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**White Discipline, Black Rebellion:  
A History of American Race Riots from Emancipation to the War on Drugs**

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

December, 2020

## DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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On November 2, 2020

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication .....	v
Acknowledgments .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
Abstract .....	viii
Author's Note .....	x
INTRODUCTION: American Race Riots as Rituals of Expurgation .....	1
<b>PART I: WHITE DISCIPLINE</b>	
<b>I. FOREVER FREE, BUT ALWAYS UNEQUAL .....</b>	<b>35</b>
A Racial Cleansing in the City of Liberty .....	37
A Racial Cleansing in a Riverboat Town .....	59
<b>II. DEMOCRATIC MURDER CLUBS .....</b>	<b>82</b>
White Terrorism: Louisiana's Blueprint for Political Control .....	86
'A Perfect Carnival of Released Rascality': The Redemption of Mississippi .....	101
'Those Leading Rascals, We Intend to Put Them Out of the Way' .....	113
<b>III. THE SPECTER OF 'NEGRO DOMINATION' .....</b>	<b>132</b>
'If We Have to Choke the Current of the Cape Fear with Carcasses' .....	137
Disenfranchisement and the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906 .....	162
<b>IV. DISCIPLINARY VIOLENCE IN THE SUNDOWN STATE .....</b>	<b>176</b>
Black Progress and White Resentment in the Land of Lincoln .....	180
The Things They Carried: Two Riots, a Lynching, and an Exodus .....	194
Blood in the Water: Black Resistance and the Chicago Race Riot of 1919 .....	212
<b>V. WITHOUT RECOURSE .....</b>	<b>228</b>
Four Days of Terror in Arkansas: The Elaine Massacre of 1919 .....	231
The Great Burning of Greenwood: The Tulsa Race War of 1921 .....	243
Seven Days of Terror in Florida: The Rosewood Massacre of 1923 .....	265

PART II: BLACK REBELLION	
VI. FROM WHITE DISCIPLINE TO BLACK REBELLION .....	276
Compensatory Rebellion: The Harlem Riot of 1935 .....	283
Reciprocal Riot in Detroit, June 1943 .....	293
Compensatory Rebellion, Part II: Harlem and the New Social Structure of Riots	306
VII. REBELLION AS COMPENSATION .....	321
Two Rebellions, One City: New York Erupts for a Third Time .....	322
Fire, Blood, and Broken Glass: Black Insurrection in Los Angeles .....	344
VIII. A NATION EXPLODES .....	373
Five Days in Newark, July 1967: Black Rebellion and State-Sanctioned Terror	375
‘It Looks Like a City That Has Been Bombed’: Black Rebellion in Detroit .....	401
CONCLUSION: The Forgetting .....	426
REFERENCES .....	452
APPENDIX A. Results of the Presidential Election in Louisiana, 1868 .....	471
APPENDIX B. Mississippi State Treasurer Elections by County, 1873 and 1875 .....	472
APPENDIX C. African-American Residences Destroyed in Springfield Race Riot .....	474

## DEDICATION

My daughter Greta was born on August 18, 2014. In the weeks that followed, I realized that it was now or never. I would stop deferring my dream of earning a Ph.D. I would apply, once again, to graduate school. And so it was that I began anew as a graduate student, this time in sociology at the University of New Hampshire, on August 31, 2015. Greta had just turned one year old. Five years later, on December 14, 2020, I submit the final manuscript of my dissertation. I would like to thank Jaime Karnes, my beautiful wife—partner in parenting, teaching, and writing—for the sacrifices she has made for our family during these trying years. I would like to thank my daughter for being the catalyst: without her arrival, I may never have sacrificed five prime income-earning years to earn a doctorate. Finally, I would like to thank my mom and dad, Stephen and Joanne Burke, for their never-ending love and support. I have reached the end of a very long journey. Many thanks to all who helped me get here.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation was made possible by two generous grants from the University of New Hampshire. I was awarded a stipend of \$5,000 from the College of Liberal Arts to conduct research during the summer of 2019, a line of funding that assisted in covering expenses as I traveled to archives in New York, Michigan, and Illinois. I was also awarded a Dissertation Year Fellowship of \$22,000 from the Graduate School for academic year 2019-2020, a line of funding that made it possible for me to write this book. This dissertation was made possible because of my wife, who assumed a larger financial burden to support our family during my studies; without her support, we would have been unable to raise our child off a yearly university stipend. I love you with all my heart, Jaime Karnes (or ‘Olive Juice,’ as we used to say).

I would also like to thank my mentors for their support during this process. Professor Jeff Bolster offered his astute advice on writing about race riots—and historical writing more generally—during our two-student writing workshop in the fall of 2017. This project really began to germinate during that course. Dr. Cliff Brown, my dissertation committee chair, has been constant in his support throughout the entire writing process. His feedback helped guide the development of my manuscript and his revision notes kept pushing me forward. Dean Dillon, Class of 1944 Professor of Sociology and my professor for sociological theory at UNH, offered encouragement over lunch (her treat). Dr. Lucy Salyer took time from her busy schedule to write me detailed feedback, which will prove insightful during the next stage of the process, my ultimate goal: a published book. Cesar Rebellon and Jason Sokol served on my dissertation committee during a pandemic, and for their work I am grateful. In fact, I am fortunate to have had such wonderful professors while studying in the Sociology Department at the University of New Hampshire. Their teaching and mentorship have impacted me greatly; for their work I am grateful.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. American Race Riots by Year, 1863 – 1972 ..... 22



## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a comparative analysis of American race riots, within and across historical eras, from Emancipation (1863) to the War on Drugs (1972). I argue that changes in the status of African-American citizenship produced different forms of race rioting. Examining riot events across eras reveals how ethical principles at the core of democracy are undermined in specific socio-historical contexts—especially equality of participation in collective self-governance. Congressional testimony, state-sponsored riot investigations, and archival data indicate that riots have been *used* historically to structure racial inequality in both political institutions and economic relations. While race riots have proven instrumental in maintaining white supremacy, Black rebellion has largely proven detrimental for African-American communities. Racial collective violence has enduring consequences, especially for economic inequality.

Part I examines how whites systematically employed *disciplinary riots* to ‘redeem’ state governments for the Democratic Party for more than seven decades following the Civil War, with enduring structural consequences for African-American political participation and economic progress. The first two chapters analyze white riot violence from Reconstruction and Redemption (1863 - 1877). Chapters 3 through 5 examine white-initiated riot violence around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through World War I, a period of intensifying racism known as the Nadir of American race relations. Several riot events of this era border on *racial cleansing*: violence employed to rob, intimidate, and expel Black Americans from the community. Property was often transferred to white ownership when Black refugees did not return, hence white riot violence has implications for the present wealth gap separating blacks from whites in the U.S. Part II examines the rise of black militancy (1930 - 1972) and the corresponding shift in racial collective violence to *Black rebellion*. Chapter 6 examines the shift to Black-initiated collective violence, called *reciprocal riot*, between 1935 and 1943, during World War II. Chapter 7 shows how Black Americans used the rituals of violence to engage in *compensatory rebellion* against white supremacy, first in New York (1964) and then in Los Angeles (1965). Chapter 8 examines the racial explosion that occurred in 1967 and 1968—the peak years of Black rebellion—with an analysis of the two most destructive riot events of those years: Newark and Detroit. *White Discipline, Black Rebellion* concludes with a chapter that connects these findings with the Black Lives Matter movement and America’s racial reckoning that began to unfold in 2020. The urban riots of the 1960s and early 70s had significant consequences for Black communities, including

the militarization of law enforcement. Race riots have been weaponized against African-American advancement at critical points in United States history. This dissertation traces how disciplinary violence proved instrumental in the maintenance of white supremacy, especially in the seven decades following the Civil War; conversely, rebellion impeded Black progress, both politically and economically, with consequences that endure across generations.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Following the murder of George Floyd beneath the knee of Dereck Chauvin, a white Minneapolis police officer, on May 25, 2020, mass racial protests erupted across the United States, and at *The New York Times*, discussion began in earnest on a change in capitalization. “Because of the history of Black people in this country, most of us do not have a specific African nation to link our ancestry back to,” explained Destinée-Charisse Royal, senior staff editor at *The Times* who was consulted on the change. The “capital B makes sense as it describes a race, a cultural group, and that is very different from a color in a box of crayons.” On June 20, 2020, the Associated Press (AP) changed its writing style guide to capitalize the word Black; then on July 5, *The New York Times* began capitalizing the word black “when describing people and cultures of African origin” (Coleman 2020). This was the first decision *The Times* made on race and capitalization since 1930, when it finally capitulated to W.E.B. Du Bois’s plea that the word ‘Negro’ be given respect through capitalization: “The use of a small letter for the name of twelve million Americans and two hundred human beings is a personal insult,” Du Bois wrote in 1926

I capitalize the word Black in this dissertation because I am referencing a distinct group of people whose ancestors were forcibly seized in Africa, transported in bondage to the United States, and sold into slavery as the human property of (mostly) White Southerners. The word ‘White’ has historically been capitalized by hate groups, as the AP and *The Times* (Coleman 2020) noted. A shared “White culture” does not exist in the United States in the same way that a shared Black culture does, particularly for those American citizens who trace their ancestry back to slavery. I therefore do not capitalize white in this text when referring to white people generally, following standards set by both the AP and *The New York Times*, unless I am referring specifically to White Southerners, whom I argue did have a distinct shared culture in the aftermath of the Civil War. This capitalization decision is made based upon culture, and by the time White Southerners were migrating into the urban industrial centers of the North following Reconstruction, they encountered white ethnic groups with distinct cultures of their own, hence white rioters in Chicago may include white people from various European cultures, in addition to those migrants arriving from the South in the U.S. I anticipate some people may disagree with this decision, so I provided my rationale up front for the reader’s consideration.



