

I cried for my neighbors

Since it's Wednesday, I'm sure you, dear readers, are well aware of why Baltimore City is in a State of Emergency. What you may not know, is that much of that violence was in my own neighborhood; on my own block.

Let me take you back to Monday afternoon.

A friend and I went to Mondawmin Mall to go to Target. As we came up from the subway station, I noticed an unusually heavy presence of MTA police officers and BPD officers (Baltimore Police Department). Many of the BPD officers I saw were usually stationed at the mall due to the high number of students who use the transit hub. But it didn't really hit us until we went in the mall.

As soon as we stepped into the mall, we saw shop owners rushing to close down their kiosks and stores. Some stores had to wait for approval before closing as the mall had not officially shut down yet. I saw an employee friend and all he could tell me was that something was going to happen, though he did not know what, and everyone was trying to hurry and go home. When we walked out to Target, we could see that was indeed true as carts were used as barricades at the doors.

We were able to get through the mall to get back out and we went our separate ways. I took the bus home and thought maybe they were just overreacting to some perceived threat.

How wrong I was!



After about an hour or so of being home, my aunt and I turned on the news to see what most people saw, kids throwing cement, bricks, bottles and anything else they could find at the police officers. The officers held their line. I wondered if my cousin was up there as he is a school police officer and I prayed he would be safe. I watched as the police did their best to disperse the crowd and clear the Mondawmin area.

Then I saw the looting at the CVS at North and Pennsylvania. I go to that CVS. It's the closest to me. There is a library right across the street and many busses stop at that intersection along with another metro stop. I wondered how long it would be before my mom and brother made it home safely from work and school.

I watched the store go up in flames and the angry mob, so bent on destruction, make their way down North Ave, getting closer to my street, looting and hurting people along the way.

Then I went outside and saw they were only half of a block up from me at the beauty supply store trying to break in. There were so many people and I couldn't believe my eyes. I prayed the shop owners were gone so at least they would be safe, unlike the poor owner from just around the corner who had been dragged out and beaten before they looted his liquor store.

When the mob finally broke in to the store, the crowd cheered and the looting began. Those armed to break in made their way to my side of the street to break in to the Fireside North liquor store. We just call it the bar but it was more than that.

Cheers when they broke in but the shop owner was still there. They beat him and smashed the windows of his car. It was right when they started to beat him that I felt the need to go and help. I needed to get him to a safe place. My family begged me not to go up there because I couldn't help. Anyone who has been in a helping profession knows how hard it is not to step in. I fought for my country. I spent time in the military protecting our rights and the rights of others but I am powerless against an angry mob of criminals and vandals?

I broke down. I had to go inside my neighbor's house and all I could do was cry. This was so wrong and feeling helpless was the worst. I already have PTSD and this was no help. So I call Father David Mott, OP, pastor of my parish, Saints Philip and James. God bless all the priests, especially those at my parish. He was able to help me get my head on straight and calm down to understand why my family was so adamant I do nothing. After a good talk, I pulled myself together and went back outside.

Crowds were still looting but it wasn't the juveniles everyone thought was behind this. No, people who didn't live in my community were driving in to loot and take what they thought they deserved. Some tried to sell it right after they stole it. I heard some younger neighbors (under 30) say the bar owner deserved what happened.

No one deserves that. Never.

Young and old, people came to get what they wanted. Parents brought their children with bags. People with canes and braced arms went in for things. Only a few people managed to call their relatives back from the madness. It went on for what seemed like an eternity. After two hours I could not believe there was anything left to take.

It was shortly after that the bar was set on fire and flames engulfed the building. One of my sisters called 911 to get the fire department. After the crowd cleared, because they started to head back to Mondawmin Mall, it took one ambulance, 5 engines, and one truck to finally put out the fire. For the protection of the fire department, an armored rescue vehicle from the state police stood watch over them. Even CNN was there. Then I heard it was set on fire again.

By 9:15 pm, we were all exhausted. Emotions ran high and I was still in shock and disbelief over what I witnessed with my own eyes. One of my Naval Academy classmates saw one video I posted on Facebook and accurately described it as a war zone - something I thought I would never see.

Sleep only came because I have medicine for that. But I know many who couldn't sleep, likely out of fear of more violence and being caught unprepared and unable to respond.

They destroyed my neighborhood and my community for what? I'm still not sure but I'm certain whatever message they thought they delivered was lost in the violence. It usually is.

So, I wanted you all to read how things went down around where I live. I will post again on what I think should happen now and what I encountered the day after all of this destruction.



Photos from Tuesday can be seen on my Flickr page:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/28692914@N06/sets/72157651841311758/>.

Comment below with your thoughts on what I witnessed and how that compared to what you saw of all of this on Monday.
Thank you for reading!