

1 In the way you very much, Reverend Butts. I wonder if I give
2 you an open-ended question, you would (Witness excused.)
3 why do you think Englewood . . . the disturbance which the
4 whereupon, it had and in the situation it had in, it is
5 kind of different. MICHAEL ROMEO

6 called as a witness, sworn, testified as follows:
7 rioting in Newark or the EXAMINATION

8 peculiar By Mr. Jaffe: he was, and in references in my
9 now: Q Mr. Romeo, I wonder if you could state for us your
10 position and where you live?

11 A I am an investigative reporter for The Record, and
12 I live in Bergenfield, New Jersey. My address is 148 South
13 Prospect Avenue, Bergenfield.

14 Q I understand that you have covered the Englewood
15 incident, disorder, riot, whatever you want to call it.

16 A I was there for the entire duration of the riot.

17 Q I understand one of your duties is the Englewood
18 area, so you are familiar with the problems in Englewood?

19 A No, that is not so. I know Englewood, but I am
20 not the regularly assigned reporter to Englewood.

21 Q But you are familiar with the situation here in
22 Englewood?

23 A Yes.

24 Q The Commission has been very interested in the
25 Englewood situation because it does seem so much different.

1 in the normal pattern of these things. I wonder if I gave
2 you an open-ended question you would address yourself to it.
3 why do you think Englewood had the disturbance under the
4 circumstances it had and in the situation it had it? It is
5 kind of different.

6 A I would definitely say it was unlike the heavier
7 rioting in Newark or the other cities. Englewood had a
8 peculiar situation of its own, and in references in my
9 newspaper stories I tried to refer to it as a disturbance,
10 not a riot as such. It seemed to me these people had a
11 legitimate gripe, the people in the Fourth Ward, and their
12 complaints had come up against a stone wall.

13 Q Why do you think there were legitimate gripes?

14 A The poor housing in the area.

15 JUDGE WACHENFELD: What else was there besides
16 the poor housing?

17 THE WITNESS: Recreational facilities are
18 lacking.

19 JUDGE WACHENFELD: Anything else?

20 THE WITNESS: No. I think their biggest com-
21 plaint was their housing, poor housing and lack of
22 recreational facilities in the area.

23 By Mr. Jaffe:

24 Q You talk about coming up against a stone wall. Do
25 you mean a lack of communication? You talk about a failure

1 on the administration's part to recognize the problem.

2 A Lack of communication with the administration and
3 the administration's failure to recognize these complaints
4 and to do something about it.

5 Q Why do you think on that particular Friday it
6 blew up the way it did? There were no triggering incidents?

7 A There was a triggering incident.

8 Q Tell us about it.

9 A I feel what actually triggered this disturbance
10 was the implementation of the Englewood police by outside
11 police forces. It was being at the scene. The biggest
12 gripe I heard from the rioters, these teen-age boys and
13 older men and some woman, was that whitey brought in all
14 these cops and they were particularly vehement against the
15 county police. This, I think, led up to triggering this
16 whole incident. My personal opinion was that the Englewood
17 police could have handled the situation by themselves, but
18 the fact they brought in these outside policemen, and these
19 are small-town police who did not recognize the situation,
20 had never been in a situation like this before, didn't know
21 how to cope with it.

22 A No. JUDGE WACHENFELD: The Englewood disturbance
23 the fact that followed the riots in Newark?

24 Q Had you... THE WITNESS: Yes.

25 JUDGE WACHENFELD: And the Plainfield riots

1 disturbance followed the riots in Newark?

2 A THE WITNESS: Yes.

3 before.

4 JUDGE WACHENFELD: Don't you think if the
5 police had information that a similar occurrence
6 was going to take place in Engelwood they would be
7 more or less justified in taking precautions
8 against it?

9 THE WITNESS: That may be so, but in this
10 particular case it was a small group of young
11 men. Among these young men I learned there were
12 hangers-on, loafers not interested in working. It
13 was a very small group of these people.

