

# 1968 APRIL FLAMES OF OUTRAGE

*A chronicle  
of  
Washington's  
burning  
By  
Leonard  
Downie Jr.*

**T**HE INTERSECTION of 14th and U streets NW—the crossroads and nerve center of black Washington in the 1960s—was filled with people changing buses, shopping or just hanging out when the news spread on Thursday evening, April 4, 1968: The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been shot to death by an unidentified white assassin in Memphis, Tennessee. In the first minutes of shocked silence, the atmosphere at 14th and U became, in the words of one witness, "ominous—like before a hurricane strikes."

Inside the busy Peoples Drug on the northwest corner of 14th and U, customers gathered around a transistor radio at the camera counter heard President Lyndon B. Johnson mourn Martin Luther King and plead with the nation to "reject the blind violence that has struck Dr. King, who lived by nonviolence." But his words rang hollow to many blacks listening in the store. "Honkie," muttered one man. "He's a murderer himself," said another. "This will mean one thousand Detroita."

Suddenly, a group of about thirty young people burst into the drug store. "Martin Luther King is dead," they shouted. "Close the store down!" As they herded customers through the aisles to the door, the man leading them, 26-year-old Stokely Carmichael, sought out the store's white manager. "It's closed," Carmichael told him excitedly. "It's closed." The manager did not argue. The store emptied and its fluorescent lights flickered out.

Carmichael, the former national chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), had come to Washington to organize a "Black United Front" of local activist leaders. When he heard about the shooting in Memphis that evening, he went first to the Washington headquarters of Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in a high-ceilinged old bank building just next door to the Peoples Drug. After talking by telephone to SCLC people in Memphis, Carmichael walked two blocks north on 14th street to the storefront Washington office of SNCC, where he rounded up a number of

SNCC workers who had gathered there. "They took our leader off, so, out of respect, we're going to ask these stores to close down until Martin Luther King is laid to rest," Carmichael told them. "If Kennedy had been killed, they'd have done it. So why not for Dr. King?"

Carmichael and a growing group of teenagers and young adults then moved down 14th street, closing stores, car-ryouts, barber shops and movie theaters. Just south of 14th and U, the swelling crowd encountered Walter Fauntroy, who was then an SCLC official and the chairman of Washington's newly appointed City Council. (He is now the District's delegate to the House of Representatives.) Catching up with Carmichael, Fauntroy grabbed him by his arms and told him, "This is not the way to do it, Stokely. Let's not get anyone hurt. Let's cool it."

Carmichael, a foot taller than Fauntroy, shook himself free and kept going. "All we're asking them to do is close the stores," he told Fauntroy. "They killed King."

Deciding that Carmichael's march might be a "useful channel of frustration" for the growing crowd he was leading, Fauntroy headed back to the SCLC office. He stopped along the way to tell a plainclothes policeman watching from an unmarked car that he thought everything would be all right. Fauntroy advised against bringing in uniformed officers because their presence might provoke serious trouble.

Only two nights earlier, outside the same Peoples Drug at 14th and U, Stokely Carmichael and a plainclothes police lieutenant had successfully dispersed a large, angry crowd that had stoned police who responded in force to a reported disturbance there. While Carmichael calmed the crowd, the lieutenant ordered the uniformed police to leave and then stayed behind himself to listen to the citizens' complaints. Similar brushfires had flickered frequently in Washington following shootings and heavy-handed arrests by police in black neighborhoods, but the city had thus far avoided full-scale riots like those suffered earlier by Los Angeles, Detroit and Newark.

The crowd Carmichael attracted along 14th street after Martin Luther King's assassination soon grew out of his control, however. The first window was broken by a teenager at the Republic movie theater, just west of 14th street.

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While Carmichael was pulling the youth away, others on the fringe of the big crowd began kicking in windows at the Peoples Drug back on the corner. Then a middle-aged man who, with tears in his eyes, was loudly denouncing the white man's evil, picked up a street trash can and threw it through the drug store window.

"This is it, baby," someone shouted above the crowd. "The s— is going to hit the fan now . . . We oughta burn this place down right now . . . Let's get some white m— . . . Let's kill them all."

"You really ready to go out and kill?" Carmichael shouted back. "How you gonna win? What you got? They've got guns, tanks. What you got? If you don't have your gun, go home. We're not ready. Let's wait until tomorrow. Just cool it. Go home."

Then Carmichael heard what sounded like gunshots a block away on 14th street. The windows of Sam's Pawnbrokers and Rhodes Five and Ten were being smashed. Dozens of people were reaching and jumping through the broken windows to grab watches, jewelry, radios and television sets. It was 10:24 p.m. The looting had begun and police headquarters downtown received the first trouble call.

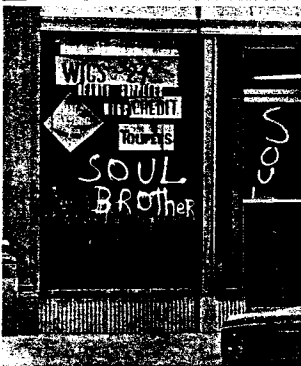
While looters carrying appliances, clothing and other booty streamed by him, Carmichael ducked briefly into the doorway of SCLC headquarters. He then dashed across the street and into a waiting car that sped off. The crowd had no leader now. All restraint was gone.

By 11 p.m. windows up and down 14th street were being broken as hundreds of looters swarmed from store to store, cleaning them out. The youths dodged police, who had arrived and started chasing them with nightsticks, and threw stones and bottles at firemen, who had come to fight fires started in several parked cars and a handful of looted stores.

Finally, police used tear gas to break up the crowds and then ran down and arrested as many looters as they could. One of the 200 they caught was a 19-year-old carrying seven hats from the London Custom Shop. After watching a television news bulletin about the King shooting at his grandmother's house a few blocks away, he had come down to 14th street to see "what would happen."

