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1968: U.S. Cities Burn - I

Lead: Introduction: *A Moment in Time, 1968*: A special series on the 40th anniversary of a year of upheaval, in a world seemingly out of control.

Content: As a part of the social and political turmoil of the era that seemed to come to a climax in 1968, urban rioting, particular racial rioting, reached fever pitch in the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in April. For many blacks the hard reality of American racial polarization was breaking through the euphoria. Despite the legal triumphs of federal

and state civil rights legislation, it was dawning on African Americans that real racial progress would take years, perhaps even generations.

The controversial Kerner Commission on Civil Disorders issued its report in March 1968 and fixed the roots of racial unrest clearly on white discrimination. Black frustration had created an urban caldron in which too often racial bias seemed to justify lawlessness, looting and rioting. After King's assassination catastrophic violence griped over sixty U.S. cities including Baltimore, Buffalo, Boston, Detroit and Chicago. In Cincinnati a domestic dispute was transformed into an excuse for wholesale riot. A black man shot his wife. By the time

the story reached the streets it had become an assault by a white police officer on a black woman. Several days of rioting ensued after which two were dead, hundreds were under arrest and the city had endured over \$3,000,000 in property damage, but Cincinnati was not the hardest hit. Next time: a capitol under siege.

Research assistance by Timothy Litzenburg, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Gilbert, Ben. *Ten Blocks from the White House*. New York: Frederick A Praeger, 1968.

Gilje, Paul A. *Rioting in America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Kurlansky, Mark. *1968: The Year that Rocked the World*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2004.

<http://www.nbc4.com/1968riots/index.html>

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