## **Introduction: American Race Riots as Rituals of Expurgation**

An elderly Black man used to wheel himself around Tulsa, Oklahoma on a small wooden platform before that June in 1921, when he ceased being a mainstay downtown. The man was blind. Both of his legs had been amputated and one of his thighs stretched a bit further than the other. He wore a catcher's mitt on each hand to protect his skin as he scooted along the streets, peddling his pencils and singing for change. The wooden platform was secured to his hip with an old tin cup attached for collecting donations; coins rattled around the cup as he pulled himself to and from his spot on Main Street. But on June 1, 1921, unidentified white men tied a rope to the 'good old colored man,' according to E.W. Maxey, a teenager who was undersheriff of Tulsa County at the time. The whites tied the other end of that rope to a convertible—then floored the gas pedal, hollering with glee as they raced down the street. “These white thugs had roped this colored man on the longer stump of his one leg” explained Maxey, and they “were dragging him behind the car up Main Street. He was hollering. His head was being bashed in, bouncing on the steel rails [of the streetcar] and bricks” (Ellsworth 2001:83). It was on that same day in 1921 that Tulsa's prosperous Black community, known as Greenwood, was burned to the ground. White vigilantes “systematically torched nearly 40 square blocks,” writes Brent Staples. “Gone in the blink of an eye were more than 1,000 homes, a dozen churches, five hotels, 31 restaurants, four drugstores and eight doctors' offices, as well as a public library and a hospital. As many as 9,000 black Tulsans were left homeless” (June 2020).

White Tulsans began invading Greenwood at the break of dawn that June 1, terrorizing hundreds of Black residents. Their attack even included an aerial assault—many Black Tulsans reported witnessing planes circling over Greenwood, some firing bullets at fleeing residents, another dropping incendiary devices. Greenwood was a war zone, and white Tulsans intended to expel the entire Black community from Greenwood. In fact, many white participants intended to expurgate its city of Black residents. In the wake of rioting, the white community remained determined, first to whitewash the event, minimizing its barbarity for public consumption in the press, then to forget it entirely, refusing to acknowledge its existence. In the years to come, white folks in Tulsa remained silent about the “race riot,” as it would become known. Buried and banished, the shameful massacre wasn't mentioned in Oklahoma history textbooks.

Rumors of mass graves were passed down across generations, first among Black families who dared not discuss the event publicly. Personal recollections and “hushed conversations” were the only way the “memory of one of the deadliest race massacres in U.S. history was preserved,” explains Campbell Robertson in *The New York Times*. “Schools did not teach about what happened,” and when it came to the “official history of Tulsa, for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was as if the massacre *had never happened*” (July 17 2020). Tulsa residents became practiced in forgetting. “The forgetting is habit,” writes Ta-Nehisi Coates in *Between the World and Me*, a letter of love and warning to his Black son growing up in America, “yet another necessary component of the Dream. They have forgotten the scale of theft that enriched them in slavery; the terror that allowed them, for a century, to pilfer the vote; the segregationist policy that gave them their suburbs. They have forgotten,” explains Coates, “because to remember would tumble them out of the beautiful Dream and force them to live down here with us, down here in the world” (2015:143). The invasion, massacre, and burning that unfolded in Tulsa on June 1, 1921 was not only punishable by law but incredibly shameful—especially for a growing oil city like Tulsa, known as the ‘Magic City.’ Mass murder doesn’t invite notions of magic; hence, the massacre “lay hidden for decades,” writes Ben Fenwick of *The Times*. “Educators did not teach it. Government offices did not record it. Even archival copies of some newspaper accounts were selectively expunged.”

But on Monday, July 13, 2020, forensic investigators finally began digging at Oaklawn Cemetery, only a few blocks from where most of the violence occurred. Ground-penetrating radar located several anomalies beneath the surface—meaning the earth could have been disturbed in these places—one of which “lies in the unmarked section of the cemetery.” The rumors had always focused on Oaklawn: O.T. Johnson claimed to have watched gravediggers bury 150 Black bodies in the cemetery back in 1921; Eunice Cloman Jackson, the wife of a Black mortician, claimed “her stepfather was part of a crew of 55 gravediggers burying bodies in Oaklawn.” The Tulsa race riot commission included both claims in their 2001 report on the massacre, in addition to a statement from Clyde Eddy, a young boy “who saw large wooden crates containing several burned bodies next to workers digging a trench at the cemetery.” Thirty-nine people were identified in the report as having been killed: 13 White residents, 26 Black residents; of the Black folks murdered, “21 were interred in Oaklawn” (Fenwick July 13 2020). Archaeologists have only begun the work of excavation 100 years after the riot event, a

testimony to the power of white silence in Tulsa, and no one was ever held accountable. The initial excavation ended in July 2020 without uncovering any evidence of human remains, according to a CNN report, though Tulsa’s mayor affirmed the city’s commitment to investigate “multiple sites of interest and potential candidates for mass graves” (Andone July 23 2020).

This book is intended to aid the process of recovery—meant to dismantle the default condition among white folks, namely our habit of *forgetting*—a process of historical excavation first begun by W.E.B. DuBois, African-American historian and sociologist and the first Black man to earn a Ph.D. at Harvard. Du Bois published *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860 – 1880* in 1935, a monumental book that challenged existing scholarship on the Reconstruction era, particularly the role Black Americans played in that period. Beginning in 1893, with future President Woodrow Wilson’s *Division and Reunion*, and continuing after 1906, with James Ford Rhode’s seven-volume *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*, “white historians and political scientists documented, denounced, and derided African-American ignorance, venality, and exploitation under Reconstruction,” explains David Levering Lewis (1992) in his Introduction to Du Bois’s book. “The drumbeat of Dunningite dissertations from Columbia rolled on steadily for two decades” (1998:vii). Though Black scholars did not remain silent, they were “unheard or dismissed by the white academy,” according to Lewis. “Mainstream historians had deplored universal manhood suffrage in the South as the greatest folly,” and Black Americans were largely blamed for the so-called ‘failure’ that was Reconstruction (1998:viii). Du Bois uncovered a different history and argued a radical view: “White historians have ascribed the faults and failures of Reconstruction to Negro ignorance and corruption. But the Negro insists that it was Negro loyalty and the Negro vote alone that restored the South to the Union; established the new Democracy, both for white and black, and instituted the public schools” (1998:ix). Du Bois’s scholarship tore at the edifice of white supremacy and challenged white academics in their habit of *forgetting*. I do not intend to compare this book to Du Bois’s seminal work in terms of importance, for *Black Reconstruction* had “irreversibly transformed” the debate over Reconstruction (Du Bois 1998:xv); rather, I aim to assist in the process of dismantling the default white condition, the practice of forgetting.

On Good Friday in 1873, a small army—composed of former Confederate soldiers and young White men who admired their service—descended upon a building in the small town of Colfax, Louisiana in Grant Parish, recently renamed in honor of the President Ulysses S. Grant

and Vice President Schuyler M. Colfax. Christopher Columbus Nash, a Confederate veteran recently elected parish sheriff, led an army of more than 300 white men, most on horseback and armed with a rifle, to the Colfax courthouse, which a group of Black Republicans claimed to control following a disputed election. It is probable that more than 100 Black Americans were slaughtered by Nash and his Democratic Confederates that April 18, 1873 (Lane 2008). Only a few of the perpetrators were charged under the Enforcement Acts, and their convictions were appealed to the Supreme Court which, in *United States v. Cruikshank* (1876) ruled that the protections of the Fourteenth Amendment did not apply to the actions of individuals, only to state governments. It was a monumental case. Following the decision, the Federal Government was prevented from using the Enforcement Act of 1870 to prosecute vigilantes and paramilitary groups, like the White League in Louisiana. “A straight line can be drawn from Colfax to Cruikshank and to the race riots in East St. Louis in 1917 and in Omaha, Chicago and other cities two years later,” write William Briggs and Jon Krakauer for *The New York Times*. That line can be traced “to the abhorrent crimes committed in the 1921 Tulsa race massacre” and the “criminal brutality unleashed on African-Americans in Selma and Birmingham, Ala., in the 1960s.” It is a history of racial collective violence that continues in the present day, through “police and white nationalist violence” in Ferguson, Missouri (2014); Charlottesville, Virginia (2015); and Kenosha, Wisconsin (2020). “Lest we forget that white supremacy and racial injustice are still endemic in America, we need to remember Colfax and the lasting harm it wrought,” argue Briggs and Krakauer. Of course, we must *remember* this history of racial violence—but first most white American high school students need actually be *taught* about these events.