By 3 a.m. Friday, police lined 14th street for twenty blocks. Windows had been broken in 200 stores, a few as far away as Hecht's at 7th and F streets downtown and D. J. Kaufman's nearby men's store on Pennsylvania Avenue. More than 150 stores had been looted along 14th street and seven had been burned. Appointed Mayor Walter E. Washington and Police Chief John B. Layton left their temporary command post at the old Thirteenth Precinct stationhouse to announce that everything was now quiet. "The crisis is not yet over," Washington told reporters. "It's still out there, but the police have it well in hand."

If more trouble occurred, they figured, it would not be until Friday night. So Layton sent the police civil disturbance unit home to rest until 5 p.m., and Mayor Washington asked federal officials to have the D.C. National Guard and federal riot-trained troops on alert for Friday night. Chief Layton said he saw no reason to cancel the rest of the week's Cherry Blossom festivities or the parade scheduled for Saturday.



After dawn Friday, as the white foam sprayed by street-cleaning crews washed broken glass and debris down 14th street, commuters drove back into the city as usual. Early-rising tourists went down to the Tidal Basin to wander among the blooming cherry trees in the warm morning sun. A Hollywood production crew resumed filming a movie scene at the Jefferson Memorial.

But in black Washington, things had not returned to normal. Everyone talked about the previous night's events on 14th street. The city's 150,000 school children were restless in their classrooms, and worried parents and some black community leaders demanded that classes be cancelled. Many students simply left on their own. Before noon, despite pleas from city officials who feared the presence of thousands of students on the streets, school authorities gave up and the youngsters poured out.

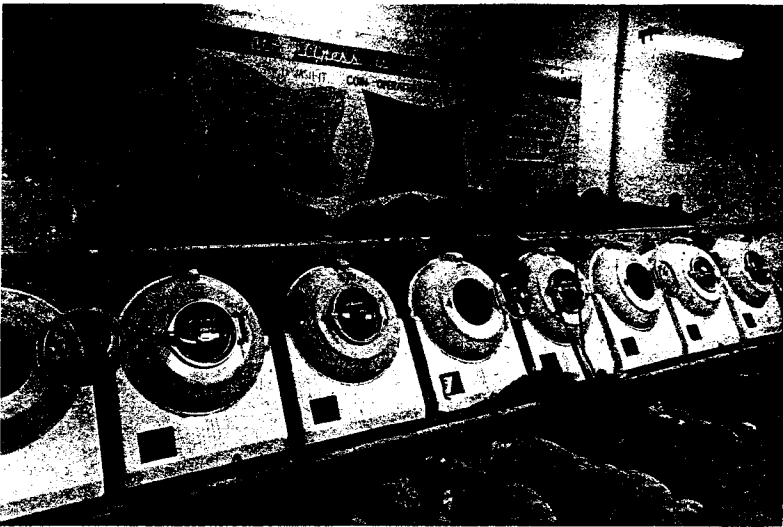
Many went immediately to 14th street to see what was happening. Overflowing the sidewalks, they began harassing motorists, rocking cars and pulling some white drivers out of their cars. There were few policemen around to stop them. At 12:13 p.m., a Safeway grocery store a half-block south of 14th and U was set afire. The smoke could be seen and the wailing sirens of fire engines could be heard up and down teeming 14th street.

As if on that cue, packs of hundreds of youngsters began smashing store windows that had not yet been broken and looting merchandise that had not yet been taken. Stores already cleaned out were torched. The fires quickly spread from building to building and block to block. Overwhelmed firemen were impeded by snarled traffic and the crowds in the streets, and when they were able to reach a fire, they were pelted with stones, bottles and bricks. Arriving policemen found themselves badly outnumbered and able to do little more than make token arrests and care for injured people. Two small boys trapped inside a burning G. C. Murphy variety store on 14th street became the riot's first fatalities. Washington was burning.

As smoke from 14th street filled the sky, the looting and burning spread along cross streets and to other major commercial thoroughfares of black Washington: 7th street NW, H street NE, 8th street SE and several streets in Anacostia. While these areas (where blacks shopped and whites owned a majority of the stores) were completely overrun by rioters, smaller bands of youths darted into the downtown business district, hitting stores there at random. Hecht's and Woodward and Lothrop quickly closed their downtown stores and workmen began boarding up doors and windows. Their fleeing customers and employees joined a midday mass exodus of panicked commuters who rushed out of their offices only to become trapped in a monumental traffic jam that further hampered the mobilization of police and firefighters. From upper story windows of apartment houses and office buildings, the city now appeared to be blanketed with smoke that obliterated the Capitol and the monuments.

Mayor Washington and President Johnson, who had been attending a Martin Luther King memorial service at Washington Cathedral, were handed urgent messages about the

*Continued on page 34*



How three businesses survived the burning and the looting and struggled back to life | By Cynthia Gorney with Paul Valentine

# An F Street Story

**I**T is early morning on F street downtown. The smell of steamy coffee and fresh bread drifts along the sidewalk from Reeves Bakery & Restaurant down past the serried ranks of shoes in the Kinney display window in one direction and a similar array in the Baker's Shoe Store window the other way.

In the next block, the glass front door of Household Discount Goods swings out toward the street. The store manager props it open with a loudspeaker. He lugs a long plywood tray heaped with sundries onto the sidewalk: skull caps, sixty-nine cents, children's slippers, \$1.99, face cloths, twenty-five cents each.

Up and down the street, electronically controlled doors click open and display window lights flash on one by one, beckoning passers-by to their plenitude: giant paper butterflies and neatly stacked copies of Frank Snapp's *Decent Interval* at Brentano's, luggage, mah-jongg sets and voltage converters at Becker's, stereo records at Harmony Hut that range from Vivaldi to the sound track of "Saturday Night Fever."

