon. There was the Molotov
17 cocktails which were being utilized. I saw smoke. You knew
18 there was fire. When I saw the first one, I ran into the
19 NAACP office right there, which I had access to. At this
20 time I was acting president of our NAACP Chapter. The
21 president of our branch was on a State Department tour over
22 in Iraq in July. I don't know when Israel and Egypt started
23 fighting, but after he had to run out of there, too. So we
24 had our share of running, but he was out of the country.
25 That meant I was at that time the acting president.

1 I called the Plainfield central fire headquarters and
2 I realized one thing would alert people and cause them to
3 run, and that was that there seemed to be -- I had picked
4 from comments about the policeman, this, that, again remem-
5 bering the rumor or substantiating fact to some extent about
6 Mrs. Brown that had been floating all through, I called the
7 Fire Department central office and I said, "Don't turn on
8 your sirens." The Fire Department answered the first alarm
9 at Third Street and Liberty, and after doing that I again
10 bumped into Mr. Judkins. So we walked down there. When we
11 rounded the corner and could look down to where the building
12 was burning, the trucks had arrived there right in the
13 ghetto area. We didn't hear the sirens. Evidently they did not put
14 their sirens on. That is what enabled them to get there.
15 At that point they had not been barraged and a new
16 tactic began. That was, well, let's say several fires.
17 There were some more fires. Something else had gotten fire-
18 bombed which meant that call was going to go in. They would
19 be coming over there and as we walked back to Plainfield
20 after we decided we would go down to City Hall to Police
21 Headquarters --

22 Q This is when, Sunday?

23 A Sunday.

24 Q What 'a bout time?

1 A Daytime. I would say this is before -- all of
2 this happened in between three o'clock. It had to happen
3 before seven because the sun was still up.

4 Q When you say that it seemed that fires were being
5 suppressed at different places, did it appear to you to be
6 planned?

7 A No. I will give you an example. The first was
8 begun at a dry cleaners and grocery store right in the ghetto
9 area. The second one was in some kind of building.
10 I can't tell what it was. I don't know why they would do
11 that other than to set a fire. It is not a business to make
12 establishment, doing business with the people in the area
13 because they dealt in junk. It is a junk place or something
14 of the sort. This as opposed to a food store or a dry
15 cleaners is what I am saying. So it was planned to the
16 extent that it was number two because they are over there
17 and they can't get over here. But in terms of being a
18 pattern, "We will get this one and that one," no.

19 BISHOP TAYLOR: Do you feel it was organized?

20 THE WITNESS: At that point that might have
21 been organized, but that could have been done
22 within five minutes because they are all right
23 within the same block. It wasn't like being one
24 on this block and five blocks away someone sets
25 one ten minutes later. It was one within the

1 time telling block, which means you had to set one. You just
2 walk over and then set the other one. It could
3 did not be one person or a group of ten people.

4 such a circuit MR. DRISCOLL: These were set, as far as
5 by you know, with Molotov cocktails?

6 o'clock in terms THE WITNESS: They were either set or it was
7 coincidental that we saw smoke. I tend to believe
8 there was, believe they were set. The only way to get smoke
9 know, a person coming up at that rate would be some type of an
10 perimeter. explosion from my knowledge of this burning.

11 tioned to Council MR. DRISCOLL: How long does it take to make
12 The mayor one of these cocktails?

13 was we went down THE WITNESS: I will give you an educated
14 getting worse guess. I would say if you have the gasoline,
15 there was the bottle and the rag you could make one within
16 Rights land about five minutes maximum.

17 Miller was there MR. DRISCOLL: If you have the bottle, the
18 "Let's stop the gasoline and the rag?"

19 nothing had happened THE WITNESS: If you have to go siphon the
20 gas out of a car, it is just a matter of letting
21 and there had been gas flow. Who doesn't know how to siphon gas?

22 come up I did that when I was a child, and Molotov
23 A windshield cocktails were not around then.

24 protection By Mr. Fortunato: A new fire was there. This is

25 Fire No Were there handbills or circulars before the riot

1 time telling you how to make these things?

