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## LeMoyne Reflections on Sanitation Strike March pp. 125 - 136 - - D.B.

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### **D.B. -1**

I arrived at Clayborn Temple at about 8:50 a.m. because I thought that the march was scheduled to start at 9:00 a.m. However, when I got my sign reading, "Mace Won't Stop the Truth," I joined the marchers already waiting in the streets. As I walked along looking for a place for me, my sister, Thinkel and my friend Barbara Partee, I could see that everyone possessed a certain kind of enthusiasm. From the talking, laughing, and waves given by people to familiar friends or acquaintances, it made me feel that this really was a "holiday march." As I walked along, I began reading some of the signs that ranged from "I Am a Man," to "Loeb, kiss my Ass." After walking for about 5 minutes, I found a spot about mid-way in the march. When we first squeezed into the crowd, I said that this was an ideal position because if anything started at the beginning or the end, maybe we would have a chance to get away quickly. While standing there in the march looking around, I could see the age level ranged from a baby in a carriage to an elderly lady of about 65.

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### **D.B. -2**

I laughed and said to my sister and Barbara that no one wanted to be left out of the parade. As we stood there, we learned that the march would not leave Clayborn Temple until about 10:30 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. For various moments there would be a certain kind of quietness present. At about 9:30 a.m. the whirlybirds (about 3) that were flying over the march area were beginning to irritate the marchers. The teen-agers from the high school areas began to make up various chants concerning Loeb. However, each time the whirlybirds would come in close, everyone seemed to become angry and thus the whole crowd began to hold their individual signs up and make geering [sic] remarks. I must even admit that the whirlybirds were causing me to become frustrated, because it seemed as though we were in a cage with guardsmen flying over us to keep watch. At about 10:10 a.m. the marchers began to get very restless. The teen-agers began to sit in the middle of the street and some of the adults went to the church to sit down, I noticed that the longer we waited, the tension was mounting higher and higher. As I began to look around in front of me, I could

### **D.B. -3**

See what appeared to be a large branch with a sign hanging from it held by one fellow and was surrounded by a group. With the wind blowing, I could not read the sign and I said to myself jokingly that maybe they had run out of sticks. Suddenly, the [bay] who was holding the branch with a sign on it was above the crowd saying ironically and sarcastically there would be no violence. Everyone that heard him, laughed because you could easily tell that his tone was not a serious one. As he continued to repeat the same thing over again, the writing on his sign finally came into view that read "Loeb's Hanging Tree." A sudden chill ran through me because for the first time, I began to feel that this would not be a peaceful march. At 11:00 a.m., the marchers

began to move on to their destination, City Hall. When the march started moving, I was disappointed because my idea of a march was destroyed. The people were just walking without any type of form. The people kept yelling for everyone to get in one

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#### **D.B. -4**

File and hold hands, but the people ignored this plea. I also noticed that half of the marchers near me were not holding their signs up. As a matter of fact, I noticed that two of the marchers near me (teen-agers) were holding just their sticks and had torn off their signs. When they held them up, I could see that the stick had writing that read "Black Power Stick." The immediate thought that passed through my mind was- What am I doing in this march? The march was moving slowly for about 5 minutes and I could see that a lot of people were standing on the sidewalks looking at us as if it were a parade going along. Suddenly, as I looked to my left, I saw about five men walking with sticks in their hands saying that we [the marchers] didn't want any violence, but we were going to get some. I thought about what they were saying but I didn't heed it because they were walking fast and I thought that maybe one of the parade marshalls [sic] would stop them in time. As the march turned on Beale Street, the crowd was changing moods. I noticed that hatred was present on the faces of many. I also noticed that they were

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#### **D.B. -5**

Getting angry because [...] policemen lined up and down the [...] I knew then that the march would end in violence. I had just reached Beale and Third when some of the marchers had turned around and saying [sic] for everybody to go back to the church. This really set the first spark for violence. A few of the militant marchers present were saying no, don't turn around, keep marching. I suddenly realized that I didn't know which to do. I had a series of mixed emotions. After my sister told me that she was going on, I decided that I would march on to [sic]. About 3 minutes later, I heard breaking of windows and I noticed that some of the crowd started to run. I headed toward a street that was lined with policemen [about 8] and for a few minutes, panick [sic] overtook them because they started running away from the crowd and

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#### **D.B. -6**

I noticed then that one of them stopped and put his hand on his gun as if to say "What am I running for, I have a gun." He then stopped and started back toward Beale and the other policemen that were running stopped and pulled their guns and started going back toward the scene of the violence. As I was running, I noticed that I had left my sister and I called to Barbara and told her I had to go back. As we arrived back on Beale, I saw my sister still standing and

looking. Suddenly, I noticed that the violence seemed to die down but I heard a voice coming from someone who I knew quite well. I will call him Ray Richardson because he is a Senior at Le Moyne College. He was carrying a stick saying "Everybody that's scared, get behind me and run." Then everything started again. This time I noticed that the stores were being looted and glasses were breaking. My sister and I started running once again. When we got a few feet from Beale, I looked back and I could see the police riding down Beale at about 70 m.p.h. I could also see policemen running with their guns in one hand and stick in the other one. Fear overtook me and I was trying to find a way home. As I looked around hoping that the violence had stepped and Beale, I saw a policeman beat a man until he fell and balled up as if lurching in great pain. I also noticed that about three or four policemen ran from their position to get a lick in on the man who was already down. I began to cry and wonder how could something like this happen in Memphis. As the three of us started walking back toward Beale, I stopped and said that we couldn't go because I showed them the fumes from mace and tear gas.