Shards of a Gallo wine bottle lie in the darkened entrance of a vacant office building, and remnants of political posters tacked on the walls for a demonstration against the shah of Iran five months ago flutter in the light breeze.

This is how the city's oldest retail street wakes up these days. Loudspeakers and luggage, Saint-Saëns and soul: a Washington collage embracing the fifty retail outlets along the F Street Plaza from 12th to 14th streets NW with its pedestrian islands, slow-moving traffic, women's apparel, men's apparel and shoes—cut-rate shoes, expensive shoes, shoes for women, shoes for men, shoes for kids—eighteen stores full of nothing but shoes.

But new visions of downtown including F street appear almost monthly now, each promising transformation and economic rebirth. There is the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, finally granted initial federal funding last spring, with its plans for public plazas, new housing and tree-shaded

walks. There is the \$100 million office and convention complex planned for the National Press Building block. There is the \$60 million retail development proposed for the city-owned urban renewal site at 12th and G streets NW. And most recently there is the planned shopping facility for the block bounded by 14th, 15th, F and G streets NW with Garfinckel's flagship store at 14th and F the anchor.

Metro rumbles underground toward F street now, carrying what many hope is a new clientele for the downtown stores. Architects' designs envision a soaring, glass-covered interior renovation for the Old Post Office building at 12th street and Pennsylvania avenue. And hotel chains have finally begun serious negotiations for the hollowed-out hulk of the nearby Willard Hotel, which has taken on a kind of grand martyrdom for many whose faith in central Washington withered for years.

In the blueprints, in the outlines, in the elated announcements to the press, this is an urban renaissance of major proportions. But it will be months, perhaps years, before the first real change is visible. In the meantime, a glum uncertainty mixed occasionally with skittish optimism by business officials, continues to hang over downtown.

Sales, in decline every year since 1968, "appear to have held their own in 1977," says Leonard Kolodny, chief of the Board of Trade's retail bureau.

Still, some store fronts on F street remain vacant and unused. Clerks stand idle in others, their arms folded, waiting, and say the street needs a much bigger transfusion. There is a vaguely ragged feel about the street.

**W**hat happened? What changed F street, and how will its future be shaped?

Three F street merchants who once worked side by side offer answers as different as their stores.

One has left the street. Charles Schwartz, 54, third-generation downtown jeweler, closed his once elegant store at 1313 F St. on January 13, removed the porcelain ballerina from the window and moved north to the Mazza Galerie in Friendship Heights on upper Wisconsin Avenue NW. "Following my customers," says Schwartz.

One is starting anew, his future staked on F street. Rufus "Tea" Laley, 40, North Carolina-born seller of menswear, has just re-opened Mr. Man, a slick and refurbished store specializing in imports, at 1325 F St. He originally opened on F street in 1971, but was burned out by a fire in April 1976, and remained closed for renovation until last October. Despite his personal reversals, he is hopeful for F street. "I think downtown's going to be dynamite," he says.

One has kept his F street store and changed it through the years, recoiling, re-adapting and pushing back with each new shift in the fragile economics of Washington. Frank Rich, 56, grandson of a Washington shoe merchant, works two worlds at once now, directing Friendship Heights and Connecticut avenue operations from his downtown office at 1321 F St. He too is hopeful. "There is more tangible evidence than ever," he says, "that things are gaining here." His shoes are selling briskly on F street, and he believes in the plans of the renovating architects. Rich intends to stay.

The story of these three men, and the paths they followed to F street, is a study in the shaping of a city's commercial core. They are Washington businessmen, and each is limited by the blinders of memory, but what they recall of the last forty years is a city beset by changes repeated all over America—urban decay, economic flight and the fight back.

**I**n 1935, when Washington was a segregated southern town and nobody had ever heard of suburbs, downtown paraded up 7th street and around the corner to F. The Schwartz's big electric street clock marked time at 708 7th St., in front of the four-story jewelry emporium run by Samuel T. Schwartz, the son in Charles Schwartz & Son. Samuel's father had begun the business; a Russian jeweler who learned the trade from his own father, the original Charles Schwartz brought his Theoretical and Practical Jewelry and Optical Co. to Washington around 1905.

Charles Schwartz the grandson remembers the vast American jumble of modern creations Schwartz's had become by the 1930s, displaying refrigerators, clocks, toasters, even a sporty white Crosley automobile that had been carried in piece by piece. Seventh street sang with that sort of jovial excess: depart-

ment stores, appliance shops, fine and frilly ladies' wear.

But Samuel Schwartz saw fraying at the edges. Peeling paint, fast credit places. So in 1940 he moved his store around the corner and a few blocks up because "he had the vision," as his son remembers, "that things were popping on F street."

F street was the center of the new downtown. On workdays trolley cars clattered back and forth, through streets so busy that a flagman stood at 9th to ward off accidents. Television was still an oddity, and the plush seats and cavernous interiors of the great movie houses drew regular crowds, evening-elegant.

At 10th and F streets, in a hulking four-story building whose upper offices overlooked all this bustle, the Rich family sold shoes. They had been selling shoes since 1869, when the two Austrian-born brothers, Max and Louis Rich (nicknamed Vaseline and Gasoline, for their shoe softeners and cleaners, respectively), went into business on 7th street.

In 1899 they had moved over to F street, with a grand introductory sale of \$1.89 oxfords and \$2.25 "low shoes," and by the late 1930s it was all sheen and class, very modern. "Rich's Salon Bleu" said the newspaper ad. "Chrome chair frames . . . soft blue carpets . . ."

