

(Witness excused)

Q You might want to briefly state your name and address.

Whereupon, **RUSSELL MAJOR** was called as a witness, first duly sworn, testified as follows:

EXAMINATION

By Mr. Jaffer:

Q Mr. Major, I wonder if you could state for the record your present occupation, where you reside and how long you have been active in the community in Englewood.

A I live in Englewood at 212 Englewood Avenue. The only official position I have, I am a board member of the Englewood Urban League. I am on the board of directors there. As far as being active in the City of Englewood, I guess I have just been active the last six or seven years through different organizations. I belong to civic groups, civil rights groups.

Q I understand you are a member of the executive board of the Bergen County Urban League.

A Yes.

Q And chairman of their housing committee?

A That is correct.

Q And I have a note you were appointed by Governor Hughes to be the newly appointed city housing commissioner.

A That's correct.

1 Q You might want to briefly tell us what that
2 involves.

3 A We have a housing authority in Englewood that
4 supposedly will take care of urban renewal and the state is
5 entitled to one member on that housing authority who
6 supposedly reports to Commissioner Yivisaker and makes sure
7 that things go according to the way they should based on
8 some of the state requirements. We have recently had a law
9 passed in the state that now a municipality will have to
10 submit its relocation plans to the State of New Jersey, and
11 there will be state aid to the housing authority.

12 Q To really zero in on what we would like your views
13 on, the Commission has been looking into the problem at
14 Englewood. I wonder if you would like to express to us
15 your opinion as to the causes of the civil disturbance and
16 hopefully give us your thoughts as to some of the
17 recommendations and some of the things you think should be
18 done.

19 A I am in kind of a weird position because, frankly,
20 and it is something I can't prove, I feel like the
21 disturbances were a put-up job. I have never believed that
22 rioters would advertise six or seven weeks before the time
23 they were going to riot that on X day we shall riot in this
24 spot. I have just never believed that. This from all I
25 have heard is what happened. I have spoken to Mayor Volk

1 about? Q You might want to briefly tell us what that
2 involves. They know a great deal of that, I've never heard
3 of it. A We have a housing authority in Englewood that
4 supposedly will take care of urban renewal and the state is
5 entitled to one member on that housing authority who
6 supposedly reports to Commissioner Yivisaker and makes sure
7 that things go according to the way they should based on
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21 disturbances were a put-up job. I have never believed that
22 rioters would advertise six or seven weeks before the time
23 they were going to riot that on X day we shall riot in this
24 spot. I have just never believed that. This from all I
25 have heard is what happened. I have spoken to Mayor Volk

1 about this. I have spoken to Mr. Breslin, and they all
2 assure me they knew a month ahead of time, five weeks ahead
3 of time there was going to be a riot on this street corner
4 at this certain time. At any rate, after hearing all the
5 stories, the night that we had the disturbance and I went
6 up to Englewood Police Headquarters because earlier that
7 day I had seen police all over the Fourth Ward in Englewood
8 and I went to speak to some people I knew in the police
9 department. While I was there the first call came out
10 about trouble in the Fourth Ward in Englewood. Somebody
11 had either put a bullet or a BB through a store window and
12 it had caused the alarm to go off. It breaks the tape.
13 Nothing that I saw during the time that I was there,
14 and I spent quite a few hours there with Mr. Crawley, who
15 is Chairman of the Urban League in Englewood -- we had a
16 Mr. Jackson there who works in this building with the
17 Civil Rights Commission. We were back and forth to see if
18 we could get some sense out of this. During most of that
19 time I never saw anything that the Englewood Police couldn't
20 have handled or nothing that they hadn't handled at other
21 times.

22 If you are familiar with the town, you would know this
23 particular area -- in the Negro community if we put up a
24 sign. This Commission has been there.
25 That area is a bad area. The people in that area

1 have asked to have it cleaned up for years. Policemen that
2 go down there to ask people to move off the corner from
3 time to time have been continually assaulted or verbally
4 abused, so it is really nothing new. It is just this summer
5 there was riot fever in the land and with the extra police
6 and the publicity and so forth I really think this is what
7 caused the whole thing. This is not to say we don't have
8 problems in Englewood, but this riot or mini-riot was
9 played all out of proportion. It shouldn't have been,
10 number one. Nothing happened, like I said before, that the
11 Englewood Police couldn't have handled, or if they were
12 allowed to go in from the beginning when the rumors first
13 started that they wouldn't have been able to handle.

