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“Race Riot in Memphis”

Thursday, March 28, 1968 was a day of excitement, violence and bloodshed in Memphis. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been invited to lead a march in support of the striking sanitation workers. The sanitation workers had been striking since the early part of February for better wages and a dues check-off.

The march started about 11:15 from Clayborn Temple. Rev. Martin Luther King and some of the ministers of the city lead the march down Beale. About 150 or 200 young Negroes strayed from the main body of the march and began throwing bricks, bottles and sticks breaking the windows and looting. They became so violent that the march had to be stopped just as they turned on Main Street. Policemen had to use mace and their billy sticks to get the rioters turned back and the riot under control. This was just the beginning. The rioting was under control but the looting grew worse as the sanitation grew on the National Guardsmen were called in and a curfew from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. was proclaimed by Mayor Loeb.

There were so many interesting and exciting incidents that it would be impossible to (illegible) all of them. There were many incidents of arson, disorderly conduct, night riding, and one fatality.

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Approximately 5:30 p.m. Mrs. Doe and her two small children were outside in their yard talking to a neighbor about the riot situation. A truck of National Guardsmen that there cruising the area ordered them back into their homes. After they refused they were sprayed with mace and called bad names.

Also, on Thursday, March 28, 1968 a young Negro boy was fatally wounded. Mrs. Jones, a bystander, told of the incident. Mrs. Jones reported that the youth was looting but when he saw the policeman he dropped the item he had and held his hands up in the air and was shot in the stomach by this policeman. Shortly afterwards, the youth was pronounced death at John Gaston Hospital.

These are just two incidents that happened on Thursday, there were many, many others.

I think (illegible) of these incidents were terrible. I think the lady and her children should have been allowed to stand in her yard and talk to a neighbor without being treated so coolly by the National Guardsmen who were suppose [sic] to be reducing the violence and not creating it. In the second incident, I think the policeman only did his job. In a situation such as this one, behavior is unpredictable and his first reaction was to

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Shoot. If the youth had not been looting in the beginning he might still be alive today. I think the policeman's behavior was spontaneous and he should not be punished for it.

I also think the riot was a situation that could have easily been avoided.