

Special Communication

To: All Responsible Jacksonville Citizens

*From: The Northeast Florida Council on
Human Relations*

*Re: The Jacksonville Human Relations Story
With Reference to the Riots of
August 27, 1960*

Date: Mid-September, 1960

Purpose of this Communication

The purpose of this communication is threefold:

1. To motivate responsible citizens in Jacksonville heretofore not involved in total, community wide communication, to see the necessity of their active participation in some such communication at this time due to the gravity and extent of our present community dis-organization.
2. To re-marshal and re-motivate responsible citizens in Jacksonville already involved at some point in community life to see the necessity of supporting positive, emerging, total-spectrum membership of what must be called (for the want of a better term) a community inter-racial commission.
3. To give an over view and set in prospective the basic facts that led up to and constituted the crisis as has been rightly called "The Jacksonville Race Riots."

There is widespread confusion amongst many folk in Jacksonville, as to what specifically happened here. Lack of adequate news coverage prior to the events of August 27 seemed to catch a large segment of the community unawares. This so called news "black out" (as explained by news media) was prompted in several instances by an honest desire to withhold facts that might lead to riotous conditions, and, in one instance, by a self-admitted editorial policy that did not want to give support to any inter-racial developments. However, curtailment of news *did not* keep events from happening; incomplete news coverage during and after the riots tended to give credence to the many, many rumors that emerged. This Council on Human Relations did not have staff or funds to establish a daily news sheet although its Executive Board authorized same. Due to the fact that the basic tensions that existed still exist, the situation is as grave as before. Although there have been several attempts to "do something" immediately, these developments in communication are naturally slow. A better planned police action in event of further outbreaks can only offset the increased organization of violence . . . the basic tensions still exist.

As one prominent citizen, a self identified conservative, so well stated, the gravity of the situation makes the problem now not one of segregation versus integration, but the honest facing up to the tensions and conditions by responsible folk in the community who perhaps heretofore had hoped that the problems would "go away" or "take care of themselves."

Background Developments

"We have no problems here" is a recurrent phrase that seemed to satisfy many people in Jacksonville when over the past few years it was suggested that we had racial problems and tensions. Over the past four years several groups, associations, and individuals made requests to city government (through the mayor's office) for the official formation of a bi-racial commission. This Council did so on several occasions; clergy groups in the city did likewise. The answer: that such a commission would foster rather than alleviate tension; that everyone in Jacksonville was "happy"; that a bi-racial commission would of necessity foster an integration movement that was contrary to the feelings of the majority of the citizens of Jacksonville. As recently as June 1960 when mounting tensions became obvious another request for a bi-racial commission met the same above answers. As late as August 29 it was said that the riots were planned by "outsiders" and "hoodlums." The only existent inter-racial communication between peoples in this community was carried on through the regular monthly meetings of the Northeast Florida Council on Human Relations.

The Crisis

On August 13th, the Jacksonville NAACP Youth Council began, after considerable planning, an organized sit-in demonstration and picketing of downtown Jacksonville stores; stores with segregated lunch counters. For almost two weeks these unpublicized demonstrations were tolerably peaceful; there were occasional incidents of harrassment caused on one side by white citizens who objected to the demonstrations, and on the other side by Negroes and others reputedly not members of the Youth Council who voluntarily joined the picket lines.

On Saturday, August 27, white men appeared as early as 8:30 a.m. in the Hemming Park area carrying walking sticks, baseball bats, and ax handles. Confederate flags were displayed and a sign said "get your free ax handle in the park." It was reported in the press that these implements were purchased in quantity lots from local stores. When the Youth Council demonstrators arrived for Saturday's demonstration prior to the store opening time (at 9:30 a.m.) the above mentioned white men with implements were noted, and the police were requested to come on the scene to protect the Youth Council demonstrators which the NAACP Youth Council stated was lawful and orderly. Around 10:30 a.m., it is reported, a sizeable number of policemen arrived on the scene. No definite police action was invoked although the increased and growing intensity of harrassment was noted. Also seen in the downtown area were armed persons. Harrassment, heckling, and pushing around increased in intensity as the morning grew on. Some observers have said that this growing intensity not being stopped by police authority could have indicated to the white hecklers that the police would let them "go all the way." In any event, mounting tension broke into actual violence by mid-day. At that time the melee was recorded aptly and accurately by local news media; one television station having a pictorial record of the actual skirmishes, beatings and flights. The Youth Council demonstrators, presumably, felt that they had to run from the area to escape bodily injury. When they started running to the closest Negro area in the vicinity, they were pursued by whites. It was at this time that the adult and youth of the Negro area that had not been involved in the NAACP Youth Council Demonstration, "got into the act." These groups of persons, not under the discipline of the Youth Council, retaliated with physical force.

About mid-day the scene was one of utter chaos. Persons were bruised and beaten, pushed into paths of moving automobiles after being beaten and stomped . . . some escaped with only bruises, others were hospitalized . . . both Negro and white. It was reported that police action was not ordered until after the rioting had broken out and most of it had taken place. Some observers feel that the policemen on the scene during the morning activities were without orders to do anything. For this reason, perhaps, or for personal reasons, or for personal fear, police action during the morning and noon day hours was inadequate, to say the least. On Saturday afternoon and evening, the whole community became an armed camp. In spite of rumors, and isolated, scattered incidents within the wider community, an uneasy peace ensued into Sunday. City authorities said that the condition had been caused by

outsiders and hoodlums, and the police now had things under control and all was well.