14 There is also some question in my mind as to why the
15 recognized leaders of the Negro community were never given
16 any opportunity to cut this type of thing off. If you
17 believe there is going to be a riot and you have ministers
18 and elected officials and so forth who can possibly go and
19 check things out and see if it is true, I tend to think
20 these people should be contacted.

21 The other thing is after the riot was over and people
22 were set with, somehow the idea got around that everything
23 would be all right in the Negro community if we put up a
24 park. This is a park that is about 150 feet away from the
25 biggest park in the City of Englewood. Somehow the idea

1 had been conveyed to people that this is what the Negro
2 community wanted.

3 Shortly after the riot there were stories in the
4 newspaper that this was spontaneous, no outsiders involved.
5 During our election campaign the same people who made those
6 statements then turned around and said this riot was planned
7 and outsiders were involved.

8 Q Did you ever see any outsiders?

9 A I didn't see any outsiders there that night. The
10 policemen I spoke to, policemen on the beat, not police
11 station policemen, but policemen that work everyday,
12 they assured me no outsiders were involved. The people
13 who were involved in the disturbances that I knew assured
14 me no outsiders were involved. The problem that you do face
15 in some communities is like after something like this
16 happens every hairbrain from 50 miles around may end up
17 in your community. This didn't happen in Englewood either.
18 I think somebody is making a lot of statements about the
19 Englewood situation which are not basically true, and the
20 same people are not doing anything to help our basic
21 problem which happened to be housing and a better
22 understanding between both communities and Englewood. We
23 have a dialog problem.

24 CHAIRMAN LILLET: I don't mean to interrupt
25 you, but you indicated that the leaders of the

1 community were not consulted at numerous key spots.
2 We have heard testimony after the disturbance
3 there were several meetings where the mayor met
4 with people from the community. Would you say
5 these were the wrong people that he met with?

6 THE WITNESS: Number one, after the
7 disturbance was a little too late to stop it and
8 what had happened, and this is something that has
9 been in great conflict, in the first night of the
10 disturbances, the councilman from the Fourth Ward,
11 Vincent Tibbs, was with the mayor. There was a
12 group of people in this crowd who were voicing
13 complaints, and the mayor said to them, "If you
14 would like to sit down and talk with me, you come
15 in and see me tomorrow and, Mr. Tibbs, I want you
16 to make sure these people get here."

17 CHAIRMAN LILLY: Mr. Tibbs was with them?

18 THE WITNESS: Mr. Tibbs was with the mayor
19 at that time and when the mayor heard the people
20 from Mr. Tibbs's ward complaining, he asked Mr.
21 Tibbs to bring these people to him. These people
22 in no way represented any of the leadership of the
23 ward. These were people who were dissatisfied
24 with conditions at the time. I believe some of
25 them participated in the disturbance itself.

1 Now, an interesting question came up, and it
2 is this: That the mayor and the police department
3 all the time were talking about law and order, and
4 if you believe in law and order, you do not deal
5 with the people whom you believe cause the
6 disturbances. No matter how distasteful it is,
7 you still go through the normal leadership channels
8 and hope that these people will be able to take
9 care of things. This is a personal feeling of
10 mine that not only deals with Englewood but with
11 most of these communities, that the leadership
12 that is there had never been allowed to win, and
13 this is one of the problems or things that caused
14 problems. When I say that, I would like to point
15 out that in Englewood, as in other places, the
16 Urban League never comes away with a victory,
17 CORE never comes away with a victory nor the
18 NAACP. So there is no choice between a moderate
19 civil rights and the most extreme civil rights
20 group because no matter what your program is, if
21 you have to deal with the majority community there
22 is never any satisfaction given. Yet all of these
23 groups have one thing in common, and that is we
24 preach law and order because we can't beat the
25 majority population. There is no way to do that.

