

1967

To report the events of a riot from the point of its ignition to its final dissolution, one must, in a manner of speaking, take judicial notice of the many contributory occurrences which provided the proper mix of emotionalism necessary to fuel the flames of disorder.

The Newark riot 1967 followed the recent trend of riotous disorders throughout the United States. After the climate was properly charged, a police incident provided the spark to set off the brush fires which mushroomed into a widespread conflagration. However, a variance in Newark's experience is found in the arrest of a member of an occupational calling which enjoys nationwide rapport with police. Taxi operators universally enjoy an almost exalted status in their relationship with the police for they have a common bond in shared experiences and consequently are natural police allies. But a Newark cab driver apparently set out to reverse this good relationship by publicly establishing his dissatisfaction with the police, and he succeeded in gaining his own arrest to dramatize his point. Evidently, he had many sympathizers and supporters for they soon appeared in large numbers to protest his arrest. On July 12th, cab driver Charles William Smith's personal pique propelled Newark into the chaos of riot to emerge five days later, with twenty-seven of its citizens killed, an estimated damage and inventory loss of \$15 million, and untold other suffering and injuries to its citizens.

The Start of the Riot - Arrest of Charles William Smith

Wednesday - July 12th, 1967

At 9:30 P.M. Charles William Smith was arrested on charges of Assault and Battery on Patrolman John De Simone, badge #1187 and Patrolman Vito Pontrelli, badge #1276 in violation of New Jersey Statute 2A:90-4. He was further charged with Resisting Arrest in violation of City Ordinance 17:4-3 and Use of Loud and Offensive Language in violation of City Ordinance 17:2-16. Smith was also cited for operating a moving vehicle while on the revoked list and the arrest was made at South 9th Street and 15th Avenue, and was reported on Central Complaint #41277 and Central Arrest #11511. At 11:30 A.M., July 13th in the Office of the Fourth Detective Squad at Police Headquarters Smith was issued traffic citations by Officers, De Simone and Pontrelli for:

"Driving When License Revoked"	(39:3-40)
"Following Another Vehicle Too Closely"	(39:4-89)
"Failure to Drive on Right Half of Roadway"	(39:4-82)

Wednesday - July 12th, 1967 - 9:30 P.M.

Officers De Simone and Pontrelli were on routine patrol travelling west in 15th Avenue when a Safety Company Cab closed in behind their motor patrol car (#42). The operator began to tailgate, blinking on and off his high beams while alternately accelerating and braking. This continued for almost a block when at the intersection of South 7th Street the cab in the oncoming traffic lane passed the patrol car. After a pursuit to South 9th Street the patrolmen stopped the cab and requested the operator to produce his license and registration certificates.

Smith's Actions

Immediately Smith answered in a loud tone "What the fuck do you call this, you White mother-fuckers" !!!

The Officers ordered Smith to be quiet.

"Fuck you mother fuckers," replied Smith.

Smith was then ordered from his cab and told he was under arrest. Smith refused to leave his cab. As the patrolmen reached the driver's side of the cab, Smith opened the door and struck Patrolman De Simone in the face with his fist causing a laceration. Patrolman Pontrelli came to De Simone's aid and he was struck in the stomach by Smith. Smith was subdued and placed in the patrol car.

Another patrol car was summoned to tow and safeguard the cab and motor patrol car #42 started for the 4th Precinct. The prisoner became violent striking out at the operator Pontrelli who received several blows to his head. De Simone calmed the prisoner until they reached the precinct. Smith refused to leave the car. He was then carried into the precinct where he was booked.

At the precinct he refused to cooperate and had to be placed in a cell. The arrest reports lack the personal data usually obtainable from cooperative prisoners. Smith had a minor record in Newark - Not guilty of Malicious Damage in 1956 and a Contempt of Court citation in 1964.

Wednesday - July 12th, 1967 - 10:45 P.M.

Smith taken to the Beth Israel Hospital for treatment after complaining of pains in his right side. Dr. Greene treated Smith, for a possible fractured rib after an examination by x-ray by Dr. Seigel. Prisoner Smith was taken to Police Headquarters by motor patrol car #40 Patrolmen Nino and Hiltweir.

