

Statement on the "Disturbance" at 13th and Fitzwater Street July 31

(This statement was given to SNCC by one of the young Negroes involved. It is printed here exactly as it was related to us the following day.)

I, Harold Avon Coates, Jr., of 1311 Fitzwater Street, was at the corner of 13th and Fitzwater Street on the evening of July 31, 1966 at about 10:30 watching the police. I watched them shoot into a store at 13th and Fitzwater Street. They told some people to move and when some of them wouldn't move, one police officer said, "I'll make those bastards move". He then went into the store and started shooting. I heard two shots clearly, however others present said they heard at least three shots.

I saw a Negro guy named Richard arrested. As he was crossing Fitzwater street two cops chased him and cursed at him. These were white cops and they called him "nigger" as well as other profanity. After they beat him in the street, they took him away in the police wagon.

Then I crossed the street. A Negro asked me how to find the Housing Authority guard so that he could open a locked door in the Hawthorne projects. I went to show him how to get the guards. At this point I was approached by ten (10) policemen. They told me to get into the police wagon; the one who grabbed me said, "We need all we can get." I was placed in the wagon along with five or six other Negroes. Most of them were under twenty-one. I told the other guys in the wagon, "If the cops ask you any questions, just give them your name, address and telephone number. That's all. Then they shouldn't hit you."

When we got out of the wagon at the police station, we were told to 'follow the leader' -- who was a white policeman. When we entered the station we were told first to take everything out of our pockets. A policeman who worked in the station (badge number #4367) threw one of the fellows against a desk and told him to hurry up. Then he punched him in the face three (3) times. Then he (#4367) asked another of the fellows, "You don't like that or something... That's supposed to make you angry?" Then he punched all the rest of the guys and hit one of the Negroes in the head with a stick. Then they pulled me over and punched me in the mouth and in the back of the head. Then we were all placed in a cell. We all sat in the cell for about five or ten minutes. Then the same white policeman (#4367) came back in and said, "I should take you three (meaning me and two others) into another cell and bear your ass and send you out on a stretcher."

In the cell right next to the one where we were, we heard a Negro youth fall off a bench onto the cell floor. He had been arrested a little earlier than we had. His head was bleeding and he was throwing up blood. He gave us a telephone number so that we could call his mother. None of us had been allowed to make any telephone calls. He was groaning and moaning and so we asked the 'turn-key' to get a doctor for him. The 'turn-key' then said, "That's good for him. He wanted to protest -- that's what the hell he gets."

About twenty minutes later, the police came with a stretcher to take him out. The same cop (#4367) told all of us to take a good look because "you'll all be going out the same way." So then they pulled the fellow up by his arms because he couldn't walk. Then they dropped him into the stretcher which was lying on the floor. He hit his head as he fell. They took him out.

At this point the manager of the Hawthorne projects (where I live), Mr. Washington, came and took me out. After leaving the station, we went to his office. A police lieutenant was there. I told both of them what had happened at the station. Mr. Washington told me it was a shame and that something should be done about it. He suggested that I give my complaint to the lieutenant. After I had done this, the officer said, "Don't worry, I'll handle it." I asked him what he was going to do about it and he said, "I'll punish him by putting him on the beat." I said, "That's not punishing him -- that's punishing the people! Now he'll go out and shoot somebody." Then the police officer said, "Everybody makes a mistake. You wouldn't want us to fire him just for making a mistake?"