

Kansas City, Missouri

May 7, 1968

I, Herman A. Johnson, make the following voluntary statement to Hubert K. Johnson and George F. Lueckenhoff, whom I know to be Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

My name was one of several authorized names affixed to a telegram, I composed, dated April 15, 1968, sent from Kansas City, Missouri, to the Attorney General of the United States, requesting an investigation of certain incidents during the Kansas City, Missouri, disturbances, April 9-13, 1968, which we felt were possible violations of personal civil rights.

I am a Negro male, 51 years of age, Metropolitan President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and I reside at 2632 West Paseo, both at Kansas City, Missouri.

The following represents my personal observations and knowledge of the incidents specified in the above described telegram:

About 8:30 AM, April 9, 1968, Lee V. Swinton, who preceded me in my NAACP office, telephoned me at my home, informing that students were marching from Lincoln High School.

I immediately drove from my home to Lincoln High School, and observing only a few students on the Lincoln High School grounds, then drove to the offices of the Kansas City Call, weekly Negro newspaper, Kansas City, Missouri, on 18th Street. I learned nothing there about the marching students and began to search for the group of marchers. I found them marching south on Woodland at 30th Street. I recognized and identified none of the marching students.

On reaching Linwood Boulevard, the group, possibly about 250 students, turned and marched eastward on Linwood. I parked my car at the south curb of Linwood in front of the Linwood United Presbyterian Church at Woodland, got out of my car and helped guide the group across Linwood to the south side of the Boulevard, stopping traffic to permit the crossing. At this time I noticed no other Negro adult leader with the group.

We marched on east, keeping to the south of the center yellow line on Linwood Boulevard, and I helped some apparent student monitors of the group in keeping the students in an orderly column. The reason for my joining the group was, of course, to attempt to keep them marshaled in an orderly fashion. At about Linwood and Brooklyn, Lee Swinton appeared in his car with a public address system. I believe Lee was alone. I talked with two Negro students, whom I understood to be presidents of Manual and Lincoln High Schools Student Bodies, according to their

statements, their names being unrecalled. I could identify these two student leaders if I saw them again. I asked these leaders where the group was going and its purpose. They indicated the group expected to join up with students at Central High School, then go on and join up with students at Paseo and Westport High Schools.

I suggested to these leaders that instead of going through such a long march, we hold memorial services for Dr. Martin Luther King on the playgrounds of Central Senior High School. One of the two student leaders agreed to this and started passing the word around to the group, which apparently agreed to the plan.

I then had Lee Swinton announce this plan over his automobile PA system. The group was so large that the traffic of automobiles had stopped on the north side of Linwood Boulevard. Some of the students began singing, but at my suggestion to one student body president, the students stopped singing and continued to walk eastward on Linwood toward Central High School. The group was entirely orderly up to this time and I had observed no police officer whatsoever on the scene.

I helped stop traffic on Linwood at its intersection with Prospect, at its intersection with Benton, as well as other intersections, while the students crossed the intersections, finally reaching the intersection of Indiana on Linwood.

I have a general specific recollection that Vernon Thompson was in the group of students marching east on Linwood before reaching the intersection with Indiana.

On reaching Indiana, the group turned south on Indiana from Linwood, some of the "kids" short-cutting across a gas station corner lot, but I herded these short-cutters back to the curb. About this time, Negro students, apparently from Central High School, began joining the group. About the same time, I observed Rev. John Preciphs, pastor of St. James Methodist Church, 2601 Spruce, Kansas City, Missouri, in the area. Preciphs asked me what was going on and I told him of our memorial service plans. Some of the crowd of students kept walking south on Indiana past Central Senior High School, up to 34th Street, and turned west on 34th Street. Apparently some of the students had not gotten the word about our planned memorial service.

I have a general recollection of first seeing Lee Bohannon among the groups of students, probably in the 34th and Indiana area, and I observed nothing unusual in the actions of either Thompson or Bohannon, in the general area of Central Senior High School.