Max Rich's son Herbert ran the store, his grandson Frank, a teen-ager by now, had grown up with F street and could not really imagine another place to shop. Then Rich went off to war, and like hundreds of other veterans, he came back to a city ripe for change.

There is one morning Rich remembers best—1951, early in the day. He pulled the car away from his house in Somerset—the edges, back then, of the city's Montgomery County suburbs. And what he saw on upper Wisconsin avenue sent him racing to a telephone.

A sign stood on a vacant Wisconsin avenue lot near Western avenue. The lot, the sign said, was to be a Friendship Heights development of retail stores called Chevy Chase Center. Rich was new in his father's business, but he had worked for Hecht's when its Silver Spring store opened in 1948, and he knew as a merchant that something very big was about to happen to the Washington retail trade—the

suburban shopping center.

Rich wanted to put a shoe store in that development, and he wanted it badly. His father held back. Herbert Rich was a conservative man, a merchant who had begun business in 1904. This is our lifeblood, he argued. Why stake so much?

The two visited a friend together, the prudent father and the eager, exasperated son. The friend was a merchant also, a man they respected. Rich still remembers the friend's voice, slow and serious. "Herbert," he said, "I want to tell you something. Whatever size store you want to build—double it."

They built. The Friendship Heights Rich's opened in 1956, and the young Frank Rich proved right: the war was over, austerity had vanished and middle-class Washington climbed into its new car to drive off in search of a backyard.

Out in the new frontiers of Shirlington and Seven Corners, long low buildings offered comforts no downtown could match. Acres of parking lot stretched into the distance. Showrooms were modern and air-conditioned. By the late 1950s, downtown merchants were starting to feel the exodus.

**T**here was something else about F street in those first post-war years. It had never had much use for black people.

The movie theaters were segregated until the 1950s, and for years a black man could not sit down to lunch on F street. Some stores drew black patronage, but in others it was common knowledge that a black customer could stand for hours without receiving help.

Fourteenth street NW, up around U, was where much of black Washington shopped. This was uptown—window-shopping, ladies' wear, churning, shimmy-paced and rich with life. Nightclubs drew the good musicians: the Flamingo, the Bohemian Caverns. Friday night burned late into Saturday morning and then the street woke up again to the first of the weekend trade.

Fresh out of the Army and new to Washington, Rufus "Tea" Isley discovered this world in 1960. He was 22 then, up from Raleigh, North Carolina, an Army-trained sheetmetal

worker who thought Washington would be the place to ply his trade.

But the union did not want young black men, and Isley had no work. He knocked around the 14th street area for a while, until an Army friend led him to a job at a Northeast men's store, Surrey's. The store had a 14th street NW branch as well, so that Isley was soon moving back and forth between the two, learning the work and settling into uptown.

Isley never bothered with F street. In the city he had met, as he puts it now, "it wasn't a thing for blacks to shop downtown." Isley's life was 14th street, and hustling his way up in the store. In February 1968, with a \$25,000 loan from the Small Business Administration and the good-luck send-off of the store's former owner, the ghetto kid from North Carolina took over the 14th street shop and renamed it Mr. Man.

Both the loan and the opening got a good deal of attention. "Too many white faces with limousines," Isley's wife, Rosetta, observed sourly to a reporter a few months later. They flocked to the shop to celebrate the young black success story, because in February 1968 the city desperately needed Isley, needed a sop of optimism to fend off what was coming.

**T**he storm signals were hushed and queasy at first, and some would say later that they never saw the warnings. Leonard Kolodny of the Board of Trade saw. He had prepared a merchants' disaster control guide for coping with a civil emergency.

Watts had burned. Newark and Detroit had burned and the racial tensions that set off those cities now flickered in Washington like coals before spark. Kolodny set up a "hot line," a red emergency telephone that sat in his office; lifting the receiver immediately rang warnings in some thirty downtown stores. He had also taken to wearing an electronic paging device on his belt, just in case.

At 8 p.m. on April 4, as Kolodny was carrying his new-born daughter in the elevator of his apartment house, his Pageboy went off. Kolodny got to his phone. It was the executive director of Peoples Drug Stores, urgent: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been shot, and





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The Washington Post Magazine/April 9, 1978

Stokely Carmichael had just smashed a display case at the Peoples at 14th and U streets NW.

"I think we're going to have a problem," Kolodny acknowledged.

Shoe sales had been brisk that April 4. It was Thursday before Palm Sunday, always a popular time to buy shoes, and at dusk Frank Rich drove away from his busy downtown shoe store to visit the Wisconsin avenue branch in Friendship Heights.

Rich was in a good mood, and he never bothered turning on the car radio. His Friendship Heights manager was waiting for him when he arrived.

"Did you hear what happened?" the manager asked.

Rich shook his head, bewildered, and the manager told him of the shooting. Rich stood in the doorway of his shoe store, feeling fear turn over slowly in his gut. "This town is going to blow apart," he said.

Downtown Washington had changed in the wrenching era of Dr. King, and Rich liked to think that his F street store had yielded gracefully to the change. Black customers came in all the time now, not the white bigots' image of shoe-shopping gamblers with money rolls the size of ham hocks, but young professionals, working people, teen-agers.

They astonished him, too, those teen-agers had. Rich had brought down some Ballys from his Georgetown store, elegant understated leather imports that were not moving well among the matrons he thought they would suit, and the young black shoppers on F street just about went crazy over those shoes. They were \$28 a throw for the women's and \$40 for the men's, expensive by anybody's standards.

Rich was damned if he could figure it out, but who could predict teen-agers and their passions anyway? "We had a bonanza," he remembers, describing those shoes. "I mean, it got huge."

So Rich had black customers, plenty of them, and he thought about that as he listened to the first riot reports Thursday night and the following morning. The store was open Friday, and jammed; Rich kept the radio on, alert for rumors.

