

Noguchi Averted Racial Trouble, Witness Claims

Calmed Angry Militants
at Black Panther Inquest,
Coroner Office Aide Says

BY RICHARD WEST
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Coroner Thomas T. Noguchi averted possible violence when he calmed a group of angry Negro militants at the inquest into the shooting of a Black Panther, the hearing into Noguchi's dismissal was told Friday.

Miss Marguerite Linnecke, coroner's office statistical clerk, testified that the incident took place in April, 1968, outside the room where an inquest was being conducted into the shooting of a young Black Panther by a policeman.

The witness told the Civil Service Commission that the militants were enraged because they could not get into the crowded inquest room, and that one of them threatened:

"We're going to shoot that son of a bitch of a policeman."

Miss Linnecke, who was standing nearby, said she was afraid "someone must have had a gun."

Noguchi's Action Described

But Dr. Noguchi came up, she said, and told the group, "Let's act like ladies and gentlemen."

She said Noguchi promised to have loudspeakers brought in immediately so the militants could hear the proceedings.

Miss Linnecke said a youth who appeared to be a leader, told his companions:

"Let's listen to him. He's one of us. He's of a minority race."

The militants calmed down, the witness said, and a public address system was soon set up so they could hear the inquest.

Miss Linnecke also gave further details of a retirement dinner for a coroner's office employe at which the county alleges Noguchi made himself look ridiculous.

She said that "the one that was

embarrassing" was not Dr. Noguchi but television actor Ben Alexander, who portrayed "officer Frank Smith" in the original Dragnet TV series.

Pearl Harbor Allusion

Miss Linnecke said Alexander started to reminisce about "old times in the morgue."

"He was evidently a mortician (at one time), which I didn't know," the witness said.

At one point in his talk, Miss Linnecke related, Alexander said that "if this had been 1941, Dr. Noguchi would have come and shot the hell out of us."

The witness said Dr. Noguchi later

addressed the banquet and said that he "had first come in a warship to the beautiful Harbor of Pearl (Honolulu) and wanted to become an American."

"I was kind of thrilled," Miss Linnecke said, "because I like the American flag."

Picture Becomes Evidence

On cross-examination, Dep. County Counsel Martin Weekes asked Miss Linnecke if Noguchi had not said that "the first time he observed the beautiful Harbor of Pearl it was through the periscope of a submarine."

"No, sir," she replied.

Noguchi's lawyer, Godfrey Isaac, called the commission's attention to the fact that Noguchi was only 14 years old in 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Isaac entered as evidence a picture of Dr. Noguchi which Miss Linnecke said she took at the retirement dinner. The county charges that Noguchi's eyes were glazed at the dinner.

Miss Linnecke also testified that Dr. Noguchi came to the dinner late in a sheriff's helicopter because he had been at the scene of the crash of an airliner.

She presented statistics to show that the coroner's office under

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Noguchi's administration handled 13,788 cases a year compared to an average of 12,500 cases annually for a period of six years before Noguchi became coroner.

Dr. John Burton, coroner of Detroit, who came to testify for Noguchi, was asked by Isaac whether he carried a knife on his

person while in the field, as Dr. Noguchi did.

"No," The Detroitier replied. "I don't carry a knife myself—I carry a gun."

"A gun?" Isaac asked.

"I wouldn't go out my door without a gun—not in Detroit!" Dr. Burton declared.

Dr. Burton said a knife is useful to scrape up evidence at the scenes of homicides, and that most medical examiners carry them.

Dr. Burton inspected the death certificate of Lewis Sawyer, a Negro deputy coroner whom the county accuses Noguchi of working "until he dropped."

The Detroitier said that while the death certificate gave the immediate cause of death as respiratory failure—"a condition, not a disease"—it was cancer which led to Sawyer's death.

"There's nothing that could have been done to avoid this" (Sawyer's death), the pathologist said.

Weekes asked the doctor if overwork would not have "accelerated" Sawyer's death.

"No," Dr. Burton replied.

Another witness, Mrs. Toshi Yamamoto, president of the Japanese-American Republican Club and a member of the State Republican Central Committee, identified Dr. Noguchi as a member of the club.

She said Noguchi was greatly interested in politics and civic affairs and that he frequently discussed civic and social problems with her.

Others Testify

Mrs. Yamamoto said Noguchi had a "long-range approach" to solving social problems and often urged her to adopt the same attitude.

The hearing in the Hall of Administration will begin its fifth week Monday at 9:30 a.m. with Dr. Noguchi taking the stand in his own defense. The proceedings are expected to end about the middle of next week.