I, probably with the help of Lee Swinton and other adults who had joined the group, were able to stop most of the group one block west of Indiana on 34th Street. I noticed that two Negro police patrolmen, one named Parker who rides a motorcycle,

and another Negro officer, name unknown, <sup>white</sup> on foot at the intersection of Indiana and 34th Streets, stopping and controlling traffic while the student marchers were moving and turning about. I noticed that traffic was stopped between 34th and 35th on Indiana. At this time there were possibly 350 to 450 students in the area student groups between Linwood and 34th Streets.

With the help of the two student body presidents of Manual and Lincoln, and of Lee Swinton with his PA system, we turned the student groups back northward on Indiana Avenue, with announcements of the memorial service we planned at the Central Senior High School playgrounds. At 34th and Indiana, Swinton and I kept waving the "kids" on their return northward toward Central High School, and the two Negro police officers also assisted in keeping the student groups marching northward, while they held back traffic.

When most of the student groups passed the intersection of 34th and Indiana, moving northward on Indiana towards 33rd Street, I observed two white police patrol cruisers parked on Indiana, headed south on the west side of Indiana, near 33rd Street. Four white officers were in the first and nearest cruiser. I noticed the windows were rolled down on this cruiser and saw two maces held by officers through the cruiser windows spraying a substance at students moving north on both sides of the cruiser. I ran toward the cruiser and felt some of the spray from the maces in my eyes. I said to the officers in the cruiser,

"For God's sake, don't shoot that stuff. We have got the kids under control." All four doors of the cruiser opened and four white officers emerged with billy clubs, approaching me on the driver's side of the cruiser. One of the officers, a sergeant, was told by me again not to spray the maces as the "kids" were under control, however I did not identify myself to this officer. By this time, the "kids" were yelling; in effect, "Why did they shoot that spray in our faces?" Up to this time I had noted no destructiveness whatsoever on the part of the students, such as overturning of cars, breaking of glass, or destruction of property, and had observed no student taunting, baiting, or insulting officers or civilians.

I again told the sergeant that the "kids" were under control. The sergeant replied, in effect, "You do not have control and you are not running things." The sergeant also indicated in effect that the police would handle the situation. I then looked into the second patrol cruiser and noticed a white uniformed officer with major's rank, and one other white officer. I identified myself to the major, as Herman Johnson, NAACP, and told him we felt we had the "kids" under control. The major made no response, but immediately approached the first patrol car and appeared to stop the officers who were advancing toward me.

I then began walking again to control the "kids" reactions to the described use of chemical maces, telling them

to go on to the Central High playgrounds and keep away from the police. The "kids" were clearly still resentful of the police use of chemical maces, but were not destructive or violent. It was clear several of the "kids" continued to resent the officers' use of the chemical maces, and some undoubtedly indicated a belligerent attitude. However, I actually heard no specific insults or taunts of an officer by any of the students.

I observed that the first described police cruiser was #77, and later came to understand the name of the major in the second patrol car was probably Garrison. He had gray hair.

On reaching the playgrounds, Central Senior High School, at Indiana and Linwood, it was apparent several "kids" were still feeling the effects of the chemical maces. Some were talking noisily or shouting with other students, and the situation appeared confused. There, I and Rev. W. H. White, Negro pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, 920 Olive, Kansas City, Missouri, spoke to some of the students. I asked Rev. White to offer a prayer for Dr. Martin Luther King, over Swinton's PA system. White attempted to do this over the PA system, but could not be heard by the crowd which was still quite noisy at this point.

About this same period of time, I recall observing

Lee Swinton, Curtis McClinton, and another member of the Chiefs professional football team, name unrecalled, as well as Bob Rone (phonetic), a Lincoln High School counsellor, and "Skip" Carter, associated with or possibly part owner of the Negro radio station KPRS, all Negro adults, in the area with the undoubted purpose of trying to keep the student groups from becoming disorderly. It was generally understood at about this time that instead of holding memorial services at Central Senior High School, the groups would march or assemble at Troost Lake Park at about 27th and Vine Streets.

