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Violence at Hamilton High

Lucille Watson is a fictitious name of a student at Hamilton High School, who witnessed the riot that occurred at Hamilton on the day of the March downtown for the sanitation strikers. Miss Watson is a sophomore at Hamilton and for reasons prefer that her name be anonymous or fictitious. Miss Watson gave me a detailed account on the happenings that occurred at Hamilton.

This is the interview as it was told: The date was March 28, 1968. The time was about 9:00 A.M.

Interview Begins:

Miss Watson: I went to school that day to finish my test, but before I could walk into my homeroom, Sondra, Nancy. And some more of my friends told me to fool Mrs. Wilson into believing that we weren't coming to school to stay, but to return home or go to Clayborn Temple to join in the March for the sanitation workers.

Question: Did you immediately leave the school to go home or march?

Miss Watson: We went outside on the campus and we saw a majority of Hamilton students out on the side of the building facing Kerr Street.

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Question: what did you and your friends do?

Miss Watson: We decided to join them. On the other side of the street, I saw three adults, whole I believe were ministers. They were telling the students not to go to school but to return home or come to Clayborn Temple to join the march.

Question: Did you all follow their advice?

Miss Watson: Everyone was in a panic, we didn't know what to do because we had planned to finish our tests.

Question: What else happened?

Miss Watson: There were three men and a group of other kids from other areas of the city were steadily arguing with us. We didn't want them to think that we didn't care about the Negro sanitation workers, so some of our students join them. A few minutes later the city bus appeared and the kids forced the bus driver to open the door and he did, so they got on the bus without paying a cent.

Question: What happened after that?

Miss Watson: After the bus left, we saw those garbage trucks coming up Kerr toward us. We started yelling, throwing rocks and anything that we could get our hands on.

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These trucks were guarded by the policemen. About fifteen minutes after, we heard the sirens of the police cars coming to Hamilton.

Question: What did the police do?

Miss Watson: The policemen had the schools blocked in every direction so nobody could come in or out. I was very surprised and afraid too because our assistant principal had locked the side doors where the majority of the Hamilton students were.

Question: About how many policemen were there?

Miss Watson: 20 policemen or more, their appearance didn't excite some students at all because they were determined to cause violence. All of [sic] the policemen got in a straight line with their black jacks and tear gasses and our students got together and started throwing rocks, bricks, sticks and some of anything at the policemen.

Question: What did the police do then?

Miss Watson: This caused the policemen to run and beat us if they could catch us. They were hitting girls as well as boys. When the policemen started running after us and using their black jacks and tear gasses I (illegible) to get in the building where I felt safe.

Question: What was happening between students and the police?

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Miss Watson: This didn't stop the students nor the policemen, because they like beating, kicking and knocking you down on the ground like you were dogs or something. The teachers were so afraid that they locked up their doors. The running was plenty of exercise for the policemen, because you can believe me, they did plenty of that. One while we all had ranks and we lined up and went toward the policemen; we made them run for a change.

Question: Were there any injuries or arrests?

Miss Watson: Two persons were hurt and one arrested. This really made us angry. When we saw these people who got hurt. This action happened fast, the policemen were running all over our campus and on other people's property and shoving older people around. They sprayed some tear gas in one boy's eyes and he couldn't hardly see. Some boys brought him inside put some water in his eyes. At 10:00 the riot

had quieted down. The policemen were still there but they couldn't stop us from forming a group to march downtown, so a large group of students left school to march.

Comments

This is a detailed account of what happened at Hamilton school but it is the account of the riot by just one person – there are of course other (illegible) accounts also, but Miss Watson gave a very thorough account of what actually happened.

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Comments

The trouble that occurred at Hamilton is related to the trouble that occurred, when Dr. King led the marches downtown. From the information that is gathered from Miss Watson, the trouble started when kids from other areas of the city came to Hamilton and started an argument with the students because they weren't participating in march downtown and it is my belief that the Hamilton students started throwing things at the garbage men and policemen because they were trying to prove that they were for the garbage workers, just by the use of violence.

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