



# Jose Torres

*Newark, N.J.*  
**EXPLOSION IN NEWARK**

Newark is not exactly the place where you'd want to spend a honeymoon. It is not the place where you expect to see tourists walking down Broad St. admiring the fancy clothes in the store windows. For Newark, if you ask someone who is white and lives in the suburbs, is the jungle where every black should be put.

Newark is the largest city in New Jersey. Of its population of 400,000, no more than 25 per cent is white. Although its Mayor, Kenneth Gibson, and its police chief, Hubert Williams, are black, there seems to be a disproportion in the makeup of political representatives and the police force in relation to the community.

For example, Newark's two State Senators and two Congressmen are all white, while of the nine elected ward leaders, five are white. The police force of 1500 includes only 200 blacks and 36 Puerto Ricans. To put it another way, 84 per cent of the total force is white

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Whatever they are in numbers, Newark's blacks and Puerto Ricans are politically, economically and socially minorities. They live close to one another in poverty, often in sub-human conditions. They are the unemployed, the welfare recipients, the ones who complain of police brutality.

Last Sunday afternoon, while 10,000 Puerto Ricans were holding a festival in Branch Brook Park, trouble erupted. A group of young Puerto Ricans was shooting dice in the park and the Essex County mounted police sought to disperse the "gamblers" with their horses. A child was hurt by a horse. One thing followed another and suddenly there was a riot.

It was not until Mayor Gibson arrived on the troubled scene that the situation finally subsided. He spent all night

negotiating and talking with the angry crowd and the police. By midnight seven Puerto Ricans had been wounded. Two of them later died.

On Monday at 2 p.m., as promised, Mayor Gibson met with two groups of Puerto Ricans who came to City Hall to discuss the situation. Outside, about 2000 people were demanding action. Nine Puerto Ricans were in jail and two were in the hospital, one on the brink of death. What, the people yelled, was the city administration going to do about this?

By 5 p.m., with no definite word from Gibson or anyone else, the crowd grew impatient and began to throw rocks at City Hall. I had been there since that morning after receiving a call from Gibson's office for help. At one point I was able to contain the crowd, by pleading with them to wait for word from the Mayor. Both the crowd and I agreed to wait for an hour for a Gibson statement.

More than an hour after I had spoken to the crowd, and as a Puerto Rican group met with the Mayor, rocks flew again, breaking one of Gibson's office windows. The Mayor called police chief Williams and a decision was made to bring in police squads.

As police cars raced to the scene, sirens screaming, people began to run in all directions.

A young pregnant Puerto Rican woman ran toward a bar for safety and found the door locked. A white cop came up to her and cracked her on the head. Blood spurted out and as the woman stumbled away, the cop rushed toward another victim—a young Puerto Rican running north on Broad St. The officer cut him short and struck at him indiscriminately with great force. The boy dropped to the ground and another cop

hit him one more time and, as the body lay motionless on the sidewalk, one passing cop kicked it.

These, of course, were not the only cases of brutality. What's behind these terrible events?

First of all, Mayor Gibson has three Puerto Ricans on his staff—Deputy Mayor Ramon Aneses, public relations director Raul Davila and a special aide, Miguel Rodriguez—who were completely ignored (mostly by those closer to the Mayor) by the Administration as it made its key decisions on how to deal with the situation. Only after there were many arrests and over a dozen people hurt and the first of two deaths were the three called in.

Although police chief Williams is black and had the best intentions in this particular matter there seems to be some friction between him and the 84 per cent white segment of his force.

My own view is that there is a division (psychological and otherwise) in the police force: those who would rather listen to State Sen. Anthony Imperiale and PBA president Ronald Gaspanetti, and those who are loyal to their boss.

\* 9-7-74

And the Puerto Rican leadership is not without blame. There were two groups speaking to Gibson in the name of the 60,000 Puerto Ricans of Newark: a left-wing, radical group and a right-wing, conservative group. They didn't see eye to eye for obvious reasons.

Gibson listened patiently to both groups and their demands but I don't know how much respect the Mayor has for them. For neither group was able to stop the violence in the streets.

However, Fernando Zambrana, a businessman and a Puerto Rican member of the Newark Urban Coalition Inc., who spends part of his time with the community and its problems, has formed an organization—the Hispanic Emergency Council—that received Gibson's blessing, and it will begin to deal with this situation at once.

It is a hopeful organization and a much needed one.