2 A: I did not see any. There might have been, but I
3 did not see any. To the best of my knowledge there was not
4 such a circulation of anything.
5 Q: I think you have taken us to Sunday about seven
6 o'clock in terms of this. What happened after that?
7 A: Right after that the area was sealed off by police.
8 There was, and this is under litigation now, I am sure you
9 know, a general order. The police were to stay on the
10 perimeter. There were police constantly coming in. I men-
11 tioned to Councilman Judkins -- I went down to City Hall.
12 The mayor was in charge, not the police chief. What we did
13 was we went down to ask him to please, you know, things are
14 getting worse. As we walked in it was fruitless because
15 there was a representative from the State Division on Civil
16 Rights and the Human Rights Commission, and Mr. Charles
17 Miller was there. Several people had been saying to him,
18 "Let's stop the thing now," and for some reason or other
19 nothing had happened. Police were still on the edges.
20 When I returned down to the area the fires were there
21 and there had been one or two more. The fire truck had
22 come up Plainfield Avenue and that had gotten hit with rocks.
23 A windshield was broken, and there was a police car for the
24 protection of the firemen. A new fire was there. This is
25 Fire Number Three now at a store which had been broken into

1 a couple of nights earlier, Abram's Cafe, a bar.
2 toward At this point I went back. Many people were out on
3 Plainfield Avenue standing and talking about the sequence
4 of things. This is not something that you just idly let go
5 by and stay within your home. I guess the time would be a
6 little bit after eight o'clock. The next momentous thing I
7 remember, because I was in the process of having many
8 arguments with many people over the merits of what is being
9 done as against what would be better not to do. The next
10 thing was I looked down toward Plainfield Avenue toward one
11 of the perimeters, which is toward Front Street, and I
12 cannot see at a distance. Whatever it is, I am blind. I
13 cannot see at a distance. Straight, a white helmet was
14 walking this way, and it walked down Plainfield Avenue. I
15 stayed still for fear of breeding fear within people that
16 this might be the move to break up things. As it turned
17 out it was not effective.

18 A police officer walked into the ghetto area. I turned
19 my back trying to be calm. I didn't want to set anybody
20 off. I started to call, and I was afraid if anybody saw me
21 running into the office -- I just remember standing and con-
22 tinuing my argument there. I can't even tell you who I was
23 arguing with. The next thing was I heard four shots. I
24 turned around and saw a young Negro man stagger, someone
25 whom I had just spoken to about fifteen minutes before quite

1 ironically, and he staggered and fell. As I walked over
2 toward him I vaguely remember the blue uniform of the
3 policeman running back to Front Street. As I got to him he
4 was carried by me on the way to the hospital.

5 I then returned into the direction of the policeman,
6 and I remember seeing him being struck by his nightstick by
7 people, and as I approached I made a couple of vain efforts
8 to get people to stop, all of which were unsuccessful.
9 Eventually I went limp. Everybody then retreated and I said,
10 "Get the devil out of here." The rescue squad came, picked
11 him up, took him to the hospital. He was still alive.

12 Then I returned back to Plainfield Avenue again where I
13 remained. By this time the sun was really coming up. I mean
14 the sun had gone and this must have been about close to
15 nine o'clock. I continued my deliberations with people about
16 what had just been done, the fires, the whole works, and as
17 to why it was ineffective.

18 The one thing I would like to stress here is many
19 people knew me there, which I really and truly learned. I
20 take it as a compliment, all of whom I did not know but they
21 knew me as the NAACP man, which is a funny characteristic.
22 There was a type of new respect for the NAACP. In the past
23 the NAACP has been criticized for our methods. We have gone
24 through the court, and we believe in utilizing methods as
25 opposed to fighting and violence.

1 NAACP At this time many people were talking about the
2 complaints against the NAACP, and I was continually attacking
3 this. There seemed to be a new respect there, and I think
4 this might be attributable to my presence down there on the
5 street when things were happening and I was continuing to
6 say, and I wouldn't change it, "You don't do it this way."
7 One of my criticisms was if you have got to tear up so
8 much, why don't you get out of your own neighborhood? Most
9 of the people asked, "Are you going with me?" I said, "Not
10 on my life. I don't believe in it." Somebody said, "Shut
11 up." My reply was, "I will shut up and after you have done
12 your damage and when you are finished and you have to stand
13 before that judge" -- at this time it had gotten to a black-
14 white issue -- "before that white judge with your white
15 lawyer, you come down to the NAACP because you will find one
16 black man sitting in here. He is the president, and I will
17 see if you are getting adequate legal protection for what
18 you have done, even though you are guilty."
19 This was the sequence of the arguments that kept on
20 right there. That was Sunday night.

