# Five years later

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*In this story and others on the three succeeding pages, three Courier-Journal reporters examine the aftermath of the 1968 Louisville civil disorders. Writing from the vantage point of five years after the incidents and on the basis of dozens of interviews held over the past few weeks, the reporters analyze and comment on the impact of the disturbances on the black community and assess the mood of its people.*

By JOHN FILIATREAU
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It was a Monday—May 27, 1968—and the gathering was just another protest rally, featuring the same old rhetoric of rebellion, the same mild excitement, the same carnival spirit, the same modest catharsis.

About 350 black persons, most of them young, gathered at 28th and Greenwood to demand the dismissal of Louisville Patrolman Michael Clifford, who had arrested two prominent black businessmen a few weeks earlier.

A police investigation had concluded that the officer used excessive force in making the arrests, and Clifford had been suspended, but the Civil Service Board had recommended his reinstatement, and Louisville's militants were hopping mad. They had already warned then-mayor Kenneth A. Schmied that they wouldn't bear responsibility for "what might happen at the rally tonight," Schmied took that as a threat.

The rally's organizers had promised that Stokely Carmichael, the black power advocate, would be there. They had started the false rumor to insure a good crowd.

Carmichael didn't show; so the same leaders who had started the rumor now told the crowd that the "power structure" in Louisville had refused to let Stokely's plane land.

The people standing on the roof of Moon Cleaners, exchanging black power salutes in front of the House of Champs pool room, lounging in front of the Little Palace restaurant, began getting restless. Same old jive. Stokely ain't coming. Nothing's gonna happen. The rally was breaking up.

Then, suddenly and inexplicably, the "party" started. A bus barged through the intersection, nearly steamrolling half the crowd. Somebody tossed a rock at the lumbering bus, starting a fusillade. More rocks. Bricks. Lightbulbs, making pleasant popping sounds as they hit the pavement. "Let's cool that stuff, somebody's gonna get hurt," someone shouted.

But in a matter of seconds, all hell broke loose. Gunshots were heard. Police cars came screeching in from all directions, lights flashing. Police Capt. John Hampton was hit by a thrown object, the first blood was drawn. Panic ensued, and people were running helter-skelter through the streets, along railroad tracks. Glass broke. Police cars and taxicabs were overturned and set afire.

"Oh baby, it's finally here," kids shouted gleefully. "It's really happening."

Louisville's 1968 disorders don't rank among the full-blown riots that wracked other American cities during 1967 and 1968.

Two black youths were killed — one by a policeman, the other by a grocer. But not a single policeman, fireman or National Guardsman was hit by sniper fire, though city police said they were fired on at least twice. No sniping arrests were made.

Property damage in Louisville was assessed at more than $500,000, but this doesn't compare with the destruction suffered by such cities as Detroit, Los Angeles and Cleveland, where similar disorders caused millions of dollars' worth of damage.

Yet the memory of Louisville's "minor riot" hasn't faded. To many young blacks, those five anxious days seem a glorious chapter in Louisville's history.

Other blacks remember the disorders as a series of shameful episodes, when blood was needlessly shed, property was needlessly destroyed, and fear reigned in black neighborhoods. They remember that two young blacks were killed.

For many white Louisvillians, memories of the 1968 disorders provoke bitter, angry reactions. They describe the violence as "senseless," "unwarranted" and "plain stupid."

It has now been more than five years since that relatively calm rally turned monster.

What has been done since the 1968 disorders to improve race relations in Louisville? Have there been any changes in attitude on the part of whites, blacks, police, politicians, businessmen? Do black Louisvillians feel that discrimination is as widespread in 1973 as it was in 1968?

Have police relations with the black community improved? What are the hopeful signs? Are there any portents of further racial trouble? Have Louisville officials made plans for handling future trouble, or for de-fusing situations that could bring new disorders on?

And, above all — is it likely to happen again?

There is no clear answer to the last question. Many blacks, especially the young, say with certainty that Louisville will have racial disturbances in the future. Others say such explosions aren't likely, at least not in the immediate future.

People's opinions tend to be dependent on their desires. That is, those who would like to see Louisville burn usually think it will burn; those who want peace look into their crystal balls and see tranquility.

But it is fairly evident that many residents of the western part of Louisville are stockpiling weapons. The vast majority of blacks questioned at random claimed to have small arsenals in their homes. Some see this as a threat of racial trouble; others see it as a natural development for persons living in an area that has a serious crime problem.

While so many young blacks charge that "nothing has been done" since the disorders of five years ago, others are very much aware that city, county and state governments have tried in many different ways to ameliorate the conditions under which poor blacks live.

