

FROM PROTEST MARCHES TO RACE RIOTS

On March 28, 1968, Martin Luther King lead what was suppose to be a peaceful protest march for the striking sanitation workers. The sanitation workers have been on a strike approximately six weeks. They are requesting a higher salary but Mayor Henry Loeb refuses to offer them what they want. So as a form of protest, they have staged marches, persuaded the majority of Negroes to stop shopping downtown and to stop patronizing at any Loeb businesses until the Mayor has granted them their request.

Dr. Martin Luther King was asked to come to Memphis by leaders of the strikers in an attempt to help end the confusion. Dr. King came to Memphis and suggested to the people that a work stoppage of all Negro citizen be held. "Let no Black Man or Black Woman work that day and let no Black Child go to school", stated Dr. King.

On March 28, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King was late arriving for his peaceful protest march. Before he arrived, violence had broken loose in one part of the city. It began at Hamilton High School and spreaded to other schools. A student who wishes to remain anonymous stated that the distrubance was started by a car of weird-looking men who looked as if they were from out of town. These men drove in front of the school and yelled, "Why dont you tear this school down!" They crea ted a lot of tension and chaos among the students. When the cops were heard, the car speeded away.

In the downtown area, the march had started without Dr. King. Some of the marchers had began to break out the windows of some de- partment stores. When Dr. King finally made his arrival, it was very difficult for him to control the mass of marchers.

"Marchers were everywhere but the rioting and looting took place mainly on Beale Street", stated my cousin who was taking pictures of the march and riot. "I was standing on the corner of Beale and Third Street taking pictures. I don't know how it all started but I over heard someone saying that some men in a car broke out windows and looted a few stores, then drove away when they heard the cops coming. I have seen riots before but I have never seen one like this before. When one man is downed by a cop, others come over and starte beating the same man. He'ss already down, why the hell do the rest of them come over and beat him also. I have pictures of this. Things began to get so out of hand, I moved up Third and away".

When the marchers could not be controled by Dr. King, a police truck was summoned for him, it wouldn't stop so he was carried away in an early model car to some secluded place.

Only one causalty was reported to the public as a result of the riot. But a nurse's aid at John Gaston Hospital said that a young girl who was hit on the head at Hamilton died. This was not reported by the television or radio nor the newspaper. The news reported that only one was killed, Larry Paine, a student at Mitchell Road High School, was shot by a policeman.

It was stated by our insurance agent of Atlantic Life Insurance, that all the agents of this company participated in the march. But when the march was called off, he started back to his palce of work located at 526 Beale Street. On his way there, he had to pass through a crowd gathered on the street. The polices approached them and told them to "get in that house and stay there". He refused. "I don't live there and besides that I have to report to work." He turned his back to walk

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away and the policeman hit him on his head and busted his skull. He had to have his hair shaved and the bump on his head sticks far away from his skull and it is sickening.

As stated by these persons I interviewed, the policemen showed extreme brutality toward the Negroes. They would beat one person until he looked like he would bleed to death or until he was unconscious. There were more young people involved in the rioting and looting than adults and I feel that if these young people were not permitted to participate in these marches, there would not be and would not have been any disturbances such as rioting and looting. These people are too immature to face such a situation. Because of them, the Major has set a curfew from 7P.M. to 5 A.M. and called in state troopers and national guardsmen to help curtail the disturbances here in the city.

It seemed that the rioters tried to burn down the city. Fire trucks, policemen and guardsmen roamed the streets all night long. Sirens were heard all through the night.

In my neighborhood, I can proudly say that there were no form of disturbances and I live near Southgate Shopping Center and other large businesses. Maybe it was because the people in my neighborhood knew that the national guardsmen were around or maybe it was because they are mature enough to know that rioting and looting isn't the answer to the problem.

*[Faint, illegible handwritten text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]*