

A Factual Account of Thursday's March

To get adequate coverage of the entire march to some extent, I decided to interview persons at the front, middle, and end of the line of march. It so happened that all are from LeMoyné. The following paragraphs are their accounts of what happened from their vantage point in the march. First, from the front of the march Bill Hodges reported the following information. "I was near the front of the march and not far from Martin Luther King when he finally arrived. I had been at Clayborne Temple since early morn like countless others present. About 10:00 p.m. the people became anxious to get the march started. The sun was shining making it hot. It was felt that time was being wasted just waiting around the church. When the march did start, there was a lot of noise and talking. King finally arrived and everybody tried to get near him. Upon reaching Beale and Linden, windows started to be broken. People were walking on the sidewalks, some crashing windows. All that could be heard was noise and shouting. King and allies hooked arms together. They shouted for the others to do likewise, but with no luck. Newsmen took pictures. A CBS Newsman photographed the window crashing and the crashers. However, policemen did not bother anyone until the marchers reached Main Street with the window breaking. The police promptly started breaking the march up when York Arms' windows were broken out. They used tear gas, chasing the marchers back down South Main. The marchers scattered in various directions. Some of them ran toward Vance and some toward Beale. The CBS Newsman's camera was taken and broken. At Lansky Brothers Men's Shop, policemen sprayed mace in looters' eyes and beat them with their billy sticks. A group of soul brothers chased a policeman through Handy Park while an officer across the street from the incident stayed there. The of the policemen ran the marchers on down the middle of Beale Street toward Clayborne Temple. In the process, they sprayed tear gas. The marchers going back to the church shouted to each other, "they're shooting tear gas". I didn't go back to the church. I went home instead. I was not hurt and unharmed I went home. However, he did observe some of the people going back to the church but looters and some other people passed on by the Clayborne Temple. I asked Bill was he scared during all the events. He answered, "no, I went for a cause"."

About middle ways the march was Anita Jones. She related the following account. "Before I knew anything, the march had begun. The line of march had been held up for the arrival of Martin Luther King. I heard noise all around me. As we walked on down Beale, I noticed that a few of the shop windows were already broken. The line of march finally reached the turn on Main from Beale. The front of the march had turned the corner when suddenly people came running back down South Main toward Beale. I didn't know what was happening. The thought of possible shooting at the front of the march ran through my mind. I was rather tense and nervous and yes, even scared. I heard a voice over a megaphone telling everybody to go back to the church for the march was over. Being mad and somewhat disgusted, I refused to run back like the people approaching me. I got on sidewalk along with a friend and began the way back down Beale. My friend and I turned on Third Street off Beale and sat in a Volkswagen and observed the sights. Most of the people were afraid and wanted to go home. The people from what I could see, were cooperating with the police by moving on but they pushed forcefully those individuals not able to move fast enough.



A Personal Account of Thursday's March

On the corner of Linden and Hernando, the police beat a clean dressed 15 year old boy for no apparent reason. This youth was alone. Three other people which included two Negroes and a White guy with a camera encountered the same treatment. The police swung their billy sticks at the white guy. They missed and he ran up the street to safety. Meanwhile, the Negro men managed to avoid a terrible beating, too. It appeared that innocent people on the street fell victims to mad policemen. Mace and tear gas were shot on people. I remained in the car and just looked on until I could make it safely home. I was told as I was going home that the area where I lived was torn up but when I got home, I found everything in tact. I made it home unhurt and unharmed."

Lillie Ray was at the end of the line of march. She provided this report of the march. "I got to Handy Park and this was as far as our part of the march got. Reverend Lawson or some minister and a few other men were at the end of the march, too. When they saw the people running back toward us, the reverend directed the marchers to return to the church. I returned to the church. Mace and tear gas was sprayed in and outside the Clayborne Temple. Two policemen came inside the church but what they did or said, I don't know. I was nervous. A twelve year old girl went into hysterics. About 11:20 or 11:30 a.m. a young man was carried by several other guys to a room in the church. He was hurt. The leaders at the church tried to get the people settled down. A check for lost children was begun by them. About 12:15 p.m., Lillie went home as did the rest of the dismissed marchers. We were told to go home and prepare for the mass meeting to be held that evening at the Mason Temple."

Thus, we have accounts of the march related by persons on the scene which gives to a great extent some insight as to what actually happened from their observation.

About middle ways the march was with Jones. She related the following account. "Before I knew anything, the march had begun. The line of march had been held up for the arrival of Martin Luther King. I looked down the line of march and saw people already broken. The front of the march had turned back when suddenly people came running back down South Main toward the church. The thought of possible shooting was in my mind. I was rather tense and nervous. I heard a voice over a megaphone telling everybody to go back to the church for the march was over. Being mad and nervous, I refused to run back like the people approaching me. I ran backward along with a friend and began to walk down South Main. I turned on Third Street off South Main and was in a Volkswagen and started to go home. Most of the people were afraid and wanted to go home. People from that area could see, were cooperating with the police in some way on but they pushed forcefully these individuals not only to move back enough."



Incident Near Leath School

Leath Elementary School is located on Linden and Tully. However, a new extension of the school recently built is situated on Danny Thomas Boulevard. This side of the building facing Danny Thomas provided the view of an incident related to the march held down town that Thursday morning. A substitute teacher, Dorothy Harrison, related this story to me.

"Dorothy had been to lunch with her pupils. She had the entire third grade sections of Leath this day. The class consisted of only ten pupils. They had returned to the classroom following the lunch period. Not very much work had gone on. About something to 1 p.m., she saw a group of individuals carrying bolts of materials, suits, etc. coming across the playground of the school going every direction. At Pontotoc, a traffic policeman rode by the area. A group of fellows saw the police car containing the officer and scattered through alleys and between houses to get away. Soon, a squad car pulled up and the policemen got out. They began their search of the area. A short, stubby policeman came upon an alley where he was caught by some fellows. In a fair fight with one of the guys, the police took a good whipping. The policeman's partner got out the squad car with a shotgun. The fellow fighting and others fled and none got caught. Bleeding, the short policeman and his partner chased the guys through the alley and around houses. These policemen kicked a lady's window out around the side of her house where some of the fellows had scattered. About 2:08 p.m., policemen in light blue helmets arrived on the scene. A group of men had gathered in front of Malunda's Restaurant looking on the proceedings. The police asked the men to move on. The group moved on slowly but not fast enough for the police. They started beating the group. Three men got caught in the beating spree. Dorothy saw one of her church members being beaten by the policemen. All of these clean-cut men in shirts and ties. The three victims of the police beating session bled over their clean clothes. About 2:15 p.m., the children were dismissed from the school. The police told them to go on home. The corner was cleared in a matter of minutes and continued so for the rest of the evening. Of course, one of the teachers was quite upset because her husband brought her to school that morning and usually waited at Malunda's until school dismissed to pick her up. It so happened that he had been detained elsewhere while the police cleared the group in front of Malunda's Restaurant that evening. They all went home safely."