21 After that I worked for the New Brunswick Anti-Poverty
22 Corporation, rather Middlesex County. I am one of the guys
23 that is responsible in New Brunswick. The City of New
24 Brunswick is ten miles from Plainfield and it began to get
25 the jitters. There was my calling there and, of course,

1 NAACP is volunteer, so I worked in New Brunswick and I had
2 to make a mad dash for there. Fortunately New Brunswick
3 was not as bad as Plainfield. It was there. They had
4 broken windows. We had groups congregating. I think that
5 is attributable to a couple of things. Our Anti-Poverty
6 Corporation, which played a large part in it, the day that
7 things broke out in New Brunswick, that afternoon about
8 two-thirty or three-thirty I, along with the rest of the
9 County went to the office of the Mayor of New Brunswick,
10 who was just reelected on May 9. This would have been
11 July something. We had a conference to begin to lay plans
12 about what could be done that night in the event of any
13 outbreaks of violence. We had the information on the basis
14 of our outreach personnel, all of whom are on my staff.
15 This was adequately reported.

16 Plans were drawn up at that point, and this is one of
17 the things that served to make the difference. The Mayor
18 was fully cooperative with us, and that might be one of the
19 things that served to make the difference between a
20 Plainfield and a Newark in the City of New Brunswick.

21 BISHOP TAYLOR: When you speak of the
22 Mayor's cooperation, you are speaking of Mayor
23 Hetfield?

24 THE WITNESS: No, Patricia Sheehan.

25 MR. DRISCOLL: The Mayor of New Brunswick.

1 THE WITNESS: What I am saying is after
2 Sunday I was automatically just pulled away
3 because New Brunswick was about to explode.
4 Plainfield had exploded already and was beginning
5 to simmer down. That is where I work. I had to
6 go to work there. During the interim things were
7 quiet in the City of Plainfield. Numerous people
8 had been jailed for this and that. I did call in
9 the Legal Defense and Education Fund of the
10 National Association who had three lawyers to
11 come to Plainfield and Union County to check and
12 be sure that all people jailed were being treated
13 adequately. They were given legal representation
14 and so forth. I don't recall the date they were
15 there, but in the interim between Plainfield and
16 New Brunswick there was a real hassle for three
17 days. The weapons were determined to be picked
18 up I think on a Wednesday. The Governor decided
19 whereupon to declare a state of emergency and make a search
20 with troops, and I am certain I was having another
21 called as conference in the office of Mayor Sheehan after
22 that about future plans, what would be done in
23 New Brunswick. I just remember leaving because
24 word came to me, and I came back to Plainfield,
25 A that there was a weapons search going on. By this

1 Q time we had many other portions of the law other
2 than the police department, which complicates
3 matters as well. The result was a search was
4 made and the following Saturday depositions were
5 taken, and I think you gentlemen are aware that
6 the NAACP is a party to a suit challenging the
7 Governor's authority for that declaration of an
8 emergency for the search for weapons.

9 Gentlemen, that's about it. That is as quick
10 as I can do it unless some of you have questions.

11 BISHOP TAYLOR: Any questions?

12 By Mr. MR. FORTUNATO: We have a number of wit-
13 nesses, as you know, and I think we are limiting
14 it to those points that you know first-hand.

15 THE WITNESS: I hope I covered everything.

16 MR. DRISCOLL: Thank you for coming.

17 (Witness excused.)

18 Q Are you in high school now?

19 Whereupon, yes.

20 Q What year? ROBERT NELSON

21 called as a witness, sworn, testified as follows:

22 MR. DRISCOLL: EXAMINATION looks like he might be a

23 By Mr. Fortunato:

24 Q Your age, Mr. Nelson?

25 A Sixteen.