At lunchtime he decided to clear the downstairs cash register money and get it over to the bank. Rich sent the stock boy out the back door and into the alley with the money; in a minute the young man was back, breathing hard. There were rioters in the alley, two dozen of them, and they were moving toward F street, breaking windows as they came.

Rich called the police and cleared out his store. He was beginning to hear sirens. He locked the front door and retreated to his car, and as he inched away from F street, through the frantic traffic jam of shoppers escaping the riot, Rich remembered the Board of Trade's warning about stocking up on plywood. He never had gotten around to it.

The looters came that night. Early Saturday morning Rich drove back down to F street and walked into his store, stepping over the broken window glass.

"Those S.O.B.s," he says softly, remembering, "had cleared the Ballys out."

The sandals were still there; the sneakers were still there. The Ballys were gone. "They knew exactly where the men's Ballys were," says Rich. "They knew exactly where the women's Ballys were." Shoes worth \$50,000 were gone.

Rosetta Isley had the family car Thursday night, and she refused to come home. She knew her husband would take it if she did, would drive up 14th street to his clothing store and stand there with the rioters breaking glass around him. She was right: out in Southeast, Rufus "Tea" Isley was pacing the floor of their apartment and listening to the radio as he paced.

At 1 in the morning Isley couldn't stand it any longer. He went downstairs and got his neighbor, and together the two of them drove up into Northwest.

"It was like a war zone," Isley says. "Like you see in the movies." They left the car on Columbia road, identified themselves to the police, and crossed over to the men's shop Isley had taken over three months earlier and renamed Mr. Man.

"It was a shambles," Isley says. Windows were shattered, display cases smashed, pants and dress shirts strewn

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over the floor. Half the merchandise was gone.

Isley heard a noise behind him. He spun around and then, finally, began to curse. A hand was reaching in the broken window, grasping for some incidental piece of clothing that had been left behind.

By Saturday Mr. Man was empty. "The store was clean," Isley says. "It was picked clean. There was nothing left." And now, for the first time since the riots began, Isley was angry. Burning he could understand. Breaking windows he could understand. But this was thievery, pure and simple. They had stolen everything he had.

Charles Schwartz closed his store early the day after Dr. King was shot. Schwartz had always been a fire buff, and all that day the police radio he kept in his office had cracked with reports of sporadic violence in the city. No one seemed to be heading toward F street yet, but he was uneasy, and so Schwartz and his store manager moved quickly through the empty jewelry shop, battening down.

There wasn't much they could do beyond the usual security, Schwartz remembers; it was standard nightly procedure to remove expensive pieces from the display cases and lock them in the vault. This they did, of course, and then as a last precaution the two men lifted from the shelves five large and expensive imported ceramic birds. They set the birds on the floor, near the walls, hoping the curved wooden cases would protect the ceramic from flying bricks.

Schwartz drove toward home. He lived near Potomac then, and as he cruised slowly toward 14th street NW, police radio still sputtering in his car, the fires had begun to spread.

Sometime later that evening the Schwartz's burglar alarm went off, signaling a break-in at the F street store. Schwartz raced back downtown, stopping to pick up his manager on the way.

The store was dark when they arrived, the front window and door glass smashed, and as the two men stepped carefully through the wreckage they saw that looters had grabbed the small collection

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of inexpensive jewelry kept in the drawers of the display cases.

But the birds, the delicate ceramic sculptures that sold for \$1,000 to \$2,000, were untouched. "These kids had stepped over this porcelain," Schwartz recalls, still sounding bewildered. "They must have walked in and stepped over it."

Schwartz got his pistol out. It was an old World War II souvenir, kept in the store mostly out of sentiment, and he was not even sure it worked. But he wanted it with him anyway. He picked up one of the heavy, long rods used for measuring ring sizes, and then with the ring stick in one hand and the pistol in the other, Schwartz sat in his broken front window and squinted out into the darkness.

It was still, except for the occasional tinkle of shattering glass.

Schwartz stayed in his store until very late, maybe 3 in the morning, trying to patch the front window with plywood. He never learned just how the rioters broke it, but a certain memory stays with him now, something unlikely enough that he is not sure whether it really happened. "This may be just my imagination," he says. "But I think we found shoes in the window."

A smoldering quiet filled Washington now, and from one end of the 14th street riot corridor to the other, stunned merchants began to take stock.

Mr. Man, the store Tea Laley had paid for with the much-heralded Small Business Administration loan was gutted. Rebuilding, restocking, would take months.

Laley took a job at a furniture store in Southeast, "waiting," as he remembers, "for attitudes in the area to cool down." It was an angry, uneasy time in Washington. Even as civil rights leaders spoke of reconstruction, merchants were reporting extortion attempts and flamboyantly casual thefts.

For six months Mr. Man sat boarded and empty, surrounded by rubble. In September Laley quit the furniture store job, took his insurance settlement out of escrow, and went back to 14th street to try again.