## A HISTORY OF AMERICAN RACE RIOTS

My aim in writing this book is to trace the history of American race riots, beginning with Emancipation from slavery in 1863 through the opening stages of President Richard Nixon’s War on Drugs, in 1972. Historians have been excavating archival sources for the past four decades, a production of scholarship that has revealed the vast history of white-initiated violence across the United States—beginning immediately after Emancipation. Scholars have written books examining racial collective violence during Reconstruction (Egerton 2014; Rable 1984), the bloody ‘Red Summer’ of 1919 (Krugler 2018), the Progressive era through World War II (Collins 2012), the ‘long, hot summer’ of 1967 (McLaughlin 2014), and the Black urban



rebellions of the 1960s and early '70s (Button 1978; Feagin and Hahn 1973; Levy 2018). Sociologists have compared race riot events, most notably Janet Abu-Lughod's *Race, Space, and Riots* (2007), a comparative historical analysis of racial violence in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. I am aware of only one study that has treated both white violence and Black rebellion together in the same text over an extended period of analysis—Herbert Shapiro's *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (1988)—but Shapiro did not include the Black rebellions of the 1960s and early 70s in his analysis, as I do here. Black urban rebellions must be considered along with earlier episodes of white-initiated violence because these 'race riots' functioned as *compensation*—they were political in nature, directed upward against the white power structure that had been exploiting and oppressing Black citizens since the first waves of the Great Migration. If we fail to examine the Black violence of the 1960s as a direct response to white supremacy, a supremacy partly ensured through instrumental white violence, we cannot grasp its true social significance as a mechanism of political protest.

American race rioting must be examined along an historical continuum, beginning with Emancipation, if we are to understand its role in shaping Black citizenship in the United States. Following the Civil War there was an extended period classified by *instrumental white violence*; race rioting became a mechanism used across the South to control the changing social structure brought about by Reconstruction, especially Black voting rights. Indeed, 'Redemption' does not occur in the South without the existence of widespread collective racial violence across multiple Southern states, violence that largely went unchecked by local law enforcement and unpunished by the Federal Government. White-initiated violence evolved over time, ebbing and flowing around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—in terms of *frequency*, measured as the number of race riots per year; *intensity*, measured as the total duration of violence (e.g., minutes, hours, days); and *severity*, measured by lives lost, persons injured, and property destroyed—before reaching a peak after the First World War, between 1917 and 1923. White violence then declined rapidly, for what amounted to a forty-year period, the start of 1924 (a year without a race riot, a rarity during the period investigated in this study) through the end of 1962, when there were four race riots. In this book I show how white-initiated violence in the United States has proven instrumental in maintain the structures of white supremacy: economic, political, and social relations were dominated by white-initiated race rioting in the two decades following the Civil War. And where it did not physically strike, the threat of white violence was omnipresent, a powerful force in

maintaining institutional life, especially in the South. Its counterpart is *compensatory rebellion*: violence initiated by Black Americans directed upward, against the white power structure that controls their community. Some of the earliest instances of Black rebellion occurred in South Carolina during the 1870s, when White Southerners actively sought to defeat African-American citizenship through disenfranchisement and terrorism. But the first instance of *compensatory rebellion* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century erupted in New York City in 1935. Harlem had become the new cultural capital for Black Americans, and after an instance of suspected police brutality against a young teenage boy, the Black community targeted white-owned businesses for vandalism, looting, and property destruction. White police officers were also attacked during the first modern compensatory rebellion. Black-initiated rioting evolved into a full-scale “Negro Revolt,” as Historian Thomas Sugrue refers to those years of civil unrest that rocked American cities, between 1963 and 1972. In this middle of this continuum of violence is *reciprocal riot*, perhaps a term closest in meaning to what’s intended by the opaque and ambiguous term ‘race riot’: these are rare events, historically, characterized by the simultaneous eruption of proactive violence initiated by two warring groups. Perhaps the most famous case of *reciprocal riot* is the Detroit riot of 1943, which began when Black youths attacked a small group of white teenagers on Belle Isle Park, just over the bridge from the main part of the city, across the Detroit River. White Detroit residents responded with attacks on Black residents in the streets, before Black residents in other sections of the city began attacking and looting white-owned property. The Detroit Police would end up killing many Black residents in their effort to restore order—but not a single white rioter lost his life (the Harlem rebellion of 1935 and the Detroit reciprocal riot of 1943 are examined in Chapter 6).

*White Discipline, Black Rebellion* traces the history of white disciplinary violence and its consequences for Black citizenship across a 110-year period beginning with Emancipation from slavery in 1863. The book is divided into three parts by historical era. Part I, “White Discipline,” examines the phenomenon of *instrumental white violence* during Reconstruction, ‘Redemption,’ and the New South. In 1863, Irish New Yorkers (and newly arrived Irish immigrants) participated in an attempted *racial cleansing* of the city—a widespread effort to banish all Black residents, targeted because they were competitors in labor and blamed for the war. “Ill will in the North toward the Negro, which was widespread before the war, had not changed,” writes historian William Gillette. “Manifested in varying degrees by different groups, Negrophobia had

been expressed brutally during the war, for slavery was sectional but racism was national” (1979:7). White Irish rioters continued their effort at banishment following the riot: Black New Yorkers “had trouble getting their old jobs back, particularly on the docks, where white longshoremen drove them away,” explains Barnett Schecter. Their mobility was also highly limited, because conductors and white passengers refused to admit Black riders on street cars, “both from prejudice and fear of renewed attacks by white mobs” (2005:266). The rioters “succeeded in scattering free blacks to the edges of white society, a prelude to the formation of large black ghettos in New York and other cities,” and a precursor to the campaign of terror to come against Black Americans in the South (2005:252). Nearly three years later and over a thousand miles southwest, Irish residents and Southern Democrats banded together seeking to banish all freed slaves from Memphis, Tennessee (or *freedmen*, as they were known following Emancipation).

Freedmen were assaulted, robbed, and murdered with impunity, both in their homes and on the streets of Memphis during a reign of terror that lasted more than two days. Arson and plunder were the key mechanisms of social control in both events. What occurred in Memphis was ‘an organized and bloody massacre of the colored people,’ according to a Congressional investigation. Forty-six Black Americans were killed; another seventy-five Black people were injured, and at least 100 had been robbed. Five Black women were raped. Four Black churches were burned, as were twelve schools built for the children of former slaves (Ash 2013:180). The so-called ‘Draft Riots’ in New York City and the Memphis Massacre of 1866 show the effectiveness of symbolic violence—especially widespread arson—as a mechanism to promote an exodus of Black residents. Both events are attempted *racial cleansings*: a collection of violent rituals intended to kill, intimidate, and expel Black residents, thereby eliminating economic and political competition for white Democrats. These attempted cleansing events are compared in Chapter 1, with special attention paid to subsequent consequences for the Black community.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, adopted on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1868, addressed the issue of citizenship rights and equal protection under the law. The amendment declared that all Black folks born on U.S. soil were indeed American citizens, and that, as citizens, Black Americans enjoyed the same privileges and immunities that white citizens were accustomed to receiving. No State could “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without *due process* of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the *equal protection* of the

laws.” The freedmen were now citizens of the United States, and all Southern states were required by law to grant Black residents with both due process if accused of a crime and equal protection, from both law enforcement and the courts; in other words, the Fourteenth Amendment declared all former slaves United States citizens with both access to and protection from the criminal justice system, should they be harmed, robbed, or otherwise abused.

