

C.J. – 1

My Eye-View of the Riot in Memphis

When I arrived at the scene where the march was to begin I noticed, to my estimation, that there were around 3,000,000 to 4,000,000 people. The march was very late getting started, for what reason I do not know, but as I walked through the crowd I heard almost every person around me say that the most terrible thing has come out of this sanitation-workers strike and that is racial disturbances. A lot of people had different opinions of what they thought could end the strike. Some people thought that boycotting, marching and constant meetings between councilmen and union leaders would be effective, this opinion was among most of the older members of the march. The opinion that seemed to be characteristic of the younger members of the march was to tear up the white man's property and make him lose a lot of money. They thought that by doing this the whole business owner

77

C.J. – 2

would pressure Loeb into giving the strikers what they wanted. I thought that many of these youngsters weren't for the benefit of the strikers but the benefit of themselves by looting and getting a lot of clothes, etc.

When the march reached Beale Street there seemed to be a lot of disturbance when I reached the area in front of Pape's Men Store. Rev. Lawson was telling everyone to turn around. I wondered why was he telling us to turn around and then I saw the broken window. When I began to turn around I heard another window break and people were grabbing the clothing out of the window, then I saw the people behind me running from Main Street so I panicked and began to run. When I reached the church I heard loud gun blast and I thought someone was shooting a gun then I saw people running inside the church holding their eyes and crying and someone said, "the police are shooting

78

C.J. – 3

tear gas inside the church," everyone began to panic (illegible) the Negro leaders were telling them to keep calm. Just then I looked to my right and I saw a girl screaming so loud, I wondered what was wrong and someone said that the police had shot "mace" directly in her eyes. My eyes began to feel weak and I could hardly keep them open then I heard another blast everyone started screaming, I began to get very afraid. After everything had quieted down the people began to leave the church I could see that everyone was either mad or afraid. As I could see down Vance I noticed a lot of windows broken then I remembered Detroit and the conditions it had last summer and I wondered if Memphis would be another Detroit. As I passed many people they were all saying that this would have never happened if Loeb wasn't the mayor.

79