

# Thousands Leave Washington as Bands of Negroes Loot Stores

By TOM WICKER  
Special to The New York Times  
WASHINGTON, April 5—

panic threatened this easy-going city this afternoon as fear of black violence spread rapidly across the downtown shopping area and through massive Government buildings.

Shortly after 3 P.M. black smoke rose above the Negro slum area and drifted on Spring winds across the central shopping district toward the Potomac River.

That, plus news bulletins about looting and burning in the area along Seventh Street N.W., set off an exodus of white-collar workers. Spotty looting in the downtown area caused most stores to close.

As night fell, swiftly moving looters—many of them arriving and departing in automobiles—hit almost every store in the central downtown block bounded by 13th, 14th, F and G Streets.

That was long after most shoppers, tourists and downtown workers had gone home. But most of the burning and the most extensive looting was in a relatively limited Negro area centered on Seventh Street Northwest. Nevertheless, the effect elsewhere in the nation's capital was immediate.

It began shortly after noon of a sunny spring day, when word swept through the city that Negroes again were creating disturbances in the Seventh Street area. It was there last night that looting and burning began following the news of the murder of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis.

As the smoke cloud rose and drifted above the city, a hush fell on the sidewalks and some merchants immediately began closing their doors.

Washington's broad streets

were quickly jammed with bumper-to-bumper traffic, most of it headed for Virginia and Maryland. Telephone circuits were overloaded and ineffective. Buses were jammed; Government workers fled their desks by the thousands.

Looters, frolicsome at first but increasingly menacing, broke windows and ransacked a few downtown stores, mostly those selling men's clothing. Police cars with piercing sirens darted about without apparent aim.

Later this afternoon, the most thoroughly looted downtown store—D. J. Kauffman's at 14th and I Streets N.W.—was burned while motorists, caught in a traffic jam, looked on.

By 4:30 P.M., pedestrians were even streaming across the Memorial Bridge over the Potomac. Well-dressed businessmen, unable to get aboard a bus or catch a taxi, carried their briefcases across the grassy circle at the Virginia end of the bridge.

Six miles southward on U.S. 95, the Shirley Highway, traffic streaming out of the city filled available lanes. Along downtown F Street, where men's clothing stores were looted within sight of the Treasury Building, motion picture theaters halted their showings early in the afternoon and sent their patrons out on the streets. Police cruisers with loudspeakers were touring about, urging passers-by to go home.

With rush-hour crowds and traffic so quickly developing, and with most police mobilized in the riot area east of 15th Street N.W. and north of the central shopping area, intersections quickly became snarled. Some civilians in business began directing traffic.

Many Government workers

quickly left their offices on their own initiative. Later, some agency heads used their discretion and sent workers home. At 4 o'clock, the White House announced that all Federal offices had closed.

Sporadic looting reached as far into downtown Washington as the shopping mall recently opened along F Street N.W., just above Pennsylvania Avenue, and almost in the shadow of the Washington Monument.

For the most part, however, the main shopping area, the Federal Triangle, and most Government buildings were not touched by violence in the afternoon; they were swept instead, it appeared today, by the kind of uncertainty that people usually resolve by going home.

Negroes and whites mingled in apparent harmony on downtown sidewalks, but there was little fraternization. At 14th and I Streets, members of both waves of Negro youths ran and watched as repeated sacking the D. J. Kauffman store before burning it.

Across I Street, cherry blossoms bloomed in Franklin Square, where dozens of young Negroes in something like a holiday mood watched and often joined the looting. Some of the looters dashed from the store to the park, put their booty down on benches and then tried on the jackets, ties and hats they had grabbed.

When a police siren approached, the watchers in Franklin Square would call to the looters: "get out of there quick!" Youths racing from the store frequently stopped the creeping traffic to make their escape across I Street.

Young black girls edged the looters on. "I wish I could wear some of them damn things," one of them cried out. One looter, reaching into a show window, seized a green jacket buttoned around

a dummy and carried away the dummy as well.

But there were not many such scenes in downtown Washington this afternoon, although after the major part of the exodus had been completed and a curfew had been imposed on the city, further looting broke out along 14th Street within blocks of the White House.

