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LeMoyne Reflections on Sanitation Strike March pp. 317-318 -- D.M.

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“The Negro Ministers as a Contributing Force in the Riot”

The beginning of the anti-Loeb feeling which has penetrated most of the Negro community started in Loeb's previous term of office. Many Negroes felt that if reelected in 1967 he would enact similar laws, which would induce further segregation. So, when the sanitation strike occurred and Loeb did not recognize the wants of the workers, most Negroes felt this was a direct attack on the power structure of the Negro community. Thus, the Negro leaders sought to unify the Negro community by making, I feel, the sanitation strike, a racial issue. This racial issue was in the form of a boycott of all downtown businesses.

Marches were staged for two weeks in hopes of getting the whole community aware of the problem, but the city council showed an ambiguous attitude towards the bargaining forces of the sanitation workers. Thus, Martin Luther King was asked to help in the problem. His march, a peaceful one in am resulted in a riot last Thursday. The ministers (Negro) of this city are partly in fought of this riot. I say this for several reasons. Although Rev. Kyles and Lawson openly advocated that they did not have the thuggish elements in the march, when it began, they did go to the various high schools and encouraged the students to leave school and participate in the march. This fact was an indication that they were encouraging trouble.

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I feel it would have been different if the ministers had constantly been organizing the students for the march, but that they had not. Thus, these students for all intentional purposes was [sic] similar to a mob. They were unorganized and many of them came into the march for the purpose of looting. Thus, the Negro ministers were in fault as well as the looters. Many people might oppose this view, for Loeb is still a central figure in the strike and in the cause of the “riot.” I say this for many Negroes felt he could have recognized the union. This would have avoided much conflict by giving the workers a bargaining agent who would, thus, serve as mediator for the needs of the workers.

However, there is another aspect of the minister's contribution to the march. In the beginning of the strike, the racial issue, was not involved. It was just a union worker and city council problem. When the NAACP entered the problem, they sought to make the problem a race issue. Thus, their strategy was toward making the downtown businesses come to grips with problem. This was done in the form of a boycott which was to unify the Negro community and make the larger community put pressure on the council to recognize the workers' demands. This worked, little, thus the stage was set for last Thursday's march.