1 community. In Inglewood in particular among the most
2 civil rights groups we have a political orientation
3 that we know the answer to get the things we want.
4 So civil rights groups that get blamed for riots
5 public. In Inglewood, and this has happened, it is just
6 city over not the case because the civil rights groups have
7 public another way and that is with the ballot, and we
8 the state have just proven it works. The rest of it is
9 This department is true, but people or the public as
10 a whole just talk.

By Mr. Jaffe:

11 Q Do you know the young guys who were the trouble-
12 makers? I am not asking for names.

For the most part we have a fairly sophisticated community.

13 A I know some of them. It was my experience that
14 night to never see a group of over twenty people at one
15 time giving the police a hard time, and I will admit that
16 once things started they definitely gave the police a hard
17 time. But as far as this being some planned insurrection
18 or something, I just have never believed that.

19 Q Do you have any views as to recommendations that
20 the Commission could make that would be helpful in these
21 areas? We would be interested in your thoughts along
22 those lines.

23 A I am pretty hopeful at this present time because
24 we have had a change in the administration in the city,
25 and rather than having a monopoly with the majority of the

1 community, now we are hopeful to have a dialog^{ue}. This is
2 the answer.

3 The second problem we have had in Englewood is we
4 have had an official body that was prone to lying to the
5 public. We went through an integration struggle in the
6 city over schools, and at the outset of that the general
7 public was told by elected officials that it was against
8 the state laws to change neighborhood school boundaries.
9 This happens not to be true, but people or the public as
10 a whole tend to believe elected officials because they
11 rarely have anything to lie about or this creates a
12 leadership problem. This has been the problem in the city.
13 For the most part we have a fairly sophisticated community.
14 Most people think they are fairly liberal, and I think they
15 are if they are given a chance. I just don't think the
16 majority of the community in Englewood has been given a
17 chance, and I would think in the next two years they will
18 be. Two years from now I could probably answer some of
19 your questions a lot better than now, but my contention is
20 that the majority white community in Englewood has not been
21 given a chance to really do something about the problems
22 we have.

23 The housing problem is at least 50 years old. It is
24 just nothing new. We have stacks of reports, newspaper
25 articles, resolutions and so forth about what should be done

1 about housing in Englewood, and we just have never had
2 anything done. Every now and then around election time
3 there is a big furor about housing, and it dies down and
4 people get tired and five or six years later there will be
5 another big fuss. But at this present time I am hopeful we
6 have reached a point in Englewood's history where we will
7 be able to solve our problems ourselves because with no
8 disrespect to the Commission, I happen to believe that
9 local problems are going to be solved by local people.
10 There is no formula you can come up with from Washington or
11 anywhere else. Committees are tools. The federal
12 government provides money which is a tool for local areas
13 to get their problems solved, and in Englewood if we get
14 this dialog going and with the sincere people I think we
15 have in charge I think we have it well licked. I think this
16 formula holds true all over.

17 I was in Newark during the riot, and I think the
18 Newark situation was ridiculous based on the fact that
19 Negroes are in the majority as far as the voting public
20 goes. To hell with the brick. As long as you've got the
21 ballot you can make people jump.

22 I don't know if you are aware of it, but in Englewood
23 at this time we have a contested election. We are going
24 through a recount in which the winning party picked up two
25 additional votes, but the thing that annoys me and other

1 people is that the only machines that they are checking in
2 Englewood to see if something has gone wrong with them are
3 those that reside in the Negro community. The only election
4 books that are gone over to see if there is any fraud
5 perpetrated in Englewood or in those districts where Negroes
6 live, not only in the Fourth Ward but in any district in
7 the city that Negroes live in where they came out and
8 registered.

9 We have been told by the majority party what you should
10 do if you want to change things, but these are the only
11 books that are taken out and checked. This kind of attitude
12 has got to go if you are going to make progress in a town
13 because anybody will steal, anybody will lie, anybody will
14 cheat. If you think something has gone wrong in a town,
15 you have to check it all or you create certain impressions
16 in the minds of people.

