

The Memphis riot

This is an account of the things I witnessed during the Memphis riot and my personal reaction to it.

On Thursday March 28, 1968 I

arrived at Beale and Hernando about

9:50 a.m. From there I proceeded to join the Marchers who were lined from Beale down Hernando to Vance.

There I along with about 4,000 other people waited from 10:00 a.m. to 11:20 a.m. We were waiting for the arrival of Dr. Martin Luther King who was to lead the march. During this period of waiting there were quite a few incidents of drinking on the sidewalks, many signs were brought past us advocating black power and helicopter - the one that, as of now patrol the city - kept flying overhead. I think the period of waiting along with these

other incidents helped to help people out and  
 incite some feelings.

About 11:20 am led by the sanitation  
 workers and their leaders, we started walking  
 up Herrando, turned on Beale and proceeded up  
 toward Main Street. On the way we passed  
 several rows of spectators and policemen. In the  
 middle of the block I witnessed a man  
 passing out wooden sticks about 1½ ft. long and  
 2 inches wide. Next I saw a boy proceed to  
 break out a window in Papi's Mens Shop with  
 one of these sticks. Then I heard what I  
 think was a shot and glass began to splatter  
 over the street. People began to run in  
 all directions, but we were instructed by  
 Rev. Lawson to turn around and walk quietly  
 back to the church.

Things went pretty quietly until we  
 arrived at the church where mace was  
 sprayed outside directly in the eyes of  
 some people and where it entered the  
 church and affected the eye of most  
 people in the lower part of the sanctuary.

Once most people were inside, we were instructed to find seats in the front rows and go to our cars and then go straight home. Many people showed about being sprayed with the mace, but some left before they could be sprayed. Arrangements were made to locate children who had been lost when the people began to run and show fear.

I left the Church about 12:00 P and got a ride home with one of the men who lived in my neighborhood. His car was parked at Fourth and Vance beside the Lott's Laundry on the corner of the street. Just as we pulled off John Jones (anonymous) threw a brick in the window of the Laundry. The police patrolled the area but were totally unprepared for the things that occurred. Windows were broken on all the corners in the Fourth and Vance area except windows

in the stores of the businesses. At <sup>(replacing)</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~time~~ <sup>time</sup> I arrived home about 1:00 p.m., men were firing the window in the Fish Market across the street from my house. Later that evening the window was broken again. Also the windows in the Lodi's Laundry on the next street from me were broken, garbage cans were lined in the streets to keep the police from getting to these places. Pires were set in front of some white business and the police were kept on the run from place to place.

About 11:00 p.m. my grandfather called our house to get my brother to pick him up downtown at the jail. He had been on jury duty that day and they had just been released for that night. However, my brother didn't get off work until 11:30 p.m. and arrived home about 12:15 a.m. At about this time we proceeded to drive to town on our mission. Soon as we turned out of our street on Park Ave. we were signalled by

by a traffic police car to stop. When my brother stopped they asked him if he knew about the curfew where we were going and why did it take all three of us to go (my grandmother was in the car) and get my grandfather. After these questions were answered we were told to "go on". We were instructed not to go through Main Street however. On our way back we came through Beale Street which had been boarded up and which was heavily patrolled by police cars. (The Nat'l Guard hadn't arrived).

For the next two days I was taken to work by my brother and picked up around 8:00 at night by my boyfriend. We were never stopped at night but we would see a constant line of police cars patrolling the streets, most of the time four or five cars in a row.

National Guardsmen stationed  
 at the shopping center (Lamar-Thruway) and  
 around the Locks Barbecue at Park off Lamar.

The school in my community (Orange  
 Mound) was set on fire and many liquor  
 stores were looted over the week end.

On Saturday night we went to the  
 bowling lanes on Lamar Ave (Cherokee) but  
 we encountered no police cars or no  
 incidents of violence.

Before I tell of my reaction I must  
 mention the fact that I saw several in-  
 cidents of policemen running to get away  
 from people whom they themselves had  
 tried to push with cars, or to rough  
 up with harsh talk. These people mostly  
 young men, would not be moved by the  
 incidents and a gun was pulled on one  
 police car. I witnessed this and the  
 fact that the car had three policemen

in it and ~~was~~ flying down the street in the other direction when this incident occurred.

In my opinion the police department was totally unprepared for the Memphis "confusion." For one reason most of the cars were stationed in the downtown area in about one spot (for instance from Main + Beale to Main and Court).

I was never personally upset by the confusion, for I believe that since the mayor will not consider giving the strikers what they want after these constant series of talks that it might take some violence and even bloodshed to open his eyes and the eyes of others who feel that the strikers aren't entitled to the things they are asking for. I feel that if this type of solution will hurt the businessman enough for him to put pressure on the mayor, then that's

what it will take.

I have gone ~~on~~ always, none of my ideas about helping others have changed.

I still think that everyone should have a fair chance to work to his fullest capacities without limitations put upon him because of his color or incapacity to learn one type of job. I have encountered various incidents of meanness on my job, but I have just plain ignored this display of ignorance and jealousy because of the intelligence that I might display during these "trying" times.