Post Riot Developments

Sunday, August 28, marked the date for a previously scheduled NAACP Rally in the Negro community. At the afternoon rally, and then on into the evening, adult advisors with Youth Council members discussed next steps. Although members of the Youth Council were ready to begin picketing again on Monday morning, they were dissuaded by the adult advisors. The Youth Council voted "to suspend sit-in demonstrations and picketing to give those parties (Negro and white citizens) an opportunity to discuss the issues in an atmosphere of lessened tensions." Thus a sort of "truce" set in.

Monday, August 29, was the date in which the mayor, in official consultation with the Executive Committee of the Ministerial Alliance, again refused to form an official inter-racial commission, for the above mentioned reasons. At that time, after the mayor's departure, the Ministerial Alliance, in concert with the Ministerial Association from the Negro community and other interested groups in the tense situation, decided to form an independent inter-racial committee. On that date, August 29, the Negro youth gangs, were preparing for massive retaliation on the white community. All resources in the Negro community, spearheaded by leadership of the NAACP, and other groups not affiliated with it, made an all out effort to discover the leadership of the Negro gangs and to plead with them not to break the uneasy peace of the community. After 3 or 4 days, these efforts seemed to be sufficiently firmed up to insure an unofficial truce by the Negro gangs. In the middle of the week following the Saturday race riots, the committee formed out of the interest of the Ministerial Alliance was convened and met for several days, for the expressed purpose of forming a larger and more widely representative bi-racial commission from the whole community. This committee recessed when from another direction, responsible citizens across the community began to form such a commission. It is believed that this effort to form a bi-racial commission was motivated by economic factors which already were reported to be strong, and, the growing consciousness on the part of the whole community that the potential riotous conditions might flare up at any moment; such impending riot conditions would make the August 27 affair seem like a small skirmish.

It is known now that over 3000 youth in the city of Jacksonville are organized into highly structured gangs; that these gangs had been well organized for sometime; that although these gangs had been confined to the Negro area, the outbreak of strife on August 27 gave them a real reason for being; that they are committed to a policy of an "eye for an eye." An uneasy truce still exists with these gangs who agreed earlier to "cool" it. Also, the police are known to have taken some action in controlling them.

For two weeks following August 27, many rumors continued to circulate in the whole community and contributed to the confusion. The Council on Human Relations along with other associations tried to ferret these rumors out and track them down. An uneasy truce still remains.

The president of the Youth Council of the NAACP reported the following:

"In talking with the gangleaders and members, 97% of 98% of them stated that this — the white mob attacks on Negroes — was the reason for their 'uprising.' Their actions in large degree stem from lack of recreational facilities, bad housing, broken homes, etc. If an extensive program could be set up primarily for dealing with these gangs, the situation could be improved.

Special attention was focused on the case of Richard Parker, an FSU student visiting in town. Parker holds membership in the NAACP and joined the picketeers on August 25. According to the Youth Council, his participation was not courted nor did he come within the discipline of the planned demonstration. Being a white person, he received the full hostility of white observers on the scene. He had to be escorted from the picket lines. He was later arrested and sentenced to go days for vagrancy, and, presumably for action inciting a riot, and resisting arrest. While under police custody (jail) he was beaten, receiving a broken jaw and possible concussion, and, was further charged with as-

sault along with the white men that assaulted him. By mid-September he was still in jail; a writ of habeas corpus was denied; his case is being appealed.

Present Situation

Several factors are evident about the situation at this time:

- A. We hope that the majority of the community has become aware of the "powder keg" on which the everyday activities of all our citizens is based.
- B. The initial committee formed by the initiation of the Ministerial Alliance has been in recess for a number of days because of "c" following.
- C. An inter-racial commission has been formed on a wider spectrum of community basis than the initial Alliance committee. This group is composed of a wider cross section of both Negro and white committees. Members have been making inquiry as to "where we should go"; it plans to continue its work.
- D. Members of the Negro community are keeping in constant touch with the Negro gangs, hoping that they can be prevailed upon not to act. This is the "powder keg" of the situation; presumably white gangs, likewise, may break forth into action.
- E. The Youth Council of the NAACP has tried to maintain its good faith in B and C above in spite of the fact that these processes have been slow; and, that very little "news" or publicity is coming from these inter-racial meetings.

What We Must Do

- (1) Urge the mayor to officially sanction a bi-racial commission.
- (2) Encourage press and news media to carry full coverage of events in this area.
- (3) Encourage the emerging bi-racial commission to examine the background and causes of the current crisis; the social, economic, educational and recreational setting in which our citizens live. (In May, 1946 the Council of Social Agencies published a detailed survey, entitled "Jacksonville Looks At Its Negro Community" — and in March 1948 published a report by a follow-up committee on actions taken on specific recommendations of this survey. Both of these are excellent background for a current examination.)
- (4) Support the efforts of the police in impartial law enforcement.
- (5) Make a personal effort to evaluate rumors, or unverified news; pass on those potentially dangerous to sources that might track them down — such as the County Sheriff's Office.
- (6) Discuss our current crisis constructively in person to person conversations, and in our social, fraternal and business organizations and groups. This is a problem of our whole community and needs positive, calm consideration by all of us.
- (7) Become informed of the work of the emerging bi-racial commission and offer your support and evidence your personal concern to its individual members.

Finally

There has been working in this community for the past four years a group of citizens known as the Northeast Florida Council on Human Relations. It is affiliated with the Florida Council on Human Relations, and will continue to patiently serve the community in its specialized way. The Council seeks to keep open the lines of communication between all groups in the community, to search out the facts, combat rumors, mediate differences, and carry on an educational program for better understanding and cooperation.

Address all inquiries and contributions to:

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