In the square outlined by 14th, 15th, F and G Streets, looters appeared almost as if from nowhere in the streets cleared by the curfew.

As elsewhere in the city, the looting was done in what appeared to be a carefree, hit-and-run mood. Most of the stores were not extensively damaged, beyond broken glass; few were actually entered, except for show windows.

With the aid of tear gas, the police eventually chased off most of the downtown looters. An hour after the assault, the stinging scent of tear gas lingered along F Street, and the sidewalks were littered with broken glass and bits of abandoned loot.

Directly across 14th Street from some of the hardest hit stores, Garfinkel's, one of the city's most fashionable department stores, was untouched. Its show windows were lighted and unguarded.

In the Negro area, where most burning occurred, damage was far more extensive than in the downtown area. Many small fires were burning along Seventh Street tonight.

It was hard to view what happened here as a direct and bitter reaction to Dr. King's murder, although in a news conference here this morning Stokely Carmichael urged the "extermination" of whites in retaliation.

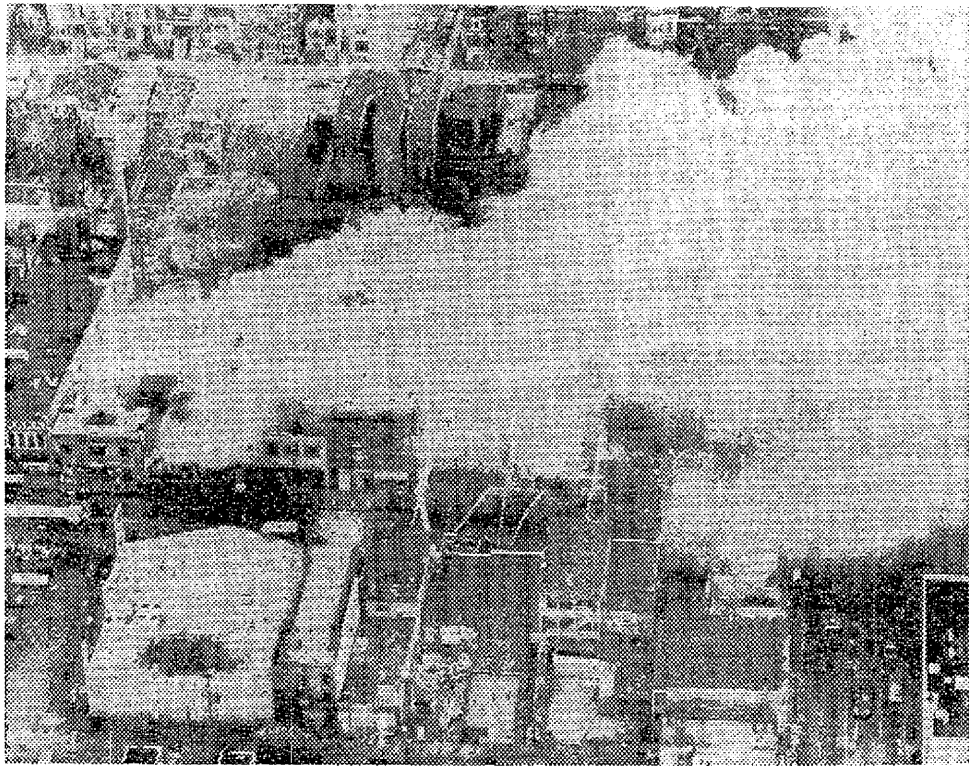
But mob violence was limited, and the looting seemed too

light-hearted and casual to be entirely in response either to Carmichael's words or Dr. King's death.

Rather, it seemed that the angry or vengeful actions of a few might have stimulated excitement in others and set them free of normal restraints. Most of the looters, far from appearing angry or mournful at the news from Memphis, appeared to be having a good time.

But whatever set off the looting and burning here, one fact was evident: even small bands of looters and burners can require great numbers of police and troops to re-establish order.

4-6-68  
297



United Press International

**IN CHICAGO:** Smoke rises from fires set by looters along a block on the city's West Side