Suddenly, the Republican Party represented a serious threat to the Southern way of life. Southern Whites began using racial collective violence as a mechanism to restore white power in politics and keep Democrats in control of state affairs. Collective violence peaked during the 1868 presidential election between Ulysses S. Grant, Republican and Union General, and Horatio Seymour, Democrat of New York. “The violence of the 1868 canvass marked a clear departure from the earlier pattern of Reconstruction disturbances,” explains historian George C. Rable. “Outbreaks with a primarily political purpose occurred in nearly every state. If enough potential Republican voters could be convinced that casting their ballots would be dangerous, the Democrats might very well carry the southern states.” In the postwar South, the “first widespread political disorders” occurred in 1868, and from that point forward, “Reconstruction violence became increasingly organized (at the local and state levels) and less random and individualistic” ([1984]2007:69). In Louisiana, armed bands of Democratic terrorists terrorized Republican supporters across the state in the months leading to the election: “The *raison d’être* for the Knights was to maintain white supremacy and protect the country from political equality and miscegenation,” writes Rable. “Alcibiades DeBlanc of St. Martin Parish, the founder of the order, accused [Republican] radicals of attempting to turn the southern states into ‘African provinces’ and of inciting their black dupes to acts of barbarism” (2007:75). White Louisianans (falsely) claimed Black folks were terrorizing the state, and since Blacks were slightly more numerous than whites in Louisiana, constituting just over 50 percent of the population, this posed a major problem indeed. Perhaps more importantly, Black folks “also constituted a numerical majority in over half of the state’s counties or parishes (thirty-six out of fifty-eight, or 62 percent), including the parishes along the Mississippi, the Red River, and the delta surrounding New Orleans” (Gillette 1979:105).

Black citizenship rights continued to expand during the first half of the 1870s: the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which prohibited states from denying citizens the right to vote on account of race, was ratified on March 30, 1870, and the Civil Rights Act, which

barred discrimination against Blacks in restaurants, parks, hotels, and theaters, was passed by Congress in 1875. Chapter 2 examines the spread of white violence across the Black Belt, first in Louisiana, then Mississippi, and finally in South Carolina. The Black population rivaled the white population in numbers in each of these Southern states, hence the Republican Party represented a real threat to the existing social hierarchy. But the power of white violence helped maintain the structures of white supremacy against the egalitarian threat posed by the radical principles of Reconstruction in Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina during the decade following the Civil War. Democratic terrorist organizations targeted Black citizens using a variety of tactics during the presidential elections of 1868 in Louisiana, preventing Republicans from victory by silencing the Black vote. Mississippi whites followed a similar blueprint during the 1870s—particularly since, between 1867 and 1871, withdrawal of U.S. troops from the South made “keeping the peace increasingly difficult” (Rable 2007:108)—beginning with attacks on Black Republicans in Meridian in 1871, then Vicksburg in 1874. “In Mississippi, the enormity and extent of the use of force and fraud by white Democrats by 1874 had become a national scandal,” writes Gillette. The Vicksburg city election took place in August 1874, and through two strategies—intimidating Blacks so they stayed away from the polls and direct manipulation of the vote count—the all-white Democratic ticket defeated the Republicans. “Their victory marked the turning point in state politics, with a local government displaced by sanctioned violence and racist appeal,” explains Gillette: “indeed, it was the beginning of widespread racial conflict for political gain” (Gillette 1979:150). The White Leaguers of Louisiana, the White Liners of Mississippi, and the Red Shirts of South Carolina adopted the terrorist tactics of the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camelia. Collective racial violence spread across the Deep South; it was “more extensive and more effective than has been commonly believed. Hatred of the federal government, ‘carpetbag control,’ and Negro suffrage fed southern whites’ fears and frustrations, causing the restless and reckless to vent their rage” (Gillette 1979:28).

The Slaughterhouse Cases, resolved by the Supreme Court in 1873, were the Court’s first interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment, limiting the rights and privileges granted by the amendment to those explicitly stated in the Constitution. Following a five-to-four majority ruling, Justice Samuel F. Miller declared that the Fourteenth Amendment did not shift control of all civil rights from the state to the federal government; states retained legal jurisdiction over their citizens and federal protection of civil rights did not extend to property rights. “Had only

one justice in the majority voted differently, the next hundred years of American history might have been dramatically different, and the suffering of blacks in American society not nearly so great,” writes Robert Whitaker. “But the *Slaughterhouse* cases were now precedent law, and with that decision serving as a guide, the Supreme Court quickly tore down the entire edifice of Reconstruction law, brick by brick” (2008:27). The Supreme Court ruled on another case involving the state of Louisiana—*Slaughterhouse* was decided after the Louisiana state legislature granted a monopoly to a New Orleans slaughtering corporation in 1869—when it determined the fate of several white men charged for their roles in the Colfax massacre (referenced above). In *United States v. Cruikshank* (1876), the Supreme Court “effectively gutted” the Federal Enforcement Acts when it ruled that the federal government did not have the constitutional authority to prosecute the mob leaders responsible for the violence at Colfax. “The court reasoned that while the Fourteenth Amendment barred states from depriving individuals of ‘life, liberty, or property without due process of law,’ it did not bar private individuals from doing so,” explains Whitaker. “The mob leaders were set free, and whites throughout the South knew what this meant: violence could be used to keep blacks in their place, and those who killed need not worry about going to jail” (2008:28). But the Court was not finished. In *Reese v. United States* (1876), the Supreme Court ruled that while states were not permitted to deny citizens the right to vote on account of race, they were within their right to establish voting standards, a ruling that opened the floodgates for Southern states to use poll taxes and literacy tests as mechanisms to disenfranchise Black Americans.

The ‘Mississippi Plan’ of 1875, devised by Democrats to prevent Republicans from gaining power by any means necessary, featured a variety of white social control tactics, including murder, assault, and economic coercion. In Mississippi, “a *revolution* ha[d] taken place—by force of arms,” wrote then Governor Adelbert Ames, “and a race are disfranchised—they are to be returned to a condition of serfdom—an era of second slavery” (Foner 1988:562). President Grant had sent federal troops to confront the violence in Louisiana; by contrast, in Mississippi, he “turned a deaf ear” to Ames’s pleas for federal intervention to prevent Democratic terrorism from defeating the progress inaugurated by Reconstruction. Northern Republicans were increasingly sympathetic toward men of property, and President Grant’s “failure to intervene in Mississippi, 1875 marked a milestone in the retreat from Reconstruction,”

according to historian Eric Foner, whose *Reconstruction: America's Second Revolution* (1988) represents the seminal text on the period.

A 'Second Mississippi Plan' was presented for all the South to emulate at the State Constitutional Convention, which began in August 1890. As late as 1879, the "three foremost spokesmen of the South," Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, Senator of Mississippi (1877-1885); Wade Hampton, Senator of South Carolina (1879-1891); and Alexander Stephens, former Vice President of the Confederacy and Congressman of Georgia (1872-1882), all "agreed in a public statement that the disfranchisement of the Negro was not only impossible but was undesired," writes Woodward (1955:321). Reconstruction effectively ended in 1877 for Black Americans living in the Deep South; election fraud and the ever-present threat of white violence progressively eroded their newfound political rights, and African Americans experienced a deepening sense of isolation during the years to come. "What began as day by day disengagement ended as lasting alienation," writes historian Joel Williamson in *The Crucible of Race*. "As the black world moved away from the white world and solidified, disengagement became institutionalized. Schools and churches, for instance, became all black," and this growing *alienation* from the white world was evident in civic affairs, commerce, industry, the professions, public transportation, and the arts (1984:54). And on November 1, 1890, the Mississippi State Legislature offered a new blueprint for political relations when representatives adopted a new constitution—created to disenfranchise all Black residents and eliminate the threat of the Republican Party. Once again, Mississippi "led the way in race policy," and legal tactics spread rapidly across the South: "Mississippi was the only state that took this step before the outbreak of the Populist revolt. South Carolina was next with a convention in 1895, Louisiana in 1898, North Carolina by means of an amendment in 1900, Alabama in 1901, Virginia in 1901-1902, Georgia by amendment in 1908, and Oklahoma in 1910" (Woodward 1955:321). During this same period, Tennessee, Florida, Arkansas, and Texas used poll taxes and other devices to disenfranchise Black Americans. by means of the poll tax and other devices.

White-initiated riot violence grew in frequency, intensity, and severity during the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the 'Mississippi Plan' in 1890 to the start of the Great Depression in October 1929. "It is not too much to say that species of feudalization occurred in black life in these turn-of-the-century decades," writes Williamson (1984:53): "Separation and alienation from the white world loosened the threads of black life for a generation or more. For

each individual black person, taken all together and totaled up, there was a measure of disorientation, an anarchy, a chaos and loneliness compared both with what their white contemporaries then knew and with what black individuals had known before and would know subsequently” (1984:57). Sociologist James W. Loewen calls the period between 1890 and 1930 the Great Retreat in his book *Sundown Towns* ([2005]2018), because white supremacy “increasingly pervaded American culture during this era, more even than during slavery” ([2005]2018:44). Convinced of Black inferiority, white Americans began asking whether African Americans should even be allowed to live in “their” communities. It was an era that historian Rayford Logan first described as the nadir of American race relations in *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir* (1954). It was an era defined in the aftermath of the forced removal of Indigenous Tribes across the Plains, a genocidal campaign that only heightened sense of white superiority and racism in American culture; it was an era of intense immigration, where Irish, Italian, and Polish newcomers “immediately learned it was in their best interest to be considered “whites,” differentiated from ‘blacks,’ who were still at the bottom of the social hierarchy; and it was an era defined by imperialism, by an ideology that white people were meant to govern black or brown peoples everywhere (Loewen 2018:31). These social forces converged, and by the 1890s, the culture of white supremacy had reached new heights. “It is almost unimaginable how racist the United States became during the Nadir,” writes Loewen (2018:43). White Americans increasingly turned to violence to dispossess Black neighbors and intimidate them so thoroughly that all would leave, never to return.