A program was established in Louisville to train police officers in minority affairs. The program, planned and developed by the city-county Human Relations Commission, proved unsuccessful; more than 70 per cent of the policemen taking part in it reported "negative reactions." But at least the effort was made, and some policemen said the experience had been helpful.

City and county police departments have made efforts to recruit blacks in greater numbers. And Maj. Elmer Johnson, a black man, has been named community relations officer — primarily to improve relations between the city police department and the city's black community.

In the years since the disorders, it has become clear to white businessmen and industrialists that the hiring of blacks is a necessity, whether they like the idea or not. Hardly any sizable business in Louisville can any longer afford to exercise discriminatory hiring practices, because of pressure from governmental agencies like the Human Relations Commission, and from activist organizations such as the Black Workers Coalition.

Hard-boiled racism has all but disappeared from the speeches of local politicians, who are aware that they can't get away with it anymore. Blacks are winning more and more governmental positions, and more and more blacks are running for political office. Though charges of tokenism are often heard, it is clear that government is a more promising field for blacks than it was five years ago. A recent survey conducted by the Human Relations Commission found that the number of blacks in government has increased by approximately five per cent since 1967. In supervisory positions, the increase has been almost 10 per cent.

Several programs have been established to help black businessmen achieve independence.

Shortly after the 1968 disorders made it difficult for merchants in the trouble area to get insurance at standard rates, the state set up the Kentucky Fair Plan, designed to make fire insurance available at standard rates in such high-risk areas.

The state also adopted a "crime insurance" program but dropped it last year after merchants showed little interest.

The city hopes eventually to win federal funds to set up small factory and banking facilities.

The Metropolitan Foundation of Louisville Inc. has been established to help minority businessmen work up financial proposals to submit to banks and other funding institutions. Equal Opportunity Finance Inc. has been set up to raise money and make loans to minority businessmen. The Business Resource Center, recently established by the Louisville Area Chamber of Commerce, offers the help of volunteer businessmen to struggling minority enterprises.

Most blacks acknowledge that progress has been made in these areas. But many say little progress is being made in areas that touch people more immediately—housing, health care, poverty, hunger, unemployment, etc.

And they note that the Nixon administration has chosen to dismantle many of the social programs established during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

Most of the improvements that have been made since the 1968 disorders have been institutional. It's hard to say whether there has been improvement on the personal level—whether blacks are any happier, any more secure, any more relaxed in Louisville's white-dominated society.

At the fateful rally at 28th and Greenwood five years ago, the evening's final speaker told his audience: "We going to tell the mayor that the next time this happens, he's going to see smoke signals coming up from the west."

Moments later, the smoke signals were indeed billowing over the western section of Louisville. Their message was repeated sporadically over the next few days. Louisville officials got the message.

Shortly after the disorders ended, Mayor Schmied, who died last April, acknowledged that Louisville hadn't fully met its obligations to the disadvantaged, and that there are "real problems" that must be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Schmied said many of the problems "go back for years and years and can't be solved overnight." But he added that his office was making a genuine effort, and would "pursue all avenues that show any promise of success."

Martin M. Perley, executive director of the Louisville-Jefferson County Human Relations Commission, warned that disorders could break out again, "if, rather than face up to the problems, we write off all the problems as the work of unruly elements and not realize ... that the problems of the black community are real."

The officials' post-riot statements were hopeful, optimistic, promising. Their implication was that Louisvillians could look forward to seeing significant changes in the city's treatment of its black citizens.

But five years of relatively clear skies have caused the smoke signals to fade.

Maj. Johnson, the black man who was recently named community liaison officer for the Louisville Police Department, was asked the other day to try to explain why the disorders broke out in 1968.

"In my opinion, it was some outside people — non-residents of Louisville," Johnson said. "It was happening all over the country, in other cities. ... Outside radicals going from city to city, stirring up trouble. ... The rioters were mostly the same people that were doing the robberies, rapes and purse-snatchings. ..."

Johnson said his main duty is to keep disorders from occurring in Louisville, presumably by keeping his eye peeled for outside agitators. He said he spends a lot of time "on the streets, communing with the people," and believes citizen unrest has diminished in recent years.

Louisville's initial reaction to the city's 1968 disorders was a massive show of strength involving city, county and state policemen and units of the National Guard.

On the third night of the disorders, the Guardsmen were pulled out of a 25-block area (trouble area, and forty black marshals patrolled in place of the soldiers. Initially, the plan seemed to be working well; early in the evening, little trouble was reported. However, two black youths were killed in the evening. Things were threatening to get worse again.

Mrs. James Groves Sr., mother of the 14-year-old boy killed by a policeman, made an emotional appeal for an end to violence that seemed to be somewhat effective. (Now, however, Mrs. Groves says she regrets having made the TV appeal, "to the very bottom of my heart. I was taken advantage of in my misery.")

