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LeMoyne Reflections on Sanitation Strike March pp. 25-29 -- J.J.

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The Memphis Riot

J.J.-1

On March 28, 1968, an exceedingly warm and sun shiny day, Martin Luther King, arrived at Clayborn Temple on Hernando at 11:15 A.M. (W.D.T.A. news), for the purpose of the march scheduled in reference of the Sanitation workers.

There was an estimated crowd of 1500 people gathered for the march. The crowd proceeded from the Church in a somewhat orderly but noisy manner. Mixed in the crowd, were those varying from twelve to possibly 60, as well as the mixing of the races. As the crowd made a right off of Hernando to Beale, order broke exceedingly near main, a clatter was heard, which was unmistakably the sound of glass being broken. There I was in the midst of such a combination of mixed expressions.

I realized that the triggering off of the riot was not from those gathered for the purpose of the march, but various "black-powers" groups organized for the disturbance of mankind. Their

purpose was to intermingle with the crowd in order to make it less obvious of the organizations there. They began by breaking shop windows, and ~~looting~~ looting all they could, between Hernandez and main.

The police immediately began taking drastic measures in rendering a quick solution to the disturbance. Such objects as blackjacks, slapsticks, rifles and maces were used to break the crowd up. The police fired in the air, in order to frighten the looters, they even fired at many of the marchers, many who were totally innocent in the starting of the riot. One of the bullets hit 16 year old Larry Payne in the stomach. The story as told by his 17 year old girl friend, who was present at the march, to a friend of mine, was: Larry and I were on side one, each other, and when the sound of windows shattering began, he ran in that direction. He had a T.V. in his hands, and when the officer asked them to put it down, he did, but was immediately shot in the stomach. I couldn't believe what I had seen, but it had happened. (26)

With our attention placed once again on the march, Martin L. King was escorted by other leaders of the march to safety. Meanwhile the few policemen on hand, were working to clear the streets and arresting the looters and troublemakers. It was an event which will linger in the minds of those who were there, because such inhuman brutality on the part of the police officers was displayed. Unnecessarily beating that wasn't printed or seen by the press, the vulgar name calling, and the number of officers that were hurt. It was estimated as to about five or six injured. But reports from John Easton Hospital were different. My aunt, Mrs. Amelle, age 32, a practical nurse on the day shift reported that a numerous number of police officers were being treated and a few admitted, a number that exceeded five or six.

There also were reports from Detroit and Milwaukee, that showed how twisted the press made the actual news. Mrs. Taylor, age 24, a teacher in Detroit, called her mother, Mrs. Ireland, age 42, a neighbor of mine and (27)

stated that the paper there had printed that 300 had participated in the march and riot, and that no-one was injured, and not much damage was administered to the Downtown section by Miss Seymour, and then daughter of Mrs. DeLoach, who is also a teacher, age 26, states: news reached her that Memphis had a little disturbance, not much derived of it, but news got a few windows were broken and there were no injuries, for about one hour, the crowd had dispersed and all was quiet once again.

As to my personal reactions, I feel that the riot was necessary, in that the Sanitation workers have been protesting and marching for over eleven days, and still nothing has come of it. With disturbances of this sort it does give the white citizens of Memphis the ideal that we, as negro citizens, has taken about all we intend to. Some peaceful agreement will have to be decided on, or actions of this sort (riots) will always be a part

of Memphis. Maybe something will be done
in the future to better the situations here
that are taking place. Until Then, I say,
"Riot Baby, Riot !!"