Disenfranchisement and segregation were the tools used to maintain white supremacy during this great retreat from the idealism of Reconstruction. “The fact was that previous disenfranchisement had been achieved and was maintained by corruption, fraud, and intimidation, conditions that steadily tested the tolerance of the North and strained morality at home,” explains Williamson. “The laws passed after 1890 sought to obtain the same end by legal mean. The laws would purify the process; they would also purify the electorate” (1984:229). States in the “Radical heartland”—Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina—began establishing voting standards, including property, education, and good citizenship qualifications. After Mississippi introduced the ‘understanding clause’ in 1890, Southern states now had a method for allowing whites who could not meet these qualifications to remain in the body politic: as long as poor, uneducated whites could explain a section of the state constitution read



to him by an election official, he could bypass those voting requirements. Ben Tillman in South Carolina was the first Southern politician to use the ‘understanding clause’ to achieve complete disenfranchisement of Black Americans. Beginning in 1895, Black Americans were denied the right to vote and subsequently forced out of public office—and out of power. Within ten years, South Carolina had no Black representatives in the state legislature, nor did African Americans hold “any other significant state or local office, a condition that would prevail for more than half a century” (Williamson 1984:232). And this insurrection against Reconstruction government succeeded, despite the fact that a majority of adult males in South Carolina were Black.

Louisiana pioneered use of the ‘grandfather clause,’ another mechanism used to bypass voting qualifications for whites. Though a variety of specific techniques were devised, most relied on a white man claiming an ancestor had voted in that state in the past—typically 1867 was chosen as the cutoff year, since prior to that point Black residents were ineligible to vote in Southern states—or on a white man claiming his ancestor had performed military service for the state, typically to the Confederacy in the Civil War. Louisiana first used the ‘grandfather clause’ in 1898, and in 1900, less than two years after the Wilmington ‘race riot’ of 1898, North Carolina achieved disenfranchisement of Black residents through constitutional amendment that allowed for the ‘grandfather clause.’ By the end of 1902, “six Southern states had passed disfranchising amendments to their constitutions” (Williamson 1984:241). Georgia followed in 1908, not two full years after the devastating Atlanta race riot of 1906 (the race riots in Wilmington, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia around the turn of the twentieth century are examined in chapter 3). Oklahoma was the last state to incorporate disenfranchisement provisions into its state constitution, in 1910, and while it may have been the last state to use the ‘grandfather clause’ as a mechanism to control Black Americans, it was also the first struck down by the Supreme Court, in 1915. “More vitally important than the laws were the economic, the physical, and especially the social and psychological sanctions imposed upon blacks to keep them from voting and participating in politics,” explains Williamson. “In the end, it was white power and white solidarity in the desire to exclude the great mass of Negroes from political life that effected the political reduction of black people” (1984:247). Behind this separation was “white unanimity against blackness, molded rigid in a white culture, monolithic, total, and tight, that put the black man either down or out,” writes Williamson. “The exclusion of blacks from politics both drew upon and contributed to the exclusion of blacks everywhere” (1984:248).

Segregation laws swept over the country in waves during this period, establishing the social structure of Jim Crow. In Reconstruction there were laws passed *against* segregation; after the Second Mississippi Plan, however, laws began *requiring* segregation in public spaces. Segregation laws represented a revolution “in declarations of intent by governments and the white constituencies they represented,” writes Williamson, and they came in three waves. The first two waves came between 1889 and 1893 and between 1897 and 1907; these laws primarily affected public accommodations on trains, streetcars, and passenger boats. The third wave arrived between 1913 and 1915 segregated factories, especially workstations and bathrooms, and established “schemes designed to achieve block-by-block segregation in urban housing. That something new was happening in the separation of the races was indicated by the fact that a new word was required for such occasions,” explains Williamson. Segregation “was not much used” in the public lexicon, at least prior to 1899, and when it was used “it had no special racial connotations” (1984:254). After that time, however, the word frequently came to refer to the separation of the races. By 1913, when President Woodrow Wilson began segregating multiple agencies of the federal government, the word was nationalized.

“In the quest for social justice in America, there seems to be such a phenomenon as battle fatigue,” writes Williamson. “The social body tires of laboring at a given problem, and especially so if there is less than striking progress towards its solution” (1984:339). An important observation indeed, for in the North support for the rights of Black Americans had waned around the turn of the twentieth century. “Basically, the difference between the North and the South in racial attitudes was that the North had not yet discovered what its prejudices were,” explains Williamson (1984:340). It had not yet done so because Black Americans had not yet migrated north in massive numbers. More than 90 percent of the African-American population lived in the South according to every U.S. Census prior to 1910 (Gibson and Jung 2002). The Black population increased by nearly 60 percent, from just under 7.4 million in 1890 to just under 11.8 million in 1930, and tremendous growth was coupled with extraordinary rates of migration. Between 1915 and 1930, more than one million Black Americans moved north during the first wave of the “Great Migration,” yet between 1890 and 1930, “the absolute number of African Americans in many northern counties and towns plummeted,” according to Loewen’s data, a pattern indicating the “withdrawal of African Americans from many counties across the Northern states.” In fact, despite growth in the Black population, of 39 states for which Loewen collected

data, “*not one showed greater dispersion of African Americans in 1930 than in 1890,*” and in 31 states, “*African Americans lived in a narrower range of counties in 1930 than they did in 1890*” (2018:57; emphasis in original). This was the ‘Great Retreat.’ Without it, Loewen argues, increases in the overall Black population “would have caused the number of counties with zero or few blacks to plummet” (2018:58). Instead, Loewen identified 235 counties with not a single Black resident, nearly double the 119 that existed in 1890, and the total number of counties with only a handful of Black residents also increased, from 452 in 1890 to 694 by 1930 (2018:55).

Illinois may be deserving of the moniker ‘Sundown State,’ given the findings Loewen has uncovered. Black Americans lived in every county in Illinois in 1890, but by 1930, “six counties had none, while another eleven had fewer than ten African American residents. Without a doubt, exclusion underlies these numbers,” writes Loewen. “In Illinois and elsewhere, entire counties developed and enforced the policy of keeping out African Americans” (2018:59). Chapter four investigates three race riots in Illinois that took place within the span of twelve years: in Springfield, the state capitol and Lincoln’s birthplace, in 1908; in East St. Louis, an industrial powerhouse across the Mississippi River at the southern tip of the state, in 1917; and in Chicago, the “promised land” for many Black Americans fleeing racial terror in the South, during the ‘Red Summer’ of 1919. Many smaller towns in Illinois also “became sundown through violence” during the Nadir, including “East Alton and Spring Valley in 1895, Virden in 1898, Pana in 1899, Carterville in 1901, Eldorado in 1902, Anna-Jonesboro in 1909, West Frankfort in 1920, [and] probably Pinkneyville in 1927 or 1928” (Loewen 2018:95). White violence proved instrumental in shaping Black-white relations in Illinois following the Great Migration, for it directly influenced both where Black folks could live, where Black folks could work, and where Black children could attend school. It was a powerful disciplinary force in the maintenance of white supremacy, not only in Illinois, but across the Midwest (racial collective violence in the Midwest is examined in more detail in the “Part II” introductory chapter).

A vast distance separated Black and white Americans in the years following the First World War. Southern whites satisfied their nostalgia for the antebellum era with organizations for Confederate veterans and their descendants. Associations of sons and daughters of the Confederacy “became perpetual in the ensuing decades of the new century,” as did the commissioning of memorial statues honoring fallen soldiers. “The escape of black people from the white mind was amazingly total,” explains Williamson, “and the Negro practically

disappeared,” not only from public social relations, but from history textbooks and school classrooms as well. In the 1920s and 1930s, “whites discovered a mythical past for themselves,” a longing for the way things were before the Civil War disrupted Southern social relations (Williamson 1984:478). White relations with Black people were characterized by paternalism used violence to maintain power in “a series of riots as black soldiers came home from France after World War I, and afterward in scattered violent forays,” writes Williamson. “But they developed a method whereby they could see themselves both as the good parents of blacks and yet do the violence necessary to keep blacks in place” (1984:479). White violence began to decline in the second half of the 1920s, but the race war that erupted in Tulsa, Oklahoma (1921) and the *racial cleansing* in Rosewood, Florida (1932) represent two of the most significant acts of dispossession committed against Black Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; they are examined in more detail in chapter 5.