From then on, violence and vandalism declined. On Saturday, 850 Guardsmen were withdrawn from the city. The violence was essentially over, but a new kind of battling was just beginning.

Three black militants — James Cortez of Washington, D. C., and Samuel Hawkins and Robert Kuyu Sims of Louisville — were arrested. All had made speeches at the rally where the trouble broke out. At a special and irregular Police Court hearing, the legality of which was later challenged, it was alleged that the three were involved in a plot to dynamite oil storage facilities in western Louisville.

Months later, three other blacks—Manfred Reid, Walter "Pete" Cosby, and Mrs. Ruth Bryant, all of Louisville — were charged, with them, with involvement in an alleged conspiracy to destroy private property. Thus began the celebrated "Black Six" case, which dragged on for two years, spawned several lawsuits, kept part of the community in a furor for months, and ultimately was thrown out of court.

Reid and Cosby had been involved in the "brutality" incident with Patrolman Clifford; Mrs. Bryant, wealthy wife of a prominent physician, had been involved in several civic groups.

Many blacks and whites involved in the case feel that the prosecution of the "Black Six" accomplished its purpose, to name a few, "scapegoats" for the city's trouble and divert attention from its real causes; to silence the voices of militant black leaders; to damage the reputations and pocketbooks of several prominent Louisvillians who had been "troublesome."

Some blacks say the "Black Six" prose-

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## Five years ago: A day-by-day account of the disorders

Here is a brief, day-by-day account of what took place during Louisville's civil disorders five years ago.

**Monday, May 27.** As 350 persons were leaving a rally at 28th and Greenwood, rock- and bottle-throwing erupted and police converged on the area. Within minutes, rioting and burning began.

Within an hour, Mayor Kenneth A Schmied ordered all off-duty police called in, requested county police help, asked Gov. Louie B. Nunn to activate six Louisville National Guard units and sent 200 state police into the city.

An hour and a half after the outbreak of the trouble, a command post was set up at the Brandeis Elementary School, 26th and Date, for police and Guard units. Schmied declared an 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew. Twelve persons were injured — five were admitted to Louisville General Hospital.

**Tuesday, May 28.** At 2 p.m., looting and burning began again in the area of 28th and Greenwood.

Police Chief Lee N. E. Hyde said the looting and disturbances were between 26th, 34th, Dumesnil and Broadway. But scattered incidents were reported as far west as Cecil Avenue and in the near-downtown area bounded by Broadway, Polk, Shelby and Brook. Twenty-were injured, including four shooting victims, and 182 were arrested.

At 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew was imposed. The total National Guard force was raised to 1,900.

**Wednesday, May 29.** Mayor Schmied, after meeting with Negro militants, agreed to have National Guardsmen withdrawn from the western part of the city and said he would not impose a third night of curfew.

A group of 40 Negro marshals began patrolling the 25-block trouble area. Little trouble was reported early in the night.

About 11:45 p.m. two Negro youths, Matthias Washington Browder, 19, and Jamag Groves Jr., 14, were shot and killed in separate incidents. Groves was shot by a city policeman; a store owner was charged with manslaughter in the death of Browder.

**Thursday, May 30.** Mrs. James Groves Sr., mother of the slain 14-year-old, appealed for an end to the violence. Vandalism and looting declined as police increased patrols in the riot area.

National Guardsmen moved into the troubled area at 28th and Greenwood several times to protect firemen, but spent most of the night at the command post.

Sixty-three arrests were reported. Mayor Schmied blamed the disorders on a "very young and very active group" of agitators.

**Friday, May 31.** National Guard troops remained in the city despite a night of relative calm. There were only a few incidents of looting and fire-bombing.

**Saturday, June 1.** About 850 Guardsmen, almost half the number called up, were withdrawn.

Three black militants — James Cortez of Washington, D.C., and Samuel Hawkins and Robert Kuyu Sims of Louisville — were arrested. A special Police Court hearing was told the three were involved in a plot to dynamite oil storage facilities in the city. Bond was set at $50,000 each. Cortez was also held on a $25,000 bond on a charge of being a "common nuisance."

**Sunday, June 2.** All remaining National Guardsmen were pulled out before midmorning. Police Chief Hyde said officers were conducting a house-to-house canvass in the neighborhood around 32nd and Garland seeking witnesses to the shooting of James Groves Jr.

**Monday, June 3.** Speaking at funeral services for Groves, the Rev. W. J. Hodge, president of the local chapter of the N.A.A.C.P., said the boy was a victim of injustice and prejudice.

**Tuesday, June 4.** Police reported their operations were almost back to normal although extra cruisers were patrolling