14 By Mr. Jaffe:

15 Q What was the size of the group just in the
16 beginning?

17 A When I was there there were about 50 people.

18 Q They were just hanging on a corner or at the park?

19 A Hanging around the corner. There is a dead-end
20 J street into McKay Park. That was their fort or where they
21 retreated to, their hangout.

22 Q Was that unusual for a Friday?

23 A No. The only thing unusual about this Friday was
24 the fact there were more than ever before.

25 Q Had you heard the rumors, too, that evidently cir-
culated throughout the community there was going to be a

1 disturbance that Friday?

2 A I heard rumors to that effect about three days
3 before.

4 Q Was that the reason you think there were more
5 people?

6 A Yes, that plus the build-up of police attracted
7 young men and boys from other areas of the Fourth Ward that
8 ordinarily do not congregate at Jay and William.

9 Q Was the build-up of police prior to the build-up
10 of the crowd or a reaction to the build-up of the crowd?

11 A The build-up of police came before the build-up
12 of the crowd.

13 JUDGE WACHENFELD: Don't you think in a situ-
14 ation of this kind the police are in a dilemma?
15 They are either accused of acting too quickly or
16 too belatedly?

17 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir. They were caught
18 between the two trains of thought. As the Mayor
19 told me, he thought it was best to protect the
20 interests of the entire community by bringing in
21 this outside police force.

22 JUDGE WACHENFELD: You would have done it
23 differently?

24 THE WITNESS: I think so.

25 JUDGE WACHENFELD: How would you have done it?

1 THE WITNESS: I would have brought in these
2 people who were known to be the troublemakers. I
3 would have tried to nip this in the bud by
4 bringing the people in that I am sure the
5 Englewood police knew would be the moving or prime
6 quarters elements who would be looked upon to push this
7 thing through.

8 JUDGE WACHENFELD: How do you do that? What
9 charge do you make against them?

10 THE WITNESS: You couldn't make any charge.
11 Talk to these people.

12 JUDGE WACHENFELD: You couldn't bring them in
13 you would have to go to them and talk to them?

14 THE WITNESS: I think they could have been
15 brought in.

16 JUDGE WACHENFELD: How?

17 THE WITNESS: Just by asking them, by inviting
18 them down to either police headquarters or to the
19 local community center, an ice cream parlor. These
20 are my personal opinions, and I feel strongly.
21 This comes from being on the scene, talking to
22 these people and also talking to the men and boys
23 who actually performed or caused this disturbance.
24 They felt they had no one who spoke to them or
25 tried to talk to them.

1 By Mr. Jaffe: [unclear] were facing each other at

2 Q Was there any looting or breaking in or widespread
3 mob action prior to the county police being called in?

4 A No. There was one incident that brought the
5 county police. The county police had already set up head-
6 quarters on the pistol range, which is a short distance away
7 from Jay and William Street. At approximately nine o'clock
8 someone threw a stone or fired a gun at a local food market,
9 Foti's. As soon as this went over the radio, as soon as
10 this happened, the county police radio called in all their
11 men to concentrate at the police range. They formed there
12 and also formed together with various police departments
13 from other communities, converged at Jay and William.

14 of [unclear] JUDGE WACHENFELD: Was that common knowledge?

15 by [unclear] THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

16 Q Were JUDGE WACHENFELD: Or did you only know about

17 A It by reason of the fact that you were a newspaper

18 man? [unclear] that were in their early thirties, Jackson,

19 Crawley and the THE WITNESS: That was common knowledge. The

20 then what boys and men at the scene were well aware of what

21 They had was going on. It is a small community and word

22 harassment spreads from word-of-mouth. They seemed to know

23 element the move of the police. [unclear] just told them to

24 knock off the They formed at Jay and William and they were

25 area. They faced by this crowd of young boys, men and a few

1 women. Both lines were facing each other at
2 approximately nine-thirty. At this point there
3 was a Mr. Jackson and Mr. Crawley and Sheriff Job
4 who went into the crowd, and I was right behind
5 them, and tried to talk to the youths to find out
6 what their gripes were.