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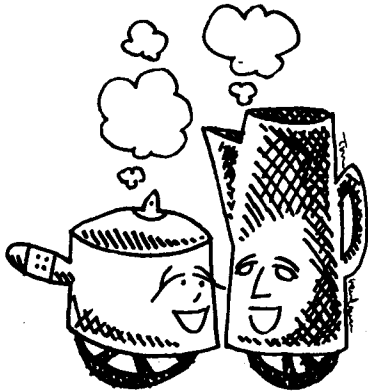
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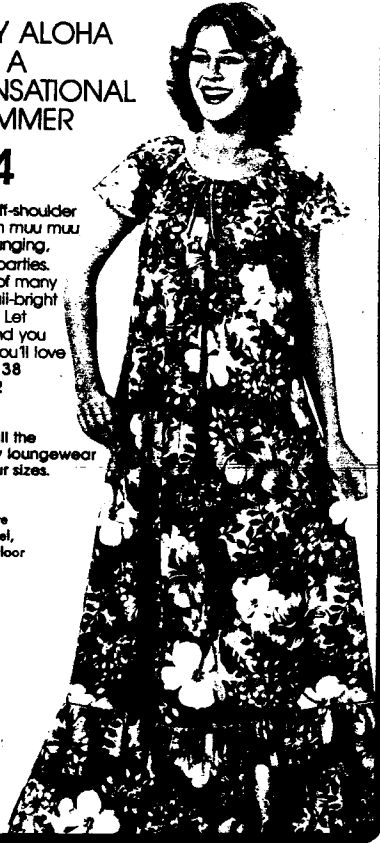
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clothes: "We just threw everything away and started new," he says. No more of the Ivy League line his predecessor had carried, either; this time he went Superfly and bought jumpsuits, fine colors, wide-brimmed hats.

For a while it seemed as though the customers were back; "1969 was a very good year," recalls Isley. Fourteenth street was feeding on promises: the mayor, the government, the experts all predicted rebirth.

By 1970 the mood had soured. "People started moving out of the neighborhood," Isley says. Charred debris still lay where growth had been promised. Whites had pretty much disappeared from 14th street NW, as they had from much of inner-city Washington.

What had sucked the life from 14th street, though, was far more than white flight. A retail shop, any merchant will tell you, needs other stores nearby—small magnets, whose combined force draws the casual browser from place to place. On 14th street most of those magnets were gone now.

The shoe store near Mr. Man had closed and moved on; the wig shop on the other side had shut down. Work was scarce, money was tight, and Isley was trapped in the same vicious circle that drove other riot survivors off 14th street—each store that closed made it harder for the others to stay open.

Isley gave up. He began looking for a new location, and when he learned that the established F street menswear shop called Bruce Hunt was going out of business, Isley took over the building. He was inside his new shop, experimenting with layout, when a short, dark-haired man knocked out front. Isley opened up and met his new neighbor.

"Hi," the man said. "I'm Frank Rich."

F street was in deep trouble by the time Isley arrived, and Rich knew it about as well as anybody. The tenuous racial balance Rich had believed in, the thing he had thought would hold Washington steady, had vanished—literally overnight, so far as Rich was concerned.

Rich spent the spring of 1968 going to prayer break-



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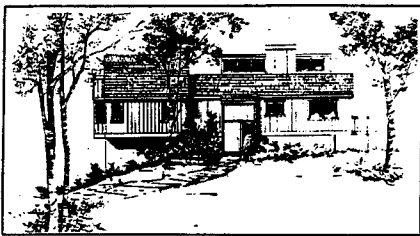
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facts: In those first stunned weeks after the riot, the breakfasts offered a safe zone, one of the few places that seemed to nourish dialogue. Projects grew from the meetings: coalitions, funding for activists' groups, the beginnings of a whole array of civic organizations.

But the rebuilding was a long process, frustrating and hampered by political divisions. It was also not doing much for F street.

Physically, the street was intact. Only Rich's and Bruce Hunt menswear had suffered much damage, and even that was minor compared to the wholesale devastation along the riot corridors. But the people who had shopped F street were shunning the city, and the iron window bars clanged shut now at dusk.

Employees at Rich's carried pocket electronic devices, to signal trouble alerts. The store remained open until 9 on Thursday nights, but the last customers would hurry away at 6:30, and after that the store was silent.

"There was no night business. Zero," says Rich. "It dried up immediately." The Board of Trade sponsored

Thursday night F street festivities, paying street bands and entertainers to attract people back for the traditional shopping evening, but that died too; it was expensive, and merchants complained that the revelers weren't spending much money.

Then in December 1969, with a shattering roar of construction and air hammers, Metro broke ground at 13th and G streets.

"It was just like another nail in the coffin," says Rich, shaking his head. "Unbelievable." Sidewalks were dredged into gaping pits; doorways disappeared behind plywood fences. Shoppers slipped on the wood planking in the rain. The drills shrieked and the air was dusty and even on F street, a block away, downtown stores felt the impact and shuddered.

"We never had a chance to get back on our feet," Rich says. If April 1968 had killed the suburban trade, he thought, this was the blow to make sure it stayed dead.

Rich's F street stock changed, shifting with the clientele. Footsavers, the conservative medium-heeled

women's shoes that had once sold prolifically at the F street store, disappeared downtown and reappeared at Rich's Chevy Chase. The downtown children's shoe business withered, too. "It just kept dropping and dropping and dropping," says Rich. "The whole thing changed pretty quickly."

Isley saw that as well as Rich did. For the first few months of his new F street business, he tried to hold onto some of Bruce Hunt's more conservative, mostly white trade. He bought subdued ties, Van Heusen shirts. He bought doubleknit suits in muted colors and hung them next to the flashier clothes his black 14th street customers preferred.

They didn't mix. "The Bruce Hunt customers," Isley says, "had gone to the malls." A white presence still lingered at Garfinkel's and a few other stores, but Tea Isley's F street, four years after the 1968 riot, was really a black downtown.

The mannequins in many of the display windows became black. Soul music thumped from the loud-

speakers on the sidewalk in front of the discount houses. One by one, white sales clerks were replaced by black clerks. And in 1975, in a move that was perhaps more symbolic than substantive, the predominantly black D.C. Chamber of Commerce shifted its headquarters to F street from 14th and N streets NW.

Despite the change to black clientele and other outward appearances of blackness on the F Street Plaza, however, the fifty retail stores remained essentially white-owned. Today, three of the stores are black-owned: Isley's Mr. Man, the His 'n' Her Leather Shop just across the street and a Hallmark Cards 'n' Things at 1323 F.

