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THE MEMPHIS "RIOT"

Some Eye-witness Accounts of Events in Memphis, March 28-April, 1968

These documents do not present a balanced picture of the Memphis "riot." They are not supposed to be balanced. Instead, they are eye-witness accounts of what ninety-seven LeMoyne students saw, heard, and felt during the tumultuous days that occasioned Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s ill-fated return visit to the City of Good Abode. These documents give us a unique opportunity to learn what really happened during the "riot," at least to these LeMoyne students. They represent history in its roughest form, direct and unedited statements of personal experiences. Because they are unedited, they are repetitious; because they were dittoed, many of the copies are faint; because they were hand-written they are not as clear as they might be. ALL of this means the reader is confronted with material that demands more than the usual amount of perseverance, concentration, and simple hard work. We hope it will be worth it. We hope that after you read these documents you will be able to answer many questions. For example:

Why did violence erupt at the scene of the march? Were black militants wholly responsible? Was police protection adequate, before the window-breaking? Was the march properly disciplined? What was the influence of the incidents at Hamilton High School. Did the news media contribute to the tension or merely observe it? Were the looters seeking revenge against "the man" or were they simply interested in stealing? Did the police exercise the restraint Frank Holloman has praised them for? Was the widespread property damage organized by conspirators or was it random and spontaneous? Was it the result of a "moral holiday," precipitated by looting at the march, or was it redistribution for the actions of police? How was the curfew enforced? What were the attitudes of police and National Guardsman as reflected in their actions and language? And of course these are not the only questions to which we hope you will find here.

Many people helped contribute to this publication. The students in History 202 and 304 did the most important work—they wrote it. The College has generously consented to underwrite the cost of making copies of the documents. We are grateful to Upward Bound for the use of their electric ditto machine.

Note to the Reader:

1. Page numbers are circles in the lower right corner of each page.
2. The initials of the writer are at the top right of each page.
3. All names in these accounts are fictitious.

Michael P. Johnson

Memphis, Tenn.

May 14, 1968