

Cops Riot in Houston

Fifth Estate Collective

1967

HOUSTON, Texas—The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has requested the U.S. Attorney General to launch a “vigorous investigation” of Houston police who “engaged in a vengeful and destructive rampage” against students and property at Texas Southern University during a five-hour riot on May 17.

NAACP Assistant Executive Director John A. Morsell, who was joined by NAACP Special Field Director C. Anderson Davis in a personal inspection of the riot-torn, predominantly Negro campus, charged in telegrams to Attorney General Ramsey Clark, Texas Gov. John Connally, and Houston Mayor Louis Welsh, that:

“Students were pulled: out of dormitories, forced to lie on grass strewn with glass from gun-shattered windows, all the while subject to verbal and physical abuse.”

Mr. Morsell, in his call for an investigation by Federal, state and city officials, said Houston police entered the university buildings with axes and other implements and “smashed doors, destroyed personally-owned radios and television sets; ransacked closets and cupboards, destroyed mattresses, and ripped tile from hall ceilings.”

Mrs. Mattie Harbert, a house mother in one of the dormitories, said that when police broke into her building and began to arrest students, most of them in pajamas or underwear, “they made me lie on the floor and two or three of them walked on me.”

“One of them kicked in the screen of my TV set and knocked my flower pots on the floor,” said Mrs. Harbert. She also reported seeing police carry “five or six (students) out bloody as beef.”

“The wanton destruction by Houston police,” Mr. Morsell said, also _ included the firing” of hundreds of shots into the buildings and windows of the state-supported university where some 4,400 students are enrolled.

The NAACP reported that most of the dormitories on campus are uninhabitable and local citizens are volunteering their homes for temporary student shelter.

A policeman was killed and several students and policemen were injured during the riot. Police arrested 488 students, five of whom were charged with inciting a riot.

The riot broke out following rock-throwing incidents involving students and long-standing racial grievances, it was reported.

Officials of the NAACP announced plans to call a citywide meeting of leaders to discuss the possibility of instituting court action to recover damages caused by police destruction of property, and to establish a “board of inquiry to investigate the rioting, from top to bottom.”



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