Following Smith's arrest residents of the area began gathering in front of the 4th Precinct clapping and chanting for the driver's release. Inspector Melchoir permitted representatives of Area Board Two to see the prisoner. At their request he sent Smith to the hospital for examination.

Wednesday - July 12th, 1967 - 11:30 P.M. - Midnight

Someone threw a Molotov cocktail against the Precinct wall. Speakers addressed the crowd.

Oliver Lofton - Director Newark Legal Services Project.

"I have fourteen men on my staff and if necessary I'll use every one to bring justice here."

Inspector Melchoir acceded to a request to remove all policemen from the area. Fifty-three officers entered the station hours.

Rumors that Smith had died spread through the crowd.

Thursday - July 13th, - 12:30 A.M.

Police Director Dominick A. Spina arrived at the scene. The Fourth Precinct is designated as the Command Post.

A rock crashed through the Precinct window.

Robert Curvin - Rutgers Community Action Instructor - O.E.O. Program addressed the crowd. "I can tell you this we are not satisfied" - The crowd roared. "We are not going to leave until we are satisfied. There are approximately two hundred and fifty people here now. We need more and we need to be organized."

Thursday - July 13, 1967 - 1:00 A.m.

Rocks crashed into the Precinct Station. A fire engine was stoned responding to a fire in a car in the front of the General Electric Company, 17th Avenue. A platoon of police protected the firemen.

The crowd in front of the precinct had grown to extend into the recreation areas and parking lots of the Reverend Hayes Homes.

Thursday - July 13, 1967 - 1:45 a.m.

Cab drivers assembled with their cabs at Belmont and Kinney and Montgomery Streets. Groups gathered and a caravan was formed. Twenty-five cabs and several private cars were soon filled and the drive to the City Hall started. The majority of the crowd still milled around the Fourth Precinct and Hayes Homes.

Thursday - July 13, 1967 - 2:30 a.m.

Persons gathered on the City Hall steps. Two lines of cabs blocked traffic in Broad Street. Police flanked the gathering on three sides.

James Walker - United Community Council and _____ were in the crowd. Police ticketed the vehicles and tow-trucks responded to remove the vehicles whose drivers refused to move their cabs. The crowd thinned out but about fifty led by James Walker attempted to enter Police Headquarters. Detectives barred the door and Lieutenant Mc Gurty informed the group that the prisoner could not be seen and that they could not enter. The officers blocked the door with loaded shotguns. "You're well prepared" said James Walker. Realizing they could not enter the crowd milled about until finally Walker said, "Come back tomorrow morning and fill the court. Bring your family, sisters and brothers."

A cab driver who had requested to see Smith turned to Walker and said, "Hey you're leading this thing aren't you"? Walker replied "I'm just one of the crowd". The cabbie sensed he was hedging and added, "I still want to talk to you, lets go over here" (out of police earshot).

Thursday - July 13, 1967 - 3:30 a.m.

Damage to the Fourth Precinct Station is estimated at \$2,500 for destruction of 102 windows, screens, door, and miscellaneous interior damage.

The following arrests took place during the night, seven men for ideling and malicious damage - five men for looting, one man for loud and abusive language, nine men for possession of stolen property, and three men for breaking and entering.

The following Central Complaint Numbers record incidents during the foregoing hours:

- C.C. 41312 - Fairmount - 17th Avenue
Break and Entry - One arrest
- C.C. 41314 - 54 - 17th Avenue, One arrest - larceny
- C.C. 41333 - 172 Belmont Avenue, Four arrests -
Breaking and Entering
- C.C. 41374 - 425 Springfield Avenue, Breaking and
Entering
- C.C. 41398 - 434 Springfield Avenue - Vandalism
- C.C. 41786 - 282 Springfield Avenue - Breaking and
Entering
- C.C. 41511 - 282 Springfield Avenue - Second Break
nad Entry
- C.C. 41812 - 502 Springfield Avenue - Break and
Entry