Charles Schwartz felt the changes after 1968, too. Each uneasy year of that wrenching time had somehow stretched the distance between his Montgomery County home and his F street store. By 1969, the commute had become a passage between two hostile worlds.

"A lot of my friends said, 'Well, I'm never going to downtown Washington again,'" Schwartz recalls.

Or, "I wouldn't let my daughter go down there."

The old customers came in sometimes, the women with family heirlooms and the men whose watches bore Schwartz's engraving cut eighty years earlier. But they came quickly, almost furtively, Schwartz remembers, and they spoke to the jewelers about their fear.

And there were not enough new customers to keep a jewelry store alive.

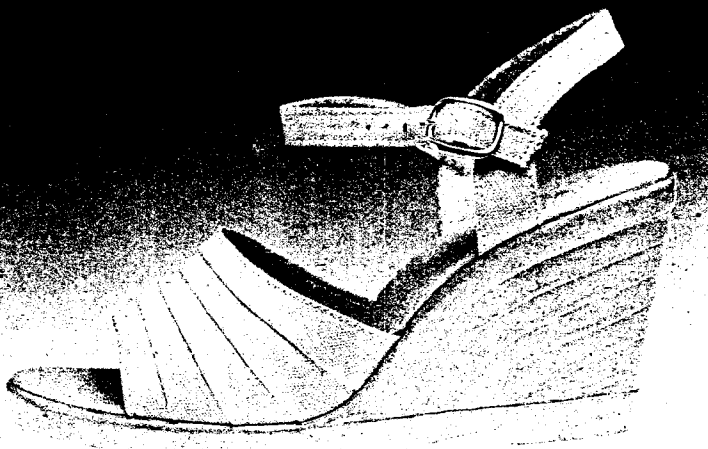
"Our sales tool is impulse," Schwartz explains. "We don't carry anything anybody needs." More urgently than Rich's or Mr. Man, Schwartz needed street shoppers—and not the shoppers who had been forced off 14th street, either. They had to be customers with money. They had to want all-jewel watches, Tiffany silver, imported objets d'art.

Schwartz knew what would have to happen. He was upstairs in his office one afternoon in 1976 when his real estate agent called: a new shopping center was going up in Friendship Heights, a quietly elegant arcade called Mazza Gallerie. The center would feature

# The sandal: pretty and pleated

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Martco's canvas wedge in all of the brights and basics you could want! Red, yellow, green, natural, navy or black. Stepping up on a sculpted polyurethane wedge, color-matched of course! Sensational with skirts or pants. Sizes: S, 5-5½; M, 6-6½; ML, 7-7½; L, 8-8½; XL, 9-10. Hosiery, all stores except Annapolis and Manassas



The Washington Post Magazine/April 9, 1978

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Neiman-Marcus, the famous Dallas department store, and there was an opening for a fine quality jewelry shop.

"Right away I knew that was it," says Schwartz. "I really jumped at it."

Schwartz was away on vacation the evening of April 8, 1976. Rich was home, though, nursing a headache and unable to sleep. He turned on the 11 o'clock news, and then sat straight up, alarmed. The television was reporting a fire at 1322 F St.

"Jesus," Rich said. "That's directly across the street."

But it wasn't. The news had gotten the address wrong. The fire was at 1325 F St., at Isley's brand-new Mr. Man. It had started in the basement, and by now it was burning out of control, in part because the firemen could not break down the back door iron gate Isley's predecessor had built before the 1968 riot.

The place was gutted and the stock destroyed. The cause of the fire is still officially undetermined. Isley closed down for eighteen months, finally re-opening last October.

The merchants of F Street Plaza tie their revival to the highly touted white return to the city. They don't put it quite that way, but clearly all the architects' plans, the ambitious redevelopment schemes, the guardedly optimistic press releases are based on a diversion of suburban shopping dollars to downtown.

The early signs are already on F street. "We're getting a more balanced group of shoppers these days," is the way Frank Rich puts it. "We're hoping to broaden the base of shoppers in revitalizing downtown," says D.C. Chamber of Commerce executive vice president James Denson.

What has caused these new stirrings? "Three things," says Rich. "The subway, the new FBI building and the Labor Department building down at 3rd and Constitution."

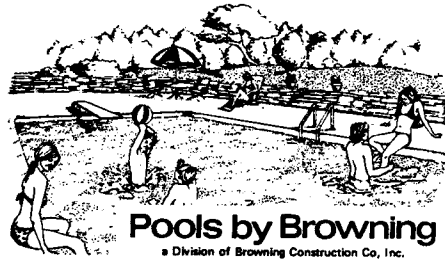
The subway glides up toward F street from Union Station and Judiciary Square, giving easy lunch-break access to stores there for the thousands of employees who work from police headquarters to Capitol Hill. Establishment of the new

Labor Department building and the FBI building at 10th street and Pennsylvania avenue has relocated still more thousands of employees within closer striking distance of F street.

In a recent speech to the Georgetown Kiwanis Club, Rich glowed with confidence, ticking off all the real estate developers who have shown a new interest in downtown.

"This tells me something," Rich said, "and it should tell all of us that the old downtown core is but a few years away from remodeling, revitalization."

Rich quoted nationally known developer and new town builder James W. Rouse: "It is very clear to me that there is new life at the center of America's old cities; that this has come upon us very fast but that there are now powerful new forces operating in the heart of the city. This new life is bursting forth in cities big and small, old and not so old. There are good reasons for it. The cumulative impact of thirty years of hard work—mostly in bits and pieces, but each piece adding on to the other—has begun to flower in many cities."