By this time, possibly 10 to 15 white police officers were lined across Indiana Boulevard at the north side of the intersection at Linwood. Three Negro patrolmen were mixing with the student groups, cooling them off. The groups now numbered approximately 600, when they began marching west on Linwood from Indiana. I observed Everett O'Neal, a well known Negro community businessman and leader, and Rev. John Preciphs, at the head of the marching groups of students. I walked up and down the line of marchers to keep the groups in an orderly column. "Skip" Carter and Swinton kept driving to the front of the line, stopping their cars and waiting for parts of the marching groups to pass. I got in Swinton's car at least twice or more to go to the head of the line and from the head of the line to keep the column orderly by marching or standing with them on foot.



The first destructive act by any of the marchers I noted was at 2101 East Linwood, at the corner of Garfield. There I saw three or four Negro "kids", possibly 15 to 18 years of age and of high school age bracket, pull from the rear of a milk truck a metal case of milk containers. Everett O'Neal and I rushed to the truck. The "kids" ran, leaving broken milk bottles on the street. O'Neal again joined the head of the group with Rev. Preciphs. "Skip" Carter drove me in his car to the head of the march, where on foot, I told Preciphs to be sure to turn the group north on Woodland from Linwood, as I felt if the "kids" continued west on Linwood to and past Paseo Boulevard toward Troost, in commercial areas, there might be trouble between the "kids" and police.

I, O'Neal and Preciphs did turn some of the "kids" north on Woodland. I stayed at that intersection, perhaps with McClinton of the Kansas City football Chiefs, and other unrecalled Negro adult leaders. O'Neal and Preciphs continued to lead the marchers north on Woodland. Then in Swinton's car, I noticed that the "kids" had turned east on 31st Street, which I considered highly undesirable because they were headed toward the business district. Swinton and I drove west on Linwood, then north and joined the main group going west on 31st Street between Woodland and Paseo. Looking ahead I saw congested traffic at 31st and Paseo, where without identifying

myself, I asked two white motorcycle patrolmen to clear the way for the group to march north, but the patrolmen just looked at me and said nothing.

In the same area, I saw a Negro driver of a parked 7-Up truck, and told him to get his truck out of there, having in mind the previous incident involving the milk truck. Before he could drive his truck away, several Negro "kids" commandeered some bottles of 7-Up from his truck, squirting some of the bottles into the air. While some of the group turned north, others kept going west on 31st Street. I was backing on foot westward on 31st between Tracy and Forest trying to hold the latter group back and turn them northward. At this point, several cannisters of tear gas were thrown from my rear over my head, eastward and past me. Affected by the gas, I had to leave the scene. The group of marchers at that point also dispersed, running north and west from the effects of the gas. I fell on some grass, suffering effects of the gas, near Dr. Lee L. Bellfield's dental office, 1220 East 31st Street. Dr. Bellfield and a nurse in his office washed my eyes and face and I promptly recovered in about ten minutes. Once outside, I saw Swinton driving by in his car at Paseo and 31st, and waved him down. We both proceeded in Swinton's car on Vine Street to Troost Lake Park.

There, about 20 police patrolmen on the right side of a roadway east of the lake were lined up with some type of guns,

possibly tear gas guns. There appeared to be a smaller number of persons gathered, but still possibly about 500. There I left Swinton's car, identified myself to one of the officers, and suggested that the officers draw back and get their guns out of sight, feeling the show of force would only serve to arouse the "kids". I asked Everett O'Neal to help get the "kids" away from the scene to prevent trouble with the officers. O'Neal and other adults decided to walk with the "kids" north on Vine street to Parade Park at 17th and Paseo, as the "kids" seemed determined to keep moving. The "kids" got started moving that way.

