



The Detroit Riot of 1968

By Dr. Kelvin E. Turner

Day 34
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Read Acts 17:22-23

“The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.”

Critical Race Fact:

The United States government compounded the psychological harm experienced by African Americans by permitting the torture and murder of black citizens. Federal and state official inaction communicated that no democratic institution valued Black citizen's lives enough to protect them against terrorism by local officials and private citizens alike. “They had to have a license to kill anything but a nigger,” explained one African American man from the Mississippi Delta. “We were always in season.” Today, public and private institutions in the South memorialize the Confederacy and celebrate the architects of white supremacy while remaining conspicuously silent about the terror, violence and loss of life inflicted on Black American during the same historical period. “this selective public memory compounds the harm of official's complicity in lynching and maintains the otherness of Black people who have lived in these communities for generations.

When it was all over more than 7,000 were arrested, 1,800 were injured, and 43 lay dead. Nearly 2,000 stores were looted and more than 1,400 building were burned. All total (in today's dollars) there was more than \$426,432,471.00 dollars' worth of property damage. Was this the aftermath of the George Floyd Killing? Was this the community's response to the Rodney King beating? No, this was the aftermath of the 3rd most expensive riot in United States history. It was the Detroit Riot of 1968.

I can remember it like it was yesterday. It began a few miles from the two-bedroom, one bath, 1,000 square foot upper flat that I shared with my mom, four brothers and two sisters on Detroit's westside. The riot began when the vice squad of the Detroit Police Department decided to raid a popular blind pig called the Scott's Club. The raid which took place at 3:35 a.m., following the prolonged celebration of two Vietnam veterans that recently returned home from serving the in the Vietnam war, was uncalled for. As the police waited for additional vehicles to arrest the 85 patrons, the outside crowd grew from 200 to thousands; and from rage to riot.

Was this the result of the raiding of a blind pig? No! it was what Fannie Lou Hammer described as being sick and tired of being sick and tired. The riot was caused by the deepened disparity and racial discrimination that included cramming more than 60,000 of Detroit's low-income residents into 460 acres of the 91,450 acres within the city's boundaries. The riot was the result of the harassing police profiling, and the harsh police brutality unjustly inflicted on the Black in the city.

The definition of riot as shared by Webster is “the violent disturbance of peace upon a crowd, does not fully capture why people riot. Maybe the correct question is not why are they rioting, but why do they have to riot? Riot has also been defined as “the speech of the voiceless.” How do the voiceless discuss separate but unequal, underfunded and over-crowded schools? In the 1968 Detroit era – they rioted. How do the voiceless discuss, the unfair hiring practices, job discrimination, pay inequity, unjust, promotional policies? In the 1968 Detroit era- they rioted. Regretfully, our nation continues to demonstrate its hearing challenges when it comes to the voiceless. Let us continue to pray that we as a people, and our country as a nation can learn to turn our lack of communication to a time of celebration as the journey of the voiceless become our journey along the road of freedom and justice.

Prayer for Today:

Lord, thank You for hearing our voices. Thank You for helping us to hear the cries of the hurting, and transforming those cries into hope for the hurting, helpless and hopeless. In Jesus name, amen.

