Watts Riots of 1965

 Segregation in the United States between white people and African Americans was prominent in the 1960’s. Tensions between the two were high, and peace between them was fragile (1). A quote to give you an example of the tension: “Hating people because of their color is wrong. And it doesn't matter which color does the hating. It's just plain wrong (2)”

 On August 11, 1965, the fragility of the peace was tested in the Watts region of Los Angeles, USA (3). Watts was a part of Los Angeles where a majority of the population was African American (4).

The conflict started between a young African American man, Marquette Frye, and a local white police officer. The officer pulled over Frye while he was in his car based on suspicion that Frye was driving while intoxicated (5). The officer then told Frye that he was going to arrest him for drunk driving and that his car will get towed. Frye and the officer began to argue, and shoving was involved. The crowd was beginning to grow as well. The crowd had grown from 75 people to about 300 on this hot night (6).



 Frye (left) and his brother, Ronald (7).

The riots went on for six days. Once it was all finally over, 34 people had died, over 1 000 injuries were reported, and 4 000 arrests were made. The real blow of the event though, was that there was more than $40 million in damage to the Watts region in south LA (8).



A map of Los Angeles and the Watts region

 The riot quickly had escalated for a number of reasons. As Frye was being arrested, his mother arrived at the scene and was yelling at the officer. People heard his mother’s screams, and many began spreading the rumor that the officer was beating up an elderly woman (9).

 The Riot lasted for six days. During these days, stores were being robbed and brawls were breaking out everywhere between the people of Watts and the poloce. Cars and buildings were also being lit on fire, and the firefighters couldn’t even go and stop the fires because the police were so busy that they couldn’t protect the firefighters from the rioters (10).

 *“Don’t worry; we’re going to burn this mother down.”* (11). A quote that Frye heard from one of his friends as he was being arrested.



A day fire in Watts, LA (12)

The arrest of Frye wasn’t the entire reason the Watts riot happened, it was actually the breaking point in tensions between the African-American people and the white people in LA. There was a large racial division between the white authority and the African American locals (13).

*“A child born to a Black mother in a state like Mississippi… has exactly the same rights as a white baby born to the wealthiest person in the United States. It’s not true, but I challenge anyone to say it is not a goal worth working for.”* (14).A quote about racism in the United States by Marshall Thurgood (1908-1993), who was an African American lawyer during this time (15).

After the riots were over, it was discovered that most of the 34 people declared dead were African American (16). After the riots, many looked into why the riots happened and realized that the riots weren’t committed by criminals, but by average citizens. They were rebelling about the incredibly high unemployment rates and poor schooling in the Watts area (17).

The importance of the Watts riots was that it was a large step for the African American people in the civil rights movement. Many of the citizens were speaking out about their rights and the way that they were mistreated. The white people were now scared of what would happen if they continued the way they were going after seeing the riots (18).

The legacy of the Watts riots lives on today because racism against people of African descent is still very real (19).

*"To live anywhere in the world today and be against equality because of race or color is like living in Alaska and being against snow."* (20)

A quote that says how racism is becoming a redundant problem. Quote from William Faulkner, an American writer (21).

End Notes

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