

History 3024

The riot in Memphis, Tennessee just didn't happen on Thursday at 11:00 a.m. but the tendencies for a riot have been present in Memphis for a long time. Thursday we merely had a confrontation with the nasty atrocities of a riot-like situation. The turmoil in Memphis was nothing compared to the trouble in Watts, Newark or Detroit in terms of property destroyed and the loss of lives, but in terms of the good race relations Memphis has had, the disturbance was more dreadful than anyone of the others.

I arrived at Clayborne Temple about 10:00 a.m. and the crowd there was an orderly one. The sanitation question was secondary to the marchers, the race question or problem had become the primary reason for some 5,000 individuals to demonstrate. Dr. Martin Luther King arrived at Clayborne Temple about 10:50 and the march got underway shortly. The march went along in non-violent pattern of Dr. King but in a matter of minutes the calm march had turned into a disorderly crowd. I heard Rev. Lawson in the background of all the confusion and noise. He was requesting of the crowd to return to Clayborne Temple. From what I saw Thursday the disturbance was caused by about 100 young individuals who were waiting for the marchers to get near them in order to camouflage their dirty work. Famous Beale Street was covered with paper, pieces of glass and other debris. The fashionable stores like Paper and Lansky Brother were wrecked. Loot got in the showcase and took everything. Next the pawn shops were wrecked along with other small businesses.

On the main street in the downtown section the damage was relatively light with only a few showcase windows broken and not much loot taken. I saw the ugly scars of the riot around the city.

Even before the riot, in the downtown section got started there was trouble at Hamilton High school. A friend of mine briefed me on the situation. Johnny Jones said and I quote, "a number of student at Hamilton were blocking the entrance, then bricks and bottles were thrown in the immediate area. Sometime later the police came and put the disturbance down. Sam Jones, also a student at Hamilton, told me that the police used much force to put the disturbance down to normal. Jones said "by standers were struck with police clubs and called obscene names. Police brutality during the so-called riot was wide-spread. Spectacles were sprayed with the chemical mace and brutalized by our policemen. But as usually complaints against our law enforcement officers.

One individual was killed while supposedly looting Sears South Third. This was the policeman's account and also the policeman said, the youth had a weapon in his hand and was coming toward him after he was caught in the act of looting. Shirley Bars, a neighbor, said, "the youth hands were up over his head and he didn't have a knife but the lone policeman shot anyway. The N.A.A.C.P. has looked in the matter and at present still deeply involved.

I was present on the riot scene on Beale and I saw using entirely too much force in order to apprehend the looters. The policeman behaved like incompetent, inexperienced abusive employees of the city of Memphis. The poli