Part II, “Black Rebellion,” documents the rise of Black Americans against white disciplinary violence and economic coercion that had long repressed both their citizenship rights and social mobility. Black resistance to white violence began during Reconstruction—in South Carolina, as I show in chapter 2, Black Americans actively took up arms in the fight for equal rights—but as historians like Eric Foner have pointed out, for how much abuse African Americans enduring during this era, what is surprising is *how little* they chose violence as an acceptable response. In 1905 W.E.B. Du Bois led a group of Black leaders in a conference at Buffalo, New York that would become known as the Niagara Movement. “We claim for ourselves every single right that belongs to a freeborn American, political, civil, and social,” Du Bois announced for the white world, “and until we get these rights, we will never cease to protest and assail the ears of America. The battle we wage is not for ourselves alone, but for all true Americans. It is a fight for ideals, lest this, our common fatherland, false to its founding, become in truth the land of the Thief and the home of the Slave—a by-word and a hissing among the nations for its sounding pretensions and pitiful accomplishment” (1940:89; cited in Orsofsky 1967:219). Du Bois’s resolve was strengthened the following year, when racial violence ripped Atlanta apart, and following the Springfield race riot of 1908 (see chapter 4), Mary White Ovington, a New York social worker and journalist; William English Walling, a journalist who covered the event; and Dr. Henry Moskowitz, a prominent progressive in the administration of New York Mayor John Purroy Mitchell, met in Manhattan during the first week of 1909. “It was

then that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was born,” Ovington explained. Lawless conduct committed against Black Americans inspired these progressives to stand up: “Silence under these conditions means tacit approval,” Ovington wrote. “The indifference of the North is already responsible for more than one assault upon democracy [i.e., permitting the disenfranchisement of Black voters in the South].” Mary White Ovington therefore called upon all Black and white supporters of American democracy to unite against white violence and white political usurpation of the privileges associated with United States citizenship, and in 1910, Du Bois and the Niagara Movement officially joined forces with the new organization, known more prominently today as the NAACP. It was the birth of a movement that would attack white supremacy—first in the courts.

Black Americans flocked to urban industrial centers during the 1920s, primarily four cities: New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit. In only 15 years, Detroit’s Black population rose from about 6,000 to over 100,000. In 1920, New York had 150,000 Black residents; by 1930, the population had risen to 327,000. And everywhere, Black migrants were forced into the worst slum areas of the city, with high crime rates, poor health, juvenile delinquency, and other forms of social disorganization. “Restriction to definitive areas and denial of opportunities to work at the more remunerative jobs were the main contributing factors” to rising crime rates among Black folks, explains Osofsky. Despite these restrictions, Black residents in Harlem were increasingly exploited, forced to pay higher rents than what could be found in similar parts of New York City due to residential restrictions and high demand. Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican-born political activist who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Harlem in 1916, advocated progress for Black folks and the need to fulfill their destiny in a country of their own: “No Negro, let him be American, European, West Indian, or African, shall be truly respected until the race as a whole has emancipated itself, through self-achievement and progress, from universal prejudice,” Garvey declared. “The Negro will have to build his own government, industry, art, science, literature and culture before the world will stop to consider him” (1925; cited in Osofsky 1967:293-94).

The Great Depression and World War II saw both white resistance to Black equality—Southern senators “repeatedly filibustered the NAACP’s antilynching bill anti-poll tax legislation to death” and Senator Bilbo aimed to “revive the movement to colonize Negroes in Africa”—and the beginnings of interracial solidarity. The 1930s and early 40s witnessed the rise of “large-

scale interracial industrial unionism” for the first time. In 1935, Black residents in Harlem launched the first *compensatory rebellion* by attacking symbols of the white power structure: white-owned property and white police officers. The emergence of Black militancy led to the March on Washington, a movement that would ultimately force President Franklin Roosevelt to sign Executive Order 8802, which banned discrimination in the employment of defense-industry workers based upon race, ethnicity, or religious belief, in June 1941. The year 1943 was the most violent of the period, with at least five significant race riots—most notably the *reciprocal riot* that erupted in Detroit, where both proactive Black collective violence and white-initiated collective violence were unleashed simultaneously. These two events marked a turning point in the history of American race rioting, a shift from white disciplinary violence to Black rebellion (examined in chapter 6).

During the New Deal and World War II, a new and broader conception of rights swept American politics. “Blacks and whites alike came to view an empowered federal government as the guarantor of positive as well as negative rights,” explains historian Thomas Sugrue. “At the heart of the later New Deal was a sweeping redefinition of the relationship of government, entitlement, and citizenship,” best summarized in President Roosevelt’s ‘Second Bill of Rights, in which he offered a proposed revision of the first ten constitutional amendments. An activist government guaranteed *positive* rights—like the right to a “useful and remunerative job” or the right “to a decent home” and the right to “earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation” (Sugrue 2009:xvi-xvii). This rights revolution “fundamentally shifted the terms of debate in the civil rights movement, particularly in the period from the 1930s to the 1970s” (2009:xvii). The 1960 U.S. Census revealed that “black America was at a turning point,” explains Sugrue. Forty percent of Blacks lived outside the South, and “for the first time since census records had been kept, a greater percentage of blacks than whites lived in urban centers” (2009:255). The Great Migration to urban industrial centers had improved the economic standing of Black Americans, yet every year after 1953, Black folks faced unemployment rates “more than double those of whites—a pattern that would stubbornly hold throughout the following decade.” In 1960, 4.9 percent of whites were unemployed, compared with 10.2 percent of Blacks: “Above all, northern blacks could not help but notice the enormous gap in affluence, status, and power between themselves and whites,” explains Sugrue. “The gains of the postwar period gave them a sense of the possibility of change, but the magnitude of change” was small,

and this “engendered bitterness” (2009:257). Bitterness produces resentment, in this case of the collective kind, and during the urban rebellions of the 1960s, Black collective resentment of white supremacy reached its boiling point. Black insurgency reached new heights by 1964, when race rioting first erupted in Harlem and officially exploded the following summer, with the Watts Rebellion (examined in chapter 7). As I examine in “Part III,” Black rebellion during the late 1960s and early 1970s swept all parts of the country, including many cities in the Northeast previously untouched by racial collective violence, like Hartford and New Haven, in Connecticut. The revolt reached its apex during the long, hot summer of 1967, when significant rebellions erupted in cities across the country. Chapter 8 examines the two most massive upheavals from that summer—Newark, New Jersey and Detroit, Michigan—and the wave of violence that ignited the following spring, in the wake of Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination in Memphis, Tennessee. While the federal government largely failed to protect the lives and property of Black Americans in the eighty years between the end of the Civil War and World War II—thereby ensuring the *instrumentality* of white disciplinary violence—it moved with exceptional force against Black rebellion. This book examines the response of law enforcement to racial collective violence, both within and across historical eras, to further our understanding of the historical conditions that helped establish contemporary police-community relations.

*White Discipline, Black Rebellion* contributes to existing historical scholarship by synthesizing and tracing the evolution of race rioting in the United States from Emancipation—announced by President Lincoln on September 22, 1862 and made official January 1, 1863—through the opening stages of the War on Drugs, in 1972 (President Nixon called drug abuse “America’s public enemy number one” the year before). Historians have paid considerable attention to studying single riot events from the Reconstruction and Redemption eras (Ash 2013; Hollandsworth, Jr. 2001; Keith 2008), as have journalists (Headley 2009; Lane 2008; Lemann 2006; McCague 1968; Schechter 2005). Scholars have written many book-length studies over the last four decades analyzing race riots from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Bauerlein 2001; Cecelski and Tyson 1998; Godshalk 2005; Hair [1976]2008; Mixon 2005; Prather 1984; Senechal de la Roche [1990]2008; Umfleet 2009). Journalists have also written books examining turn-of-the-century riot events, including the Wilmington Massacre of 1898 (Zucchini 2020), the Atlanta race riot of 1906 (Burns 2006), and the racial cleansing in Forsythe County, Georgia that took place in 1912 (Phillips 2016). Historians, legal scholars, and journalists have researched

World War I era riots even more extensively (Barnes 2008; Brophy 2002; D’Orso 1996; Ellsworth 1982; González-Tennant 2018; Hirsch 2002; Lancaster 2018; Lumpkins 2008; Madigan 2001; Rudwick [1964]1982; Stockley 2001; Tuttle 1970; Wells-Barnett 1920; Whitaker 2008; Williams and Williams II 1972). The Second World War was a less violent period in the United States; understandably, then, scholars have paid less attention to this period (Brandt 1996; Capeci 1977; Capeci and Wilkerson 1991). Hundreds of ghetto rebellions rocked urban America during the 1960s; consequently, the era has received considerably more attention, both from scholars (Fine [1989]2007; Flamm 2017; Horne 1997; Locke [1969]2017; Mumford 2007; Sears and McConahay 1973) and journalists (Cohen and Murphy 1966; Hayden 1967; Porambo [1971]2007; Shapiro and Sullivan 1964).