About this time, I saw Principal Harwell of Lincoln High School riding in the area in "Skip" Carter's car, going north on Vine. I got in and out of "Skip's" car at least once, reaching the head of the marchers, O'Neal walking at the front of the parade. I understand O'Neal possibly made a phone call about that time to get Mayor Ilus Davis to meet and talk with the group of marchers. The group reached Vine and 23rd Streets where I observed Father Fly and Father Warner standing at the intersection. I asked them to help lead the group. They did, and I heard some of the "kids" say, "take it easy, we got two Fathers with us."

About this time, I understood from someone that the Mayor would meet with the group at Parade Park.

At 19th and Vine, I observed a barricade of possibly several police cars and possibly 15-30 policemen aligned across Vine Street on the north side of the intersection.

I told O'Neal to stop the group and he and others did stop the group on Vine Street between 20th and 19th Streets. O'Neal and I approached the police line, where I identified myself to some major, asking him to permit the "kids" to go on through to Parade Park at 17th Street and Paseo, as the Mayor had agreed to meet them there. I asked the Major to radio to confirm this as he appeared to question my statement. I saw him go to his radio car, speak over the microphone, and he returned to me, saying it was OK for the "kids" to go on to Parade Park. I asked the major how this might best be done in an orderly way and he indicated we should keep going north on Vine Street to 17th and then over park grass. The police cleared the intersection at 19th and Vine, and the group of marchers was led to 17th and Paseo. Since Mayor Davis had not yet arrived, some of the "kids" kept walking north into the park area past 17th Street. About this time, I observed the Mayor on the sidewalk in front of St. Joseph's Church, 1616 Paseo. He attempted to talk with the group of marchers over a PA system, but most were unable to hear him because of police radios and other noise.

At the time the Mayor was trying to address the student groups, I noted that police had put up a strong police

line across Paseo at 15th Street. It was apparent that the Mayor was not "getting through" to the "kids" since he could not be heard.

About this time, I first observed Lee Bohannon to become vocal when he grabbed the PA microphone. Bohannon said in effect he did not want the Mayor talking to the group in the black ghetto, that the group wanted to be heard at City Hall. The Mayor agreed to this, and to march with the group to City Hall. As the Mayor and group approached the police barricade at 15th and Paseo, one Negro female, possibly of high school age, started yelling, "Let us through." I figured the best thing to do was to get her away from the scene and pleaded with officers to let me get the girl through the barricade away from the group, to stop her possible agitation. Apparently several of the officers at the blockade or barricade did not know the Mayor on sight, as at first they would not let the Mayor through, but eventually they let the Mayor through the barricade.

The Mayor, Rev. Woody Hall, O'Neal, Dr. Girard Bryant (Negro police commissioner) and I, among other adults, started marching with the Mayor north on Paseo, where we intended to turn west on 12th Street to reach City Hall. Most of the "kids", however, broke and ran around the officers onto I-70, a main expressway. I got a ride then in someone's car to City Hall at 12th and Locust, just across the street from police headquarters at 12th and Locust. I saw the kids approaching

the City Hall area, going west on 13th Street. I joined the group of marchers at Locust and 13th Street, and told them to go to the steps of City Hall. I marched with some of the group up the steps of City Hall; there I noticed some of the group was still going west on 12th Street passed the front of City Hall. I immediately hurried to the west side of the front of City Hall at 12th and Oak and with Curtis McClinton of the Kansas City Chiefs, stopped most of this group from going west of Oak on 12th. I then returned to the City Hall steps, where possibly 30 to 50 police officers were lined up across the front doors of City Hall. The crowd in front of City Hall was small compared to the original group of marchers, and represented possibly only about 150 persons.

The Mayor and others then tried to talk over a PA speaker system in front of City Hall. "Skip" Carter, Bob Rone and I kept patrolling the group of youths in front of City Hall to be sure none approached too close to police as we were afraid violence might be triggered. I heard John Frazier, a KPRS disc jockey, suggest to "Skip" Carter a dance for the youths at Holy Name Church. At first "Skip" seemed noncommittal, but finally agreed, and Frazier announced over the PA system the proposed dance at Holy Name Church. The city manager, John Taylor, agreed after we discussed the necessity of finding some way of moving the students away from City Hall to get buses. The situation looked potentially dangerous to me at this time as I noted

several police officers with rifled weapons atop buildings in the area, such as the Public Library, Police Headquarters, and at the top of City Hall steps.

