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LeMoyne Reflections on Sanitation Strike March pp. 319-320 -- A.R.

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There are two main topics which I would like to discuss concerning the events surrounding the "riots" in Memphis Tenn. March 28 and 29, 1968. The first is the "mutation" of the news brought about through the unyielding efforts of the communications "services" of Memphis, Tenn. and Jackson, Miss. And the second is to substantiate the "rumors" of incidents of police looting under these disturbances. All of information for the discussion of the first topic was gained through conversations and observations while I was in the state of Mississippi.

In Miss. on the semester break, I was confronted by the news of the "riots" in Memphis by two major sources, they were; (1) conversations with two fellow students, George Gossett, and Uzell Garner, both of whom were also in Miss. and both of whom had received information concerning the riots via long distance telephone. The other choice informational resources was the "Jackson Democratic Times" (the editorial concerning the riots) the leading newspaper of Jackson, Miss.

The information again was gained from Mr. Gossett and Mr. Garner and it was more than contradictory. I contributed this to one major factor, the utterly disgusting jobs of reporting on the part of all the news services of Memphis. Most of the information gained also "overemphasized" particular facets of the riots. For example some of the first reports (by phone) were to the effect that two schools were in flames and ruin; also that there was an even more devastating blow thrown at Beale St.; and finally a curfew had been set for five o'clock. Later reports told of less damage to all three sites (Beale St., Hamilton and Melrose schools) but even these reports were exaggerations.

These reports were of "bricking" and of burning of certain portions of the schools.

There were, I believe two basic conclusions that can be drawn from the total amount of information received. (1) that the destruction by "Negroes" in "Negro neighborhoods" was overplayed and that (2) there was very little mention of the role of the M.P.D. (Memphis Police Dept.) in their instigation or participation in the events surrounding the riots. (Instigation can be equivocated with the blocking of Main at Beale St. and the shouting of profanities at the crowd. Just to name one of the numerous incidents.)

Secondly, the editorial which appeared in the March 29, 1968 edition of the "Jackson Democratic Times" was an attempt by the editor, to connect Rev. Martin L. King directly with the "riot element" of the "March". In flagrant language the editor spoke of the "peacefulness" of the city (Memphis) before the arrival of King, and suggested if he was not in some contact with these "rioters" why did they pick "his march" to attempt this destruction. (There was also mention of the March on Washington and the "significance" of King's leadership)

Last but by no means least, upon my arrival to Memphis I was again confronted by two friends Mr. Alfonso Williams and Mr. James White, who informed me of an incident they witnessed Friday, March 29, 1968. This was a case of looting, not only by the so-call "rioters" but also the patrolmen called to the scene of the incident. These witnesses saw the officer enter into the store (Hogy's Grocers-Tillman at Broad Ave(s)) and leave with large amounts of Beer, cigarettes, and cold cuts, plus other articles). Yet none of the incidents (which this was not the first or last of) were not mentioned by the Memphis News Service