

Statement issued by Council on Human Relations of Greater Atlanta, Inc.
5 Forsyth St., N.W., Atlanta, Georgia 523-1581
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The Atlanta community - Negro and white - will be making a sad mistake if it writes off Tuesday's disturbances in the southside as a plot of outside agitators, to be dealt with by replenishing the police department's supply of tear gas.

Whatever the immediate causes, the incident was another in a long series of warnings, that poverty and segregation breed conditions which cannot be solved through the personal courage of the mayor or the competence of the police to handle riots, neither of which has ever been in question.

An editorial comment on Tuesday's incident says "the trouble followed the damagoric pattern the country has come to recognize since this is no longer one of those peculiar southern problems".

Unfortunately the pattern is tragically familiar - slums, unemployment, poor schools, continued segregation and a police incident to spark it.

Tuesday's violence by whatever name is regrettable and the Council on Human Relations of Greater Atlanta joins other citizens in the hope that it will not happen again. We also hope that the city will make full use of the courts to deal with any individuals or groups in the community whom they know to be perpetrators of violence but that at the same time it will intensify its efforts to alleviate the social and physical blight which inevitably results in such unfortunate incidents.

This incident has been repeatedly described as a riot. There appear to be as many different definitions of "riot" as there were spectators at the scene on Tuesday, numbers of whom say that it was not a riot. There was no looting, no shooting, no battles. Perhaps this was due to the competence of the police in preventing a riot for which they deserve the same praise as for stopping one. One newspaper reported that "by 4:20 p.m., the point at which the disturbance turned into a riot".. without any explanation of what happened at 4:20 to turn the disturbance into a riot. We urge the Police Committee of the Board of Alderman to prepare and make public a complete report of events as they occurred so that they can be evaluated calmly and objectively. The question might be raised as to whether it was necessary to shoot in a residential neighborhood in the middle of the afternoon to serve a warrant on a robbery suspect. Any charge of police brutality should be carefully considered, regardless of any brutality displayed towards the police. Whether charges of police brutality prove to be accurate or not, the fear of it is a real factor in the conditions which make for riots.

The community might well take this as an opportunity to examine and evaluate the entire police recruitment and training programs and the capability of the city to perform the required police function with the present level of the police budget.

As much as we deplore violence in any circumstances, the Council on Human Relations of Greater Atlanta does not accept the explanation that "SNCC members were directly responsible for Tuesday's rioting".

SNCC members are not responsible for the conditions under which Atlanta citizens live in the Summerhill and Mechanicsville area.

SNCC members were not responsible for threat of rent strikes in that area a year ago.

SNCC members were not responsible for street demonstrations in the area during the summer.

SNCC members are not responsible for people living in houses which the housing code finds unfit for human habitation.

SNCC members are not responsible for children attending school half a day, in a building scheduled for repairs in the 1963 bond issue but which was by-passed.

SNCC members are not responsible for parking space for 4,000 cars in the middle of an area which has no parks for children to play in (and to whom the income derived from the stadium is very remote).

SNCC members are not responsible for the recent incident in that same neighborhood involving police officers and the wife of a ballteam member, an incident which, rightly or wrongly, has been described by "responsible Negroes" as a white wash of the police department.

SNCC members are not responsible for the policies of the Atlanta Housing Authority which makes public housing unavailable to many residents of this and other areas in dire need of decent housing.

SNCC members are not responsible for the fact that there is no Negro on the mayor's staff, or in any high position in a department of the city government.

SNCC members are not responsible for the increasing disparity between employment opportunities for whites and Negroes and the fact that present training programs are hopelessly inadequate to close this gap.

SNCC members are not responsible for maximum welfare grants which do not permit families dependent upon them to live in decency and dignity.

SNCC members are not responsible for the fact that there is no public agency in any of the governments of metropolitan Atlanta with a continuing and professional responsibility in human relations and civil rights.

SNCC members are not responsible for the fact that the leadership of metropolitan Atlanta has refused to acknowledge that these problem require continuing, professional attention, but has acted only in response to crises with emergency measures and has continually placed upon the aggrieved groups the burden not only of raising the questions but also of suggesting the answers.

To ask residents of the southside now to list their grievances in the first place contradicts the theory that "SNCC members are directly responsible", but more important it ignores the wearying succession of meetings and surveys and petitions of residents of that area and of other citizens during the past months.

Such a request ignores the authoritative report of The Community Council of the Atlanta Area, Inc., on this and other blighted areas.

It ignores the efforts of the Council on Human Relations of Greater Atlanta and neighborhood civic groups which resulted in the establishment of the Southside Day Care Center and other programs.

It ignores the surveys and recommendations made by the various EOA citizen committees, before and after the establishment of the EOA Neighborhood Center.

It ignores the requests of neighborhood leaders before the Atlanta Housing Authority and the Citizens Advisory Committee on Urban Renewal.

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It ignores repeated statements before the Atlanta Board of Education by parents of the area.

It ignores the findings and recommendations of the Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

It ignores the continuous recommendations of the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference since its organization in 1963.

We make no claims that the solution to the problems are simple. The solutions are complicated and costly. They require changes throughout the entire metropolitan Atlanta area, and they do not lie in Summerhill or in the SNCC office.

As each of us has had a part in creating the problems, so each of us must bear a part of the burden of solving them.

Responsibility for dealing with these matters does not lie with "Negro leadership" or with "white leadership". It lies with "community leadership". These affairs are too complicated and too important to the future of the entire community to be dealt with by any racially or economically determined segment.

They will continue to plague us all until we admit that we are all equally involved. Only by our own default will any outside group gain control of the destiny of Atlanta.