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#### **D.B. -7**

However, it was too late to stop. Our eyes began to burn and water. Just as I started feeling sorry for myself, I saw a man coming up the street with his shirt off holding it up to his head. His face was covered with blood and his undershirt was soaked. His shirt seemed so saturated until it seemed as though you could wring the blood out of it. I began to cry because I thought that this was the worst thing that I could see. He stopped a car that was passing by. He didn't know the driver or any of the passengers but he asked them to take him to the hospital, I then made my desperate plea for us to try to get home. As we started walking back towards Beale, the various T.U. reporters passed us zooming as if they were in a squad car. We finally made it to Vance Avenue and I said that the buses were passing people up and that we could go to my grandfather's tailoring shop [BHS Custom Tailors] and wait there until he could take us home. As we started walking near Vance and Third where his shop was located, we passed a [Loeb L. Barb-O] with two squad cars of policemen with helmets standing in front and were saying that they should get into their cars and see what the other guys

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#### **D.B. -8**

Were doing. We knew that he was referring to the other policemen. From listening to him, I felt hard and bitter because I knew that more men like him were down on Beale beating my people and getting sheer enjoyment from beating people. However, we finally made it to our grandfather's shop safely and we stayed there until about 4:00 p.m. When I got home, I learned that my brothers had to run home from Cummings Elementary School because rioters were threatening the school. I also learned then that Memphis would have a curfew from 7:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. At about 6:55 p.m. the residents on McLemore that level in the apartments between

Neptune and College lined the streets as if expecting a parade to come along. Suddenly, we heard glass breaking and it was coming from Friedman's Furniture Store. I opened my mouth in amazement because people began to run up the street with couches, televisions, rugs, and etc. Everyone still stood there and from no where [sic] about 6 squad cars and five state troopers' cars drove up and shouted for us to get in the house. A lot of the fellows who had broken glass run [sic] into an apartment. The policemen and State Troopers stayed for about 10 minutes and then everyone came back on the streets.

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#### **D.B. -9**

Some fellows who drove up in a car bearing Mississippi license plates came and asked the people if they had any gasoline or firecrackers because they wanted to burn down Big "O" Food Store. My father then told us to stay near the door because he didn't want anything to happen to us. At about 8:00 p.m. I thought that maybe the idea of burning Big "O" Food Store was dead when there was a loud boom and saw a bright light come from the back of the store. The people in my apartment session cheered and then went into the house as if nothing had happened. About 10 minutes later we heard the fire department and ran outside to see what was happening as if we were really shocked. After they put the fire out, they left one policeman there, but he soon left in a hurry because somebody shot at him. At about 10:00 p.m. the owner of the store came with about four other friends or relatives who entered the store with rifles to guard it. This set off a spark with the people around us. About three doors down from us, the tenants began to throw bricks and bottles at the store window. I was then told to go into the house and so the only thing that I can say is that they eventually broke the window because the next morning I saw them getting glass

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#### **D.B. -10**

Installed. I will let my report end here because I feel that the other incidents that I witnessed are too lengthy to put in this one paper, but I would like to say that this was only a sample of the worst that is about to come.

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#### **D.B.-11**

"My Personal Viewpoint"

I feel that the risk that took place on Thursday, March 28, 1968, was inevitable. The reason that I could give for feeling like this was the controversial issue of police brutality. This was what

people thought would start the riot in Memphis. However, a riot did not occur and therefore the tension and reasons for a riot mounted. I feel that when Mayor Henry Loeb was elected to office that many “Black Power” groups organized because the black people of Memphis knew that they had a prejudice [sic] mayor in office. Because of his handling of the sanitation strike and the police brutality issues from last year, indicated a way out. It was not only a march for the strikers, but it was also a march for long last justice towards blacks in Memphis. I feel, however, that the march and riot didn’t accomplish too much but it illustrated to the notion and to the citizens of Memphis that justice and equality must prevail. I would also like to say that I feel that the rioting was already planned. As I can recall from the march, I remember seeing a group of fellows with the “Invaders” written across the backs of their jackets. I also remember that when the march started that they said “all right, let’s spread out.” I also think that they were the main one that started breaking the glass and other people

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**D.B. -12**

Just joined in with them at that moment. As has already been stated, no one actually knows what happened but can only tell what they saw. I think the only way to solve this mystery would be to talk with a member of “The Invader.”

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