

The Riot

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On Thursday March 28 1968 many Mem-
phians gathered for what some of them
thought would be a peaceful march in sup-
port of striking sanitation workers. What
happen during the march was anything
but peaceful. The actual assembling
place for the marchers was Clayborne
Temple, a local church, located on Pontotoc
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 to start at 10 o'clock 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

The sidelines and in the march became
so restless that at ~~at~~ certain times the ^{N.C.-2}
crowd would move spontaneously
without being told to by march
officials.

Also 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 won-
dered 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 that a lot of people
were there for that reason.

Some people started getting rest-
less and joined those on the sidelines
They started saying "we don't need

Martin Luther King came as we
 can start our ~~own~~ march and they
 did even though it wasn't time,
 even before the ~~real~~ official started.
 But not too much later the real
 march started. The march route was
 down ~~Hernando~~ up Beale and on to
 Main Street. The particular portion
 of the march that I was in was on
 Beale in front of Pope's, a men shop,
 when a group of people came running
 down 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 sitting up there" meaning the
 the portion of the march that had reached
 Main Street. K.W. Yussen, a local
 strike leader, came down the street
 and told us to go quietly back to the
 church, Clayborne Temple. I looked

up and saw what seemed a thousand
people running my way and that
when people panicked, of course not
everyone panicked but many did. N.C.-4

Some people started running
others like me stood there frightened
while some people 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 every-
one 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

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 hands
 in the air. Negroes won't forget nor
 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 event in which people
 looted just for the sake of looting.
 They have failed to see that many of
 people who stole did so because
 they had finally found a way
 of getting back at the city which

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 beating if they get the
 chance to. I fear a lot of rioting
 and beating was merely for personal
 gain and still some was emotional
 contagious, people saw other people
 steal so they stole also, but not all
 was for these reasons but for
 the other reason. The physical condi-
 tions of the riot will disappear
 but not the memory of what
 happened in minds of Memphians.
 I hope so, I think, perhaps these
 memories will stir the needed changes
 that is they stole also, but not all
 for these reasons but for