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The Riot

On Thursday March 28 1968 Many Memphians gathered for what some of them thought would be a peaceful march in support of striking sanitation workers. What happen [sic] during the march was anything but peaceful. The actual assembling place for the marchers were Clayborn Temple, a local church, located on Ponotoc and Hernando. There were so many people involved in the march, however that by the time I arrived the group extended back a block from the Church to Vance which is where I stood. The march was suppose [sic] to start at 10 oclock but Dr. King, the leader of the March did not arrive until later and it did not start until 20 minutes after eleven. In the meantime the people on the

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The (illegible) and in the march became so restless that are certain times the crowd would move simultaneously without being told to by march (illegible).

Alas I observed that there were a great many people standing on the sidelines who had no intentions of joining the march and at first I wondered why they would bother to come if they didn't intend to march. Of course a lot of them came out of curiosity just to see what would happen. But I spoke to someone who was standing on the sidelines and he said that the reason he came was to wait for the march to start so that he could start stealing things. I imagine know [sic] that a lot of people were there for that reason.

Some people started getting restless and joined those on the sidelines. They started saying "we don't need

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Martin Luther King came as we can start (illegible) march and they did even though it wasn't time, even before the march officially started. The march route was down Hernando and Beale and on to Main Street. The particular (illegible) of the march that I was in was on Beale in front of Pape's, a men shop. When a group of people came running above the street toward us grinning and laughing and saying "go back the march is over." Most of us stood there confused and someone asked "what's wrong?" another person answered "they're rioting up there," meaning the portion of the march that had reached Main Street. Rev. Lawson, a local strike leader came down the street and told us to go quickly back to the church, Clayborn Temple. I backed

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up and saw what seemed a thousand people running my way and that's when people panicked, after all [sic] not everyone (illegible) but many did.

Some people started running others like me stood there frightened while some who might have been peaceful in the march joined with others who would not have been so and started breaking windows and looting. The police started shooting mace at the crowd and then everyone started running. I ran back to the church where the police continued to shoot mace. Finally they stopped and I went home.

On the way home I noticed how quickly crowds had gathered followed by police who dispersed them just as quickly. I think that the riot produced a great deal of resentment between the races. White merchants and others resent Negroes

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who had looted, but by the same token Negroes who had always disliked the police in the city really hate them now because of police brutality. Negroes will never forget that 30 witnesses swear that the police shot a 16 year old boy in the stomach at close range while he had his hand in the air. Negro [sic] won't forget not will they forgive.

As costly as the riot was in terms of lives and property I don't think the people who run our city learned anything from it. They still think of it as a [sic] event in which people looted just for the sake of looting. They have failed to see that many people who stole did so because they had finally found a way of getting back at the city which

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has been so indifferent to them. The city does not seem to realize that calling in the National Guard will not stop these people from rioting again or looting if they get the chance to. Of course a lot of rioting and looting was merely for personal gains and still some was emotional contagion, people saw other people steal so they stole also, but not all was for these reasons but for the other reason. The physical conditions of the riot will disappear but not the memory of what happened in minds of Memphians. This is good, I think, perhaps those memories will stir the needed change (illegible)

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