

My Position of the Riot in Memphis

3. 2. 1956

The Negro has now made decisions and proposed measures which he hopes will release him completely of the suppression that has long plagued him for almost three and a half centuries. Although it is true that the chain of slavery has been broken from the Negro, there still exist barriers which enable the black man to fully enjoy and express himself as a first class citizen. These barriers are social, political and economical ones. It may be unclear to many whites why the Negro has acted so suddenly to try and break the wall that has been used by the white man to blind the Negro of all the finer things of life. In this essay I will try and bring light to ~~the~~ ^{the} sudden disturbance which occurred in Memphis.

For many years the Negro people have been a disorganized group of people and have to a large extent, lead dependent lives for an existence. The white man took advantage of the Negro people that he has had a lot to do with in separating by exploiting them and using them as working tools to accomplish his ends with very little regard to what could be done to better the Negro people. Since those backward years the Negro race has managed, to a large extent, to unify themselves. Being a Negro myself, I find that we are together in accomplishing our goal in breaking through the barriers which suppressed us as a group of people, but we are not

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together on just what tactics which should be used to accomplish this goal.

Just on last week (April 28, 1968) plans had been made by Negro leaders for a mass march on downtown Memphis. This march had supposed to have been non-violent. This is only one of the tactics used to show our concern for attaining full citizenship. This ~~the~~ tactic has worked in cities of Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and others for the overthrowing of specific issues which have weighed us from advancing. These issues were to integrate public schools, eating facilities, ~~theaters~~ theaters, and other public places. Many of these things have been accomplished through a non-violent march, but there still exist suppression and discrimination. The march planned on downtown Memphis was aimed at a specific issue also. This issue was one concerned with our sanitation department. This issue has served to unify just about all of our race in this city. The workers of the sanitation department have been pressing to form a union that will be recognized by our city government. There is very little assurance for any working group of people without a union. So, as a pressing measure to make the city meet the wishes of the sanitation department, workers went on strike about six weeks ago. To this day the strike has not been very effective. To assist the strike, the march on downtown Memphis last Thursday ~~to~~ many Negro supporters and some whites went to show their concern for the sanitation workers.

This march was led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and prominent representatives of the MCP and many ministers. The march started about eleven o'clock Thursday morning in front of Clayborn Temple Church. It went as far as Main and Oakley Street and all of a sudden violence broke out by other Negro individuals who felt that the non-violent tactic was the wrong position to take. They felt that violence was the only thing that the white man would listen to. It is their common feeling that if they destroy or attempt to destroy something that the white man has put his whole life's saving into would force him (white man) to lean to the wishes of the Negro race.

This was the second week of Spring, flowers blooming, birds singing with everything showing life and beauty. In the same way seeds of violence had been planted and like the flowers and the birds these individual's emotions began to bloom and to show their faces. Like a seed under the right growing conditions, an individual, black or white will either show how much he appreciates or ~~to~~ how much he disagrees with something.

It might seem a little strange, but many of the non-violent marchers joined the riot when it started. This ~~is~~ only shows that many of the so called doves have deep embedded feeling to fight and destroy like the individuals who started the riot. (218) 3.

To me, it is a beautiful thing to see people express themselves in truth ~~in the way~~ that they really feel. This violent act ~~was~~ then an expression of life. If one would ~~just~~ think about the historical background of all earlier generations, he will recall that ^(almost) every group used some act of violence or force to attain their goal. The Romans are a good example and so are the early American white men of this country. No one is going to give you anything in a country like this one. What's more the Negro even have a hard time earning that which belongs to him. Some work to a small degree, but they ~~do~~ not enough for a group of people who have been slighted and suppressed, living discontented and meaningless lives to a large extent. It is becoming the general consensus of many Negro Americans that violent force is the tactic which should be used to fully free the Negro people.

When violence started in Memphis on the day of the march, Dr. King was ~~at~~ ~~by~~ told by other non-violent leaders to leave the march for fear that he might get hurt. Many store windows were broken and lots of merchandise were taken. Out of the confusion one Negro youth was shot to death while turning himself over to his murderers, who was a policeman. I was not surprised to

see the riot occur in Memphis and I will not be surprised to see a greater disturbance take place if justice is not brought to this law officer.

Thursday night Mayor Loeb put a seven o'clock curfew on all individuals of the city who did not have necessary excuses for being on the street. National guardmen were called in to quieten the city. During that night there were about one hundred and fifty individuals arrested for being on the street after the curfew. Many businesses were set fire and there was also some looting. On Friday more National guardmen came into the city. That day there was another march, but this one was non-violent. That night the curfew continued and other individuals were arrested that night for being out on the street. There was very little violence on this night. Saturday there was another march. It was peaceful and was about the smallest one of all. There were only two hundred and thirty to fifty people in this march. By Sunday everything was back to normal as far as the city government was concerned. The curfew was lifted and things were about the same other than the thousands of National guardmen still patrolling the city.