City Manager Taylor informed us that he had ordered the buses. This was done before we actually knew, I believe, that we were going to Holy Name Church. In a few minutes or less, several buses appeared, and Frazier announced the "kids" would be bussed to Holy Name Church.

About this time, Al Brooks, former chairman of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) made some general comments over the PA system, and mentioned the "kids" should go to the Holy Name Church. The buses started loading and some left. I observed that practically all of the student and youth groups had moved away from the City Hall plaza yard, from where I stood, about 40 feet north of the sidewalk in front of City Hall. About this time, and probably after most of the student groups had gotten on the buses or were moving east on 12th Street, away from the City Hall front sidewalk, and as I was looking north toward the front of City Hall, I heard cannisters of tear gas exploding behind me on 12th Street. I wheeled around, first thinking these reports were rifle or pistol shots. The wind was blowing northward, carrying gas from the cannisters over the entire City Hall Plaza area. Feeling the effects of the gas, I stumbled with several others toward the top steps of the front of City Hall, and the police line permitted us to enter City Hall to

escape the effects of the gas. Inside the front doors of City Hall, I slid down on the floor, where a Negro, Robert Jackson, possibly employed with the city urban renewal agency, helped me to the information office. Someone got wet towels here and helped me to recover from the effects. Several adults there complained to Pete Newquist, the Mayor's assistant, about the use of gas. Some of us thought after serious reflection it might be well for the Mayor to consider a public expression of regret for the use of the tear gas, to quiet tensions that would possibly build from its use, if regrets were not expressed. Some of the Negro leaders and I therefore drafted a statement for the possible use of the Mayor and Chief of Police over TV. This statement was in effect an apology for the use of tear gas. This statement was given to the Mayor personally at City Hall, only with the feeling it might prevent future trouble, and we indicated to the Mayor if he said something to the same effect in his own words, we thought it would be helpful. The Mayor agreed to make the statement in effect at once over a TV hookup. The Mayor then conveyed a message to Chief of Police Clarence Kelley, who came over to read the statement. Chief Kelley read the statement, then without comment, crumpled up the piece of paper containing the statement, shoving it into his pocket and started out the door. Several of us asked the



Chief to comment as to his thoughts about the statement and his only reply was that he would speak to the Mayor about the statement. This reaction certainly angered me and possibly several others. It at least upset most of the group there, which included Rashey Moten, President of the Catholic Inter-Racial Council; Dr. Girard Bryant, Police Commissioner; Everett O'Neal, business leader; Bob Blankenship, City Councilman; Bob Rone; Paul Miller, Director of Legal Aid and Defenders Society; Gertrude Keith of the Kansas City Call; possibly Rev. James Blair, President of the Inter-Denominational Ministerial Alliance; and Rev. Charles Briscoe, pastor of the Paseo Baptist Church - all well known Negro community leaders.

Since I was personally angered by the Chief's apparent reaction, I followed him and Mayor Davis through the doors of City Hall, toward their car, as the Mayor was apparently on his way, as promised, to a TV station, possibly WDAF. Outside, I indicated to Chief Kelley the fact he had made no comment regarding the proposed statement was discourteous. The Chief still made no comment. The Mayor said in effect, "I'm going to make the statement." which satisfied me as to the making of the statement.

City Manager Taylor invited me and the rest of the group named to listen to the Mayor's statement over a TV set in the city manager's office. The Mayor's statement on TV appeared shortly and he apologized for the use of tear gas,

indicating an investigation would be made. Chief Kelley also spoke over TV, but I understood him to make no apology. The Chief did refer to the fact that several hundred police and enforcement officers were in the downtown area of Kansas City. The effect of Chief Kelley's statement, I felt, on the Negro community was that Kelley in no way regreted the use of tear gas by enforcement officers, but was carrying out his job to protect the white, not the Negro, community. I say the effect of Chief Kelley's TV comments was such probably on the Negro community, even though Chief Kelley did not specifically, in actual words, make such a statement.

