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A Report on the Citizens March in support of Striking Sanitation Workers – March 28, '68

An Eye Witness Interviewed

Q: Why were you at the March? You're not but 12.

A: My father had attended some of the nightly meetings on behalf of the striking sanitation workers and they asked for the participation of everyone; people were to stay off from work; children from school.

Q: Where did you go?

A: We went to Clayborne Temple about 9:15.

Q: Were there many people?"

A: Yes thousands of them.

Q: Did you start marching right away?

A: No. someone told us that Dr. M.L. King had been delayed and the march would be late starting.

Q: How long did you wait?

A: About an hour.

Q: What was happening while you waited?

A: We were lined up in the streets and given instructions by the march marshals [sic] who told us to stay in the streets, walk at least arms distance from the people in front of us etc. Some teenagers were singing & dancing, and people were taking pictures. A helicopter, with photographers, was flying overhead & each time—

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It passed, the crowd would hold up signs and start cheering. Finally Dr. King came and everyone started cheering him & trying to get up close to him. The Head Marshal gave the order and the march began.

Q: Were you near your father?

A: No. the ministers were first, next the sanitation workers, then young people, and adults were behind us.

Q: Then what happened?

A: After that, we started walking up Hernando to Beale Street, singing songs and holding up signs against against [sic] Mayor Loeb. One song said "I don't like bread & butter, I don't like toast and jam, I don't like Mayor Loeb 'cause he ain't worth a dam."

Q: Who was doing most of the singing?

A: Teenagers and some adults adults [sic] and some teenagers were dancing.

Q: What happened next?

A: When we got to Beale & Mulberry one teenage boy threw a stick at the window of a [illegible] and broke it. Then the other teenagers started cheering and they started breaking windows too! Up ahead of us, they had started some kind of violence, but we couldn't see. We never did make it to Main.

Q: Did you throw anything?

A: No. I went where my father was.

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Q: Were you afraid?

A: Kind of. I was shaking because I thought we were going to get stampeded by all those people.

Q: Did the crowd go wild?

A: No. The grown people kept walking and most teenagers were running, some were looting the stores.

Q: Then what happened

Q: We heard over the bullhorn that everyone was ordered back to Clayborn Temple. We took a short cut down Beale to Third behind the fire station on Linden, then to Hernando & the Church. My father took us this way to keep us from getting hurt. On our way to the church, we saw some boys break the window of Pape Men's Shop and pull the [illegible] & suits & material out of the store. They put the clothes in Hogue & Knott Grocery bags and ran.

Q: Were girls looting?

A: Almost all were boys, but there were some girls getting things.

Q: Did you hear any comments about what was happening?

A: Everybody was saying "they shouldn't be doing that" (breaking windows, etc.)

Q: What were the police doing?

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A: At first, they didn't know what was going on then they got the news on their walking – talking and they started hitting teenagers or anybody with their sticks and one policeman was asking what happened. They didn't allow anyone in the corners.

Q: What happened back at the Temple?

A: we were among the first people to get back so we got a front seat and waited for the others. People began coming in. Some had been beaten, others maced, some children were lost from parents or older sisters & brothers. It was very noisy.

Q: Were you maced?

A: No, but the police shot teargas [sic] on the steps of the Temple and the fumes came inside and burned my eyes. My brother was carrying. He is 10. The leaders tried to organize the people and find lost children. We were told to go directly to our homes and we would be notified later on about what the plans were.

Q: Did you leave right away?"

A: No, we waited a while.

Q: How did you get home?

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Q: We rode the bus. On our way to catch it, we saw a 2 white bus drivers who were off duty and were waiting for a bus themselves. A crowd of boys started after the man and they ran toward a funeral home. The boys were throwing rocks and sticks and bricks and bottles. One bus driver was stabbed in the back and the other hit upside his head just as they reached the funeral home. The people let them inside and closed the door against the boys

Q: Did anyone report this?

A: Yes, we saw a Memphis Transit man directing the bus traffic and my father told him what had happened & he called for police and an ambulance. Then our bus came and we went home.

Q: How do you feel about what happened?

A: I didn't like it at all. The way some people were cursing in church and talking so loud, the tear-gas burned my eyes and seeing all those people getting hurt. I wanted to march down Main Street to the City Hall and hear Dr. King Speak!