7 At this point it struck me this was just a
8 group of belligerent people who were out to raise
9 hell, some of them. Some of them had legitimate
10 gripes, but there were quite a few that were out
11 to raise hell and here was a chance to get back
12 at Whitey. They had the Newark and the Plainfield
13 rioting in mind. They felt let's raise some hell
14 of our own.

15 By Mr. Jaffe:

16 Q Were these mostly youngsters?

17 A They were I would say between fourteen and thirty.
18 The majority of them were in their early twenties. Jackson,
19 Crawley and the sheriff spoke to these people and asked
20 them what their complaints were, and they said poor housing.
21 They had no place to go, and harassment by police. The
22 harassment by police I discounted because this type of
23 element would be harassed if the police just told them to
24 knock off the crap game they were used to having in that
25 area. That is what they consider harassment.

1 neighbor JUDGE WACHENFELD: Is the crap game in that
2 area tolerated by the police?

3 color THE WITNESS: No, sir. They weren't up to
4 that point. Crap games are common, but the police
5 would break them up up to this point, drive them
6 off the street, and they would retire to McKay
7 Park or behind some back yard where they couldn't
8 be seen.

9 I felt that the situation could have been
10 eased at this particular moment because one of the
11 demands was to get the police out of there. They
12 wanted to speak to Mayor Volk and Mayor Volk was
13 finally convinced that he should go down into the
14 area to talk to these people. The older men had
15 been drinking, and I think it reached a point where
16 you couldn't reason with these people because now
17 they were so excited with their own power that they
18 couldn't be stopped. I felt these boys couldn't
19 retreat. This type of boy doesn't retreat so
20 easily. When the police moved back after Mayor
21 Volk came down and spoke to them, he tried to talk
22 them into breaking up and going home. At one
23 point he said, "Go back to your TV sets and go back
24 to your ice cream and cake." At this point I think
25 it infuriated some of the element. The entire

1 neighborhood wasn't in on this activity. As a
2 matter of fact, while I was standing there one
3 colored girl came over and tried to talk to these
4 men into going home. This was prior to the Mayor's
5 remarks, talk the men into going home, and they
6 told her to get back across the street, that they
7 were fed up with Whitey's nonsense and promises,
8 and she said, "This is no way of doing it. There
9 are other ways of getting to do it without someone
10 getting hurt."

11 At this point they weren't all excited as
12 half the group seemed to be because half of the
13 group tried to reason with the other half at the
14 girl's insistence. Finally she walked across the
15 street and gave up.

16 At this point Sheriff Job radioed for Mayor
17 Volk to come down. Mayor Volk came into the area
18 and he wasn't forceful enough to convince these
19 people and his off-color remark about going back
20 to the TV sets seemed to infuriate them even more.

21 JUDGE WACHENFELD: Why should that remark
22 cause them to be infuriated?

23 THE WITNESS: If someone offered you a
24 lollipop, you would be angered. I think this is
25 the way they took it.

1 JUDGE WACHENFELD: If you offered me one, I
2 will take it.

3 BISHOP DOUGHERTY: It reminds me of Marie
4 Antoinette's remark, "Let them eat cake." I
5 think this is the psychology involved.

6 THE WITNESS: They resented that remark.

7 JUDGE WACHENFELD: Do you know of any sug-
8 gestion that could have been made that they would
9 not have resented?

10 THE WITNESS: I am not a statesman. I think
11 a man who really knew these people, a man who had
12 been in this area and had mingled with these
13 people prior to this, as an official of the town,
14 had been more aware of feelings of these people,
15 had better communications with these people, they
16 would have respected anything he would have said.
17 There was no communication, there was no direct
18 communication, and communication between the area
19 and the council came through men like Tibbs and
20 men like the Negro pastors in the area.