Historians have also analyzed race riot events within historical periods. George Rable’s *But There Was No Peace* ([1984]2007) uses a comparative historical approach to examine racial collective violence during Reconstruction and Redemption. Several authors have written on year-long periods of collective violence, such as the Red Summer of 1919 (Krugler 2015; McWhirter 2011; Whitaker 2008) or the ‘long, hot summer’ of 1967 (McLaughlin 2014). Political scientist Ann Collins used a three-pronged analytical approach in a more limited historical period (the Progressive Era to World War II); she examines how structural conditions, cultural framing, and precipitating events contribute to collective riot violence. Collins identifies commonalities between riot events to “fill a long-neglected gap in the literature” (2012: xvi), and she deepens our understanding of how collective violence changes with time, but her analysis ends too soon. World War II is a crucial period of change—it marks a shift in the social structure of riots events—and I address this limitation by contrasting the riot events from World War I and II with the turbulent rebellions of the 1960s. Sociologists Joe Feagin and Harlan Hahn were the first to examine the riots of the 1960s as political acts of violence in *Ghetto Revolts* (1973). In *Black Violence* (1978), James W. Button examined data to explore how the federal government responded to the Black urban rebellions of the 1960s. Button presents an analysis on the consequences of Black-initiated rioting, especially in terms of aid from the federal government and policy changes. More recently, Peter B. Levy’s *The Great Uprising* (2018) uses a comparative approach to analyze the Black urban rebellions that erupted across American cities between 1963 and 1972, and in *A Nation on Fire*, journalist Clay Risen (2009) examines American in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Part III of *White*



*Discipline, Black Rebellion* contributes to this line of scholarship examining the forms of collective racial violence and its enduring consequences for the Black community.

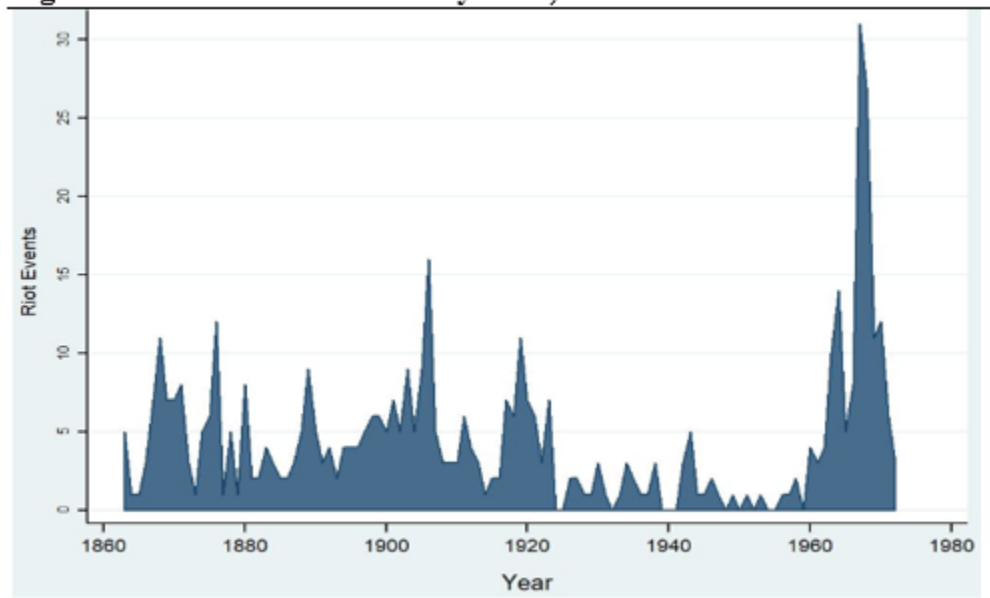
Scholars have not devoted as much attention to analyzing racial conflict across eras (e.g., Abu-Lughod 2007; Collins 2012; Gilje 1996). George Rudé's seminal work *The Crowd in History* (1964), an analysis of popular disturbances in France and England (1730-1848), is perhaps the best-known work of this kind. Much less research has been devoted to American history. Paul Gilje's study is perhaps the most extensive, covering colonial America through to "Black Revolt" in the 1960s, but it is more of an overview than a comprehensive study, given the vast historical period under review. Herbert Shapiro's *White Violence and Black Response* examines racial violence from Reconstruction to the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s; it does not include the urban rebellions of the 1960s and early 1970s as part of the "black response" described in the title, as this book does. *White Discipline, Black Rebellion* extends and expands the period under consideration, adding to the work of both Gilje (1996) and Shapiro (1988). It contributes to the historiography of racial collective violence by taking both a systematic yet descriptive approach to understanding the long history of American race rioting.

By breaking the book into three parts based upon changes in the status of Black citizenship, I contribute to examining the development of racial violence within historical periods. By examining race rioting as ritualistic behavior ranging along a *discipline-rebellion* continuum (Black 1996), I examine how racial collective violence shifted across historical periods—and shifts in *form* are associated with changes in the status of Black citizenship in the United States. A systematic analysis of data from *The New York Times* (from January 1, 1863 through December 31, 1972) demonstrates the ubiquity of American race rioting. *White Discipline, Black Rebellion* presents studies on three eras of racial collective violence, offering an overview of each period with an analysis of riot events by *state, region, and year*. Data collection unfolded in a two-stage process. In the first data sweep, I entered 'negro' and 'riot' in the search terms, located 'anywhere' in the text between a specified date range (e.g., January 1, 1863 to December 31, 1863). I sorted return results by 'oldest first,' then systematically identified and recorded all race riots for that given year (in Excel). This process was then repeated for each year through 1972, the year after Richard Nixon declared drug abuse "America's public enemy number one." The search terms I selected ignore American riots involving other races; for example, anti-Chinese rioting in Los Angeles, which occurred in 1871

and featured mass lynching, is one kind of riot event missed when the search was limited to ‘negro’ riots. While the focus of my research is black-white racial violence, I also intended to give the reader a clear picture of American *race rioting* over time, so I conducted a second data sweep to address this problem, this time using a slightly different method: ‘riot’ was the only search term entered, but returns were limited to ‘document title (TI)’ rather than ‘anywhere’ in the text. This approach expanded the study’s reach by identifying riot events involving other races, but it also returned different kinds of riots (e.g., labor riots) and riot events outside the United States, which are not a part of this study.

A main finding of this study is that race riots have been a near constant feature of American social life—at least during the 110 years analyzed in this study. Figure 1 presents the results of *The New York Times* data on American race rioting from Emancipation in 1863 through the War on Drugs in 1972:

**Figure 1. American Race Riots by Year, 1863 – 1972**



*Source: The New York Times Index (ProQuest Historical Newspapers)*

The line graph above ebbs and flows like an electrocardiogram, but there is always a pulse; the needle consistently jumps up in the recording of racial violence, and few years pass without at least one significant episode of collective violence. Figure 1 illustrates a series of peaks and valleys in white-initiated collective violence. Riot violence takes a u-shaped form, rising dramatically before falling just as suddenly, before repeating. This u-shaped form is evident several times in the figure, particularly the late 1860s to the 1870s; the u-shaped form is evident

again between 1890, when it hits a peak, falls and rises up through the turn of the century, before peaking again around 1906. A similar pattern emerges again from 1919 through 1923.

Immediately afterward, white-initiated violence declines dramatically, as evident on the right-side of the figure above: between 1923 and 1963, there is only *one* year with five race riots; all others have three or fewer, and several years during this period have none at all. It represents the calm before the storm, for the electrocardiograph jumps skyward by after 1963, reaches its greatest height in 1967, and starts to decline thereafter for the next five years, through 1972. This part of Figure 1 represents the Black urban rebellions, a brief blip on the riot radar that was far less sustained, as least historically, in comparison to white-initiated collective violence that dominates the left-side of the graph, from 1863 to 1923.

## A RIOT TAXONOMY

In his seminal study of the Wilmington Massacre of 1898, historian H. Leon Prather called upon social scientists to develop “a new term for what has been called a race riot.” Many of those events were actually massacres “of defenseless blacks with a macabre mixture of carnage and carnival” that were then “recorded in American historiography as *riots*,” Prather notes. “Such nomenclature may be incomplete” (1984:11). The term *race riot* is not only inadequate but purposefully misleading: it gives the false sense that riot violence is uncoordinated. More importantly, it obscures the moral character of the violence and fails to convey a critical point: race riots have functioned as mechanisms of social control throughout American history.