While our group was still watching the TV, someone called the City Manager's office, and Rev. Blair took a message, in effect that police were gassing or had gassed children at Holy Name Church.

I immediately left City Hall with G. Lawrence Blankenship, Negro City Councilman. We arrived at Holy Name Church within approximately 15 minutes. Outside I saw approximately 20 Negro "kids" of high school age in front of the church and two or three priests. Rev. Timothy Gibbon was one the priests, and another, name unknown, had white hair. I also saw in the church area Curtis McClinton, John Frazier, Lena Smith (WDAF newscaster), all of whom apparently had arrived after use of the tear gas. Gibbon and possibly Frazier showed me and Blankenship where one basement window on the front side of the church had been broken and one basement window on the east

side of the church, along an alley with a walk-way down into the basement, was broken. A smell of gas was noticeable around the outside area of the church. In the basement, the air was thick with gas. There we observed at least two, possibly three, spent ball-type gas cannisters on the floor. I had to leave the basement promptly because of the gas contamination. With Blankenship, I returned to City Hall, Blankenship carrying one of the cannisters back with him. Blankenship showed the cannister to the Mayor and some of the City Council. It was explained to me there are two kinds of tear gas cannisters - one having a cardboard tube shape and the other having the plastic ball shape, described at the church. This ball is about the size of a grapefruit with a mechanism at the bottom, and it was broken at the seams. When shown the cannister, the Mayor appeared shocked. In the group viewing the cannister was Russell Millin, former United States Attorney.

I wish to state that I made no personal observations and have no personal knowledge regarding the alleged hitting or holding of Father Fly and Rev. Warner in the City Hall area.

I and several additional Negro community leaders were at Rev. James Blair's Central Christian Church, Linwood and Garfield, at 7:00 AM, April 10, 1968, to plan prevention of any student difficulties that day, knowing school classes had not been dismissed, and because of disturbances the night of

April 9, 1968. There we decided it would be well for adult leaders to be at Manual, Lincoln, Central Senior and Junior and Paseo High Schools. Assignments of leaders were made; I went to Paseo High. Bob Rone, and possibly one other, was to go to Lincoln High School. I reached Paseo High School about 8:20 AM. There Lawrence Wilson, Assistant Principal, told me about 8:30 AM that "kids" at Lincoln High School were being, or had been, gassed.

I immediately left Paseo High in my car, alone, about 8:40 AM, April 10, 1968, and drove to Lincoln High School. I noticed Everett O'Neal there on my arrival. I do not recall the identity of anyone, other than O'Neal, who might possibly have been at Lincoln High School during the alleged gassing of students there that morning.

I am not complaining of any possible violation of my rights - only of possible violations of other unknown persons' civil rights, mainly Negro students, by unwise or improper use of chemicals or tear gas as described above; and of possible violations of the rights of Father Fly and Rev. Warner in their physical handling by police in the City Hall area, April 9, 1968, of which I have no knowledge from personal observation. I have named all of the persons involved, and possible witnesses to incidents referred to in my telegram and in this statement to the best of my recollection.

I do believe, also and generally, that described police methods and tactics contributed substantially to tensions and reactions which laid the basis for the ensuing days and nights of violence by probably a very few "hoodlum" types committing arson; and possibly less than five so-called snipers, as only one white fireman was injured, I believe, and no equipment by gunfire, compared with six Negroes killed by gunfire. I noted only the front first floor of the Byron Hotel had bullet marks; the upper floors, supposedly containing snipers, bore no evidence of enforcements' gunfire.

I have read this statement of this page and 20 others. It is true to the best of my knowledge and recollection.