21 CHAIRMAN LILLEY: If Mr. Tibbs had gone with
22 the Mayor and attempted to help, would it have
23 been constructive?

24 THE WITNESS: I think so, and I say that with
25 great feeling because at one time Mr. Tibbs

1 actually broke up a group of angry people a week
2 later on the steps of City Hall. Mr. Tibbs
3 actually broke up a group of about fifty Negroes
4 who had marched on City Hall after Mayor Volk
5 walked out on them at McKay Park. Mr. Tibbs said,
6 "Go on home. We will take this from here." They
7 broke up very quickly, and the little makeshift
8 band just marched away. It prevented what could
9 have been a very ugly situation.

10 THE CHAIRMAN LILLEY: Do you have any theories
11 as to why Mr. Tibbs was not there?

12 THE WITNESS: He was not asked, as I learned
13 later.

14 MR. JUDGE WACHENFELD: Who asked the Mayor to
15 talk?

16 THE WITNESS: Sheriff Job, because the crowd
17 was demanding to speak to the Mayor. Sheriff Job
18 radioed headquarters and asked the Mayor to come
19 down.

20 JUDGE WACHENFELD: The mob or the crowd was
21 demanding to speak to the Mayor. Under those cir-
22 cumstances when you comply with the suggestion or
23 the demand, what greater diplomacy could you use?

24 THE WITNESS: The diplomacy of saying the
25 right thing or knowing how to talk to these people.

1 JUDGE WACHENFELD: But you don't answer my
2 question. There is a crowd of people who are
3 demanding or suggesting or expressing their desire
4 to talk to the Mayor. Are you going to say to the
5 crowd, "You can't talk to the Mayor, but we are
6 going to let you talk to Mr. A or Mr. B"? Is that
7 a better diplomacy than saying, "We grant your
8 request and the Mayor will be here"?

9 THE WITNESS: That is exactly what happened.
10 That is what they wanted and they got what they
11 wanted. They wanted to talk to the Mayor directly.
12 I don't know what you are driving at.

13 CHAIRMAN LILLEY: I was interested in whether
14 Mr. Tibbs had been asked along.

15 JUDGE WACHENFELD: Do you think Tibbs alone
16 without the Mayor would have been more effective
17 than he would have been with the Mayor?

18 BISHOP DOUGHERTY: May I put the question
19 this way? You were on the scene, were you not?

20 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

21 BISHOP DOUGHERTY: In your judgment was the
22 situation controllable up to the point that the
23 Mayor spoke to them?

24 THE WITNESS: Yes, it could have been. It
25 could have been if a man like Tibbs would have been

1 talked about there. I think Tibbs would have been a decided
2 ringleader influence on this crowd. But there again that is

3 A a guess on my part because at this point this
4 to sixty crowd was feeling its oats. These are young bucks
5 fifteen, who had nothing to do. It was a Friday night.

6 Q They had been drinking and it was warm. My guess
7 is that Tibbs may have controlled it or at this
8 the host point these young fellows were too imbued with
9 their own power and they felt they were strong.

10 A This is the first time they ever had a crowd this

11 Q size congregated on that street corner, plus the
12 played just fact that there were a few people egging them on

13 with challenges to knock Whitey down, step on him.

14 played and This was also demonstrated at a later meeting.

15 Q The JUDGE WACHENFELD: But they were all local
16 records? people.

17 A Right THE WITNESS: As far as I know they were all
18 local people. They all knew each other. The one
19 man that was an outsider, and there again he was
20 not entirely an outsider; he had been born and
21 raised in Englewood and was now living in Teaneck,
22 a colored man named Sheffield, who seemed to have
23 a hold over these people.

24 By Mr. Jaffe:

25 Q What were the numbers of the young people? You

1 talked about the small young bucks who really were the
2 ringleaders. How many in number were they?

3 A Again I say the majority of this crowd of fifty
4 to sixty people were in their early twenties. There were
5 fifteen, sixteen year old teen-agers.