17 CHAIRMAN LILLEY: Who runs the recount, the
18 county or the town?

19 THE WITNESS: The county runs the recount,
20 but you have to go to a judge and you get a court
21 order for these things to happen. You have to
22 specify in your court order what you want done.
23 The court order specified that the total vote
24 should be counted from the City of Englewood, but
25 it went on to state that all of the machines in

1 the Fourth Ward should be checked to see if these
2 machines had been tampered with to change the
3 vote.

4 They also have a court order that election
5 books would be checked to see if there are any
6 forgeries in the election books, and again in this
7 area the only books that are checked are those that
8 pertain to the Fourth ward and those that pertain
9 to two other wards, but that have a high Negro
10 concentration in this particular area. I have
11 been present when these things were done. I have
12 asked the candidates and the lawyers involved why
13 just these areas were selected and after they
14 gave an answer that you can accept or reject, I
15 also wanted to know why their own Negro election
16 workers to have worked at this job for several
17 years and who would be able to spot a fraud just
18 like that, aren't being used because it would be
19 easier and cheaper. The guy gave me some inane
20 answer. The guy told me an Irishman is an
21 Irishman, period. This is the kind of attitude
22 that exists in our city government and will exist
23 in it until the first of January.

24 For anybody to deny that we don't have
25 segregated housing in Englewood is utterly

1 ridiculous when you have 90 percent of the
2 population living in two wards in all incomes.
3 We have fifty thousand dollar homes in the Fourth
4 ward like we have twelve thousand dollar homes.
5 For somebody to insist that our town is integrated
6 because you might have fifteen Negroes living, say,
7 in the best ward in town and we have no problems
8 just fool-hardy. It doesn't solve anything. I
9 think we have to attack these kind of problems.

10 We have problems in the Negro community that
11 only Negroes are going to be able to solve. But
12 the overall problem is one that the community is
13 going to have to help us with. Unless the
14 community is willing, we are just not going to get
15 over it. If the riots or disturbances did any
16 good, they alerted a lot of people to the fact
17 that something is wrong. The City of Englewood
18 has no business with three or four hundred
19 policemen walking around their streets working on
20 one little concentrated area. Things should never
21 be in that kind of situation. There is nothing
22 wrong for a community to be made to believe that
23 the only thing that caused this was the need of
24 four park benches or five on a street 150 feet
25 away from a park, or that housing should be used

1 as a campaign issue to the point that two weeks
2 before the campaign we had big signs put up on a
3 proposed housing area pointing out that after the
4 election this would be a housing area when we had
5 housing as a referendum question. Everybody
6 involved on both sides of the argument knew that
7 the plans that the city put forth happened to be
8 untrue. There is just no federal program to do
9 things they claim could be done.

10 These are the kind of things that are hard to
11 break down to the general public and the general
12 public doesn't want to hear about it the day after
13 election. It is these same types of attitudes
14 that breed trouble in a town and will breed
15 trouble in any town in this day of television
16 communication there is only so much fooling you
17 can do with the public. We have got to realize
18 that, too.

19 The last thing I want to say is about the
20 younger population in Englewood or the younger
21 Negroes across the country. When you are dealing
22 with a kid 19 or 20 years old and you are talking
23 about law and order, I have found we are dealing
24 with a generation that remembers Little Rock from
25 the television set, and there is not too much you

1 can tell them about law and order unless we
 2 produce, unless adults produce and turn out the
 3 things that are supposed to be the American way.
 4 Otherwise we can forget all about it because these
 5 kids won't listen.

6 CHAIRMAN LILLEY: Thank you very much for
 7 coming. We appreciate it very much.

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 11 C E R T I F I C A T E

12 I, JOSEPH F. READINGS, a Certified Shorthand Reporter
 13 and Notary Public in and for the State of New Jersey, do
 14 hereby certify that the foregoing is an accurate transcript
 15 of my stenographic notes to the best of my ability.

16
 17 Joseph F. Readings

18 November 25, 1967.

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