

Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

LeMoyne Reflections on Sanitation Strike March pp. 159-163 -- R.W.

Item Type	Text
Download date	2026-06-06 08:31:12
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10267/34057

Violent Disturbances in Memphis, Tennessee

...wishes something else to that wants to be bigger and better than the other fellow. This ambition should not be stifled, for stifling this urge lessens the man and creates future problems. Somewhere in the saga of the American Negro his desire for pride and dignity had been discouraged and he felt himself a "little man." But society does not recognize little men, if anything society pities them, even misuse them. If society doesn't pity them, it use them to its own advantage. Such was the case involving hundreds of Negroes in Memphis, Tennessee.

During the latter part of last week, March 28-31, in an instant, a fairly orderly demonstration in support of the sanitation strike molded into a vast outbreak of looting and rioting, bloodshed and vandalism. Most of the Beale Street area and the southwestern part of Memphis were under martial law after firemen, policemen, state troopers and National Guardsmen were called in to snuff out the agitation.

(159)

As the march was in its procession, there were many Negroes, mostly youths, gathering together to seek revenge

from policemen after an incident that occurred at Hamilton High School. I arrived around 11:15 A.M., a little too late to join the head of the demonstration, but as I approached the rear of the march there were policemen clubbing and cursing young Negro youths for nothing more than screaming "Black Power."

Most observers agreed that the violence started when hundreds of Negro youths broke away from the main body of marchers on Beale Street Thursday and started breaking windows and looting. This could have been the firearm for this violent outbreak. But the inhuman treatment administered by police officers of clubbing and cursing Negro youths is the more probable reason for what happened. This event set off a twelve hour period of violence that witnessed one Negro youth murdered by a white policeman, who upon this day has not been brought to justice, many people hurt and over 200 arrested. As the rioting continued over a great part of the Memphis area, fires were set, windows broken, bombs tossed, and firemen, policemen and National Guardsmen were continuously plagued with trouble.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who's guidance and procedures the demonstration was supposedly to have followed, had earlier advocated complete work stoppage by the Memphis Negro community and suggested all Negro students to disregard classes Thursday in order to conduct a symbolic nonviolent march in the downtown area.

Negro students played truant by the hundreds and were joined by many other young Negro youths who turned the peaceful demonstration into a tumult that left Beale Street in total destruction. Because of the trouble that had already occurred before he arrived, Dr. King could not have been the instigator of the Memphis riot by which he has been accused by Memphis racist news media. His sympathy march for the sanitation workers was just a handy excuse for something that was bound to happen. For a long time Memphis has been living on the mythical creed of complete cooperation between the races (black and white) that just simply wasn't true. Such incidents as the looting of Sears on Third Street and the looting of Pico Furniture and Appliance on Lauderdale was something inevitable. I also feel that the Memphis riot was not a racial crisis as such (but

racial crisis I mean an all out black vs. white) but more of a revenge of the Negro youth against police brutality and the Memphis merchants and

Another cruel incident occurred in the neighborhood of Hughs and King Street in Southeast Memphis Friday March 29 at approximately 6:00 P.M. At the H-I hamburger stand on Hughs Street at 6:00 P.M. a state trooper car pulled up and ordered about twelve Negro youths to dissolve and go home. The youths moved along slowly much too slow for the state troopers satisfaction and thus fearing trouble from the youths, radioed for help. At approximately 6:15 P.M. ten more state troopers arrived, using profanity and "disorderly conduct," began clubbing and spraying mace at the youths, striking one young girl in the eyes and momentarily blinding her. Their conduct and language was totally unnecessary in talking to the youths. I feel that if the troopers knew exactly how to talk to them instead of saying "Niggers move on" like they usually do, there would have been better cooperation between the youths and the officers. Negro youths are not apt to be called "Niggers" or any other mispronounced enunciation of Negro by whites as their