6 Q They were the basic ages? Did they stop at
7 what? No, sir. The twenty year olds were the core of
8 the hostile feeling.

9 Q How many would this be? Would you just guess?

10 A Say about twenty-five to thirty.

11 Q Do you know whether those were employed or unem-
12 ployed just based on your observations?

13 A As I learned later, a small percentage were unem-
14 ployed and a smaller percentage had criminal records.

15 Q The majority were employed with non-criminal
16 records?

17 A Right. The shooting and by the excitement of the
18 night's occurrence.

19 Q What time of the day was this?
20 THE WITNESS: This was at nine-thirty at

21 night of night when I was on the scene. This was a Friday
22 night the night. Friday night among the Negro population

23 because so is a night when checks are cashed and drinking is
24 more prevalent.

25 Q From your knowledge is there much
of an irritant? JUDGE WACHENFELD: That follows the normal.

1 or do they pattern. ng fairly well?

2 By Mr. Jaffe:

3 Q How many nights did this continue?

4 A Friday night, Saturday night, Sunday night and
5 Monday night.

6 Q Why did it stop? what do you think stopped it?
7 what defused the situation?

8 A I seem to feel that the Monday night following the
9 shooting in the area it seemed to be the escape valve for
10 this group, and they had let off steam this night and that
11 was one reason, they had run out of steam.

12 Secondly, the people like this fellow Sheffield were
13 toning down the mood of the real troublemakers. Tibbs was
14 becoming more prominent. The pastors in the area were
15 becoming more active in calming these people down.

16 The people themselves in the area had now been thoroughly
17 frightened by the shooting and by the excitement of Monday
18 night's occurrences.

19 I should correct myself and say I think they were the
20 predominate factor in knocking this thing off because the
21 night of the shooting, outside of the first night, was the
22 night that they actually became frightened. The people
23 became so frightened they themselves quelled this thing.

24 Q In the community from your knowledge is there much
25 of an irritant between the police and the black community,

1 or do they get along fairly well?

2 A They get along fairly well. The irritant there
3 is the small element, fellows who have been arrested. When
4 I say criminal records, I don't think they committed
5 serious crimes, but they have been arrested and they have a
6 record.

7 JUDGE WACHENFELD: Is there any criticism in
8 your publication editorially or otherwise in ref-
9 erence to the manner in which the police and the
10 municipal authorities handled this case?

11 THE WITNESS: Just on the part of the admin-
12 istration's handling of the situation.

13 JUDGE WACHENFELD: What was it, an editorial?

14 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir. I had never witnessed
15 police brutality as had been witnessed in other
16 cities. I did witness one scene where a man was
17 knocked down and pummeled by police, but it was a
18 situation where these police were under the im-
19 pression they were being fired at. They were very
20 tense and very nervous. This automobile came down
21 this alley and evidently the driver had been
22 drinking and had not heard the command to halt.
23 He kept coming down the street, and then finally
24 when he noticed this line of blue in front of him
25 he stopped. These guys were very tense. Most of

1 them had never had a situation like this. Ninety-
2 nine percent of them had never been in a situation
3 like this before.

4 They pulled the man out. At one point I
5 thought it was the police who were hysterical and
6 not the man in the car. They were so excited they
7 didn't realize what they were doing. Fortunately
8 there were cooler heads who came and pulled these
9 police off. The man wasn't injured, not to the
10 extent he had to be hospitalized. I didn't even
11 notice any blood. He had just been pushed and
12 kicked. This was due to the fact that these men
13 were new to this type of action.

14 **CHAIRMAN LILLEY:** Any other questions? Thank

15 you very much, Mr. Romeo. I appreciate your
16 Governor. coming.

17 (Witness excused.)

18 - - -

19 whereupon, To put a date line, I go to 1957 when I moved to

20 **ROBERT I. MILLER**

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

22 **EXAMINATION**

23 By Mr. Jaffe:

24 Q would you put on the record your business and the
25 fact that you have been in a recent election and where you