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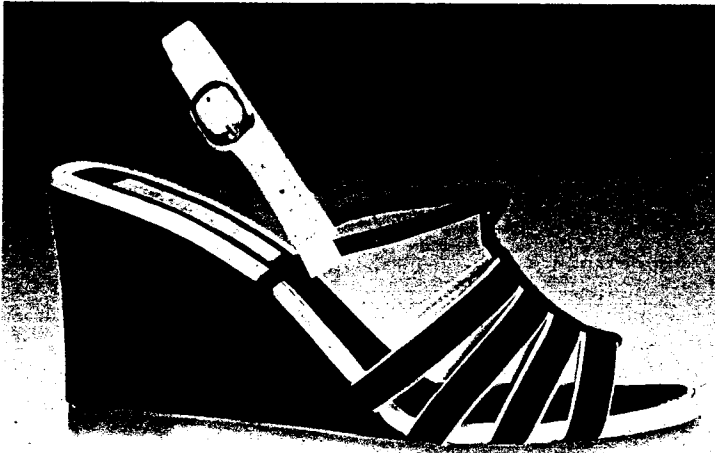
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Riot, from page 34  
 from looting and burning. There was more destruction (including 1,000 fires) in Washington than in the other riots across the country following Martin Luther King's assassination. But there also were many more arrests—7,600—than in any urban riot during the 1960s.

Those arrested, the overwhelming majority of whom were teen-agers and young adults, ranged from systematic

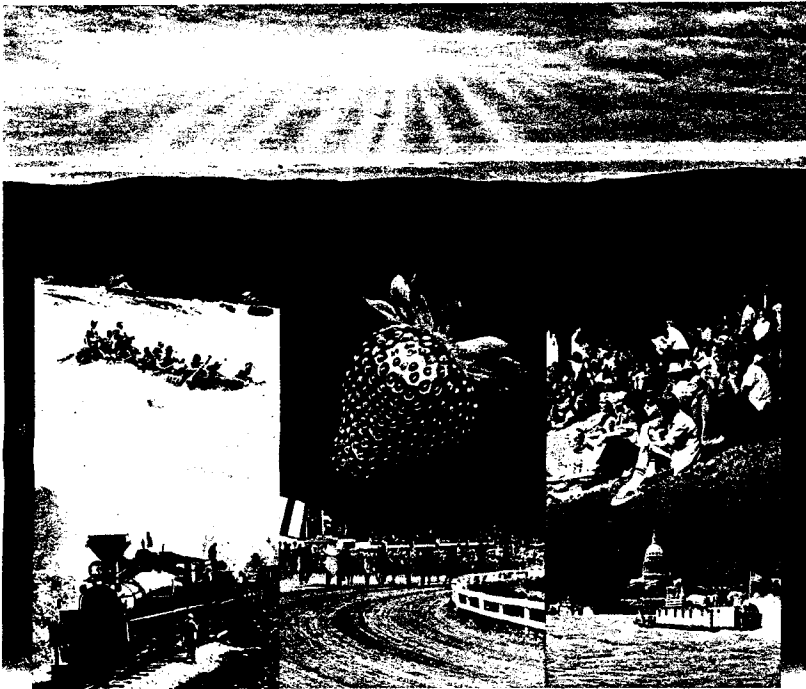
looters, who immediately began selling their booty, to those who said they did it for fun, adventure and because "everyone else was doing it." The anger that immediately followed the news of King's death had quickly given way to a carnival-like euphoria. Relatively few rioters attacked people. The youngsters torching buildings were taking impersonal revenge for the frustrations of ghetto life.

By Saturday, the looting and burning had been reduced to hit-and-run-forays, as troops and police spread themselves more evenly through the city, continuing to make arrests by the hundreds. Soldiers and D.C. National Guard MPs patrolling in jeeps became as common as police in cruisers. People cautiously became acquainted with soldiers who patrolled their block, waited in troop trucks on their street

and slept in local churches and laundromats. By Saturday night, more than half the arrests being made were for curfew violations. By Sunday—Palm Sunday—the city went to church in Holy Week finery while tourists drove and walked through riot areas in the bright sunshine, taking snapshots.

During the next week, Washington became calmer each day. Schools and undamaged stores reopened, the Washington Senators went ahead with their opening day game on Wednesday before an audience of 32,000, and nighttime curfew hours were gradually reduced. Ordinary crime disappeared during the occupation; not a single robbery was reported in the city on Tuesday. The curfew was lifted on Good Friday and troops began packing up and leaving Washington the next day.

Left behind were hundreds of burned-out buildings, whole blocks that looked as though they had been bombed into oblivion, vital centers of commerce for black Washington that had been reduced to rubble, small businesses and lifetimes of investment by their owners that had been obliterated. Years were to pass before rebuilding would substantially begin, before fears growing out of the riots would subside, before new living patterns would emerge for both black and white citizens of Washington. The city is changing rapidly now and not all of the new patterns are clear. But one thing is certain: The roots of these changes lie in the days ten years ago when Washington was burning. ■



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### Last Week's Answers

#### QUOTE-ACROSTIC

Richard (L.) Evans: Youth-age—  
 Youth is sure the rules have changed. Age is sure they haven't. Youth feels it knows how far it can go. Age is aware of the danger. Youth feels it can apply the brakes in time. Age knows it isn't always so.

#### Word List

A Roxy H Elsewhere O Unsinkable  
 B Identity I Vermont P Teetotaler  
 C Chinatown J Afghanistan Q Hasty  
 D Hitchhike K Net weight R Aster  
 E Argus L Shoo-Fly pie S Guffaw  
 F Reswakes M Yugoslavia T Ecstasy  
 G DeGas N Open House

#### CRYPTOGRAM

Silly boy buys useless lollipop.

#### CHESS

1 B-N1

Walter Jacobs