*White Discipline, Black Rebellion* contributes to the sociology of racial collective violence in several ways. First, by applying theoretical concepts developed by Donald Black and Doug McAdam specifically to racial collective violence, I present a taxonomy useful for analyzing American race rioting over time. Scholars of collective violence have called on social scientists to deepen our understanding of “race riots” by developing a more precise conceptualization (e.g., Prather 1984; Swan 1971). This work, I argue, is especially important for present-day race relations, because the term *race riot* is purposefully misleading. It masks culpability for bloodshed. It fails to reflect the nature of the conflict. And it contributes to our historical amnesia regarding collective violence in the United States. White folks, in particular, must understand the history of American race riots—and the failure of law enforcement agencies to protect Black Americans—if we are to understand the need for #BlackLivesMatter, if we are

to understand more fully why that has *never* really been the case, at any point, in American history. Historically, most racial collective violence has, in fact, been initiated by angry white folks, yet the very application of the term *race riot* (a generalized, neutral label) effectively conceals white responsibility. It's important to change that failure, to expose responsibility for racial violence through symbolic labeling; it's important to change our understanding of race riots, to expose the true social meaning behind the violence.

A race riot is a series of violent rituals that promote social solidarity through the unmasking of collective resentment. Race riots involve large groups or crowds engaged in either interpersonal violence or property destruction. This size of the crowd is critical, for it distinguishes the riot from a street brawl involving rival gangs or a bar fight that escalates into the street, both of which may stem from issues of race. Donald Black argues that crime is often social control because much of it is “moralistic and involves the pursuit of justice” (Black 1983:34). Indeed, homicide, property destruction, and property confiscation are oftentimes examples of *self-help*, crimes committed by ordinary citizens who “seem to view their grievances as their own business, not that of the police or other officials, and [they] resent the intrusion of law” (Black 1983:39). Crimes involving self-help are more likely in places where law is less available—particularly for lower-status individuals who “enjoy less legal protection, especially when they have complaints against their social superiors” (Black 1983:41). And race rioting fits these concepts, both within and across historical eras, because at its core, a race riot is always motivated by rights. Race riots are characterized by collective self-help—events that commemorate a community's unhinged collective resentment.

The riot taxonomy presented here, situated in the Weberian tradition of identifying and delineating *ideal types* for examining social phenomena, challenges existing theoretical approaches to the study of racial collective violence (i.e., Janowitz 1968; Grimshaw 1969), especially their silence on the social meaning that motivates riot violence. I define a race riot as a *collection of rituals that promote social solidarity through the unmasking of collective resentment*. A riot is an expurgation. It is collective therapy for the perpetrators and collective trauma for the targeted group. Consider the case of East St. Louis, Illinois, where on July 2, 1917, a white-initiated massacre decimated the African-American community: the crowd gathered at “intersections of major thoroughfares where black commuters concentrated at streetcar stops.” Only a “small number” of individuals engaged in murder and assault, but

throng of white onlookers engaged in the ritual by “watching and cheering” (Lumpkins 2008:115). Historian Charles L. Lumpkins notes how both spectators and killers “emotionally needed each other to build and reinforce a sense of community” (2008:115). Part of the sociological significance of riot events, therefore, is that communal bonds are strengthened by exercising collective social control against an unwanted group deemed inferior. The types of behavior involved in rioting are all indicative of social control. Collective riot violence involves property destruction, such as breaking shop windows (social control against exploitative merchants); it involves looting (property confiscation, another mode of social control); and it typically involves arson (a particularly symbolic form of property destruction with a “normative character”; Black 1998:33). In the most severe events, riots involve terroristic intimidation, assault, and murder. Violence promotes social solidarity as people participate in these expurgation rituals. It affirms the bonds between the individual and the group (Horwitz 1984).

A riot is conflict management. By targeting individuals and their property, violence defines what is deviant—and the severity of social control indicates the seriousness of said deviant behavior in a culture or society. Violence, looting, and terroristic intimidation become techniques of social control, mechanisms dividing the people “into those who are respectable and those who are not” (Black 1976: 105). Riots are also quantifiable, thus riot *intensity* may be measured by event duration (i.e. hours or days lasted), riot *severity* by using various dimensions of destruction (e.g., deaths, property damage, injuries, arrests, etc.), and riot *frequency* by the number of episodes during a given time period. In this sense, a riot is social control, and it is the dependent variable; the event’s intensity and severity may be explained by the riot’s location and direction in social space. Conflict management is the “handling of grievances” and comes in five forms, according to Black, each of which arises “under distinctive conditions” (1998:74). Riots are actually *self-help*, and therefore should be conceptualized on a continuum of *discipline* and *rebellion*: “Discipline is downward self-help; rebellion is upward self-help.” These forms “arise in the same settings and are complementary: Where discipline is most extreme,” writes Black, “so is rebellion. Where the former is mild, so is the latter” (1998:78). Individuals seek self-help when participating in riots, as evidenced by the widespread looting typically found, but it’s what’s more important is the desire for *collective self-help*. A riot is characterized by collective self-help; it is a violent response to unhinged collective resentment. It can be classified as either *upward social control* (rebellious self-help) or *downward social control* (disciplinary

self-help). A riot's social structure is determined first by identifying the target of the collective resentment: is violence directed upward against authority or downward against the subjugated?

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Race riots should be viewed as rituals in political protest, violent tools and techniques groups utilize when engaged in social movements. McAdam argues that a social movement "is to be held above all else a *political* rather than a psychological phenomenon. That is, the factors shaping institutionalized political processes are argued to be of equal analytic utility in accounting for social insurgency." The second critical point is that "a movement represents a continuous *process* from generation to decline, rather than a discrete series of developmental stages" (1999:36). McAdam identifies four sets of factors that shape the development of insurgency: "the confluence of expanding political opportunities, indigenous organizational strength, and the presence of certain shared cognitions within the minority community that is held to facilitate movement emergence. Over time these factors continue to shape the development of insurgency in combination with a fourth factor: the shifting control response of other groups to the movement" (McAdam 1999:59).

The urban riots of the 1960s can be "traced to the racial outbreaks that were generated during the period of World War I," according to Morris Janowitz, a sociologist whose work centered on the study of social control. "The riots of this period need to be distinguished from the

contemporary outbursts” (1968:9). Janowitz appears to have approached riot conceptualization from a white-centered standpoint, however. His use of the term *communal riots* to conceptualize collective violence in the World War I period is a case in point. Janowitz emphasizes the nature of the violence in his terminology: communal riots are characterized by “ecological warfare,” and since “whites generally invaded Negro areas,” the “fundamental anatomy” of the riot is “the communal clash between Negroes and whites” (1968:10). This conceptualization is misleading for several reasons. The service of African-American men in World War I changed black consciousness and offered, perhaps for the first time, the possibility of true democratic participation. African Americans responded in *self-defense* against white-initiated collective violence throughout this period, but especially in 1919, a year often referred to as “Red Summer” for its bloodshed (Krugler 2015). Though riot events of the World War I era certainly involved contentions over housing and the right to occupy public space in urban neighborhoods, the violence was initiated and often planned by white folks; thus the term communal actually obscures the “fundamental anatomy” of the events, which is that the violence was asymmetrical. It was not until 1943, in Detroit, that a true “communal clash” occurred, one in which black-initiated collective violence was used as a tool of social control.

In fact, terminology like *communal riot* continues the trend of white washing American historiography with euphemistic labels. The collective violence of the World War I era was not shared—unless by using the *communal riot* term we mean to convey blacks shared the trauma of terrorism while whites shared in a carnival of violence. Historian Charles Lumpkins’ depiction is most accurate because East St. Louis, like the most severe riot events during this period, it was an attempt at ethnic cleansing: “expulsion of all African Americans from the city” (2008:108). The term *communal riot* fails to capture the event’s social meaning and significance. What’s needed is terminology that indicates responsibility for the conflict, that illustrates the moral character of the event. In this way, we can begin to understand how collective violence is a mechanism of social control. Riot violence changes social space, often dramatically, in its historical moment; the specter of collective violence continues to impact urban ecology and culture, long after the fires fade.

This book offers a new conceptualization of American riot events, one distinguished by the type of social control applied and the direction of violence in social space. *Disciplinary riots* feature punishment wielded in a downward direction against a group deemed socially inferior.

These kinds of riot events occur in contexts where social inequality is greatest, especially differences in economic resources and political power. The most intense disciplinary riots are called *racial cleansings*—distinguished from the disciplinary riot because Black residents are expelled from the community, perhaps permanently, creating what James Loewen (2005) calls a ‘sundown town.’ *Reciprocal riots* feature bidirectional violence between warring groups in an environment characterized by declining levels of economic and social inequality; that is, these riot events take place in contexts characterized by more egalitarian relations. In a reciprocal riot, the rarest of the three ideal types, both groups simultaneously engage in proactive violence, not merely retaliatory violence. *Compensatory rebellions* feature upward violence as compensation for discrimination and injustice in a space characterized by even less social distance separating groups. These events occur in contexts where social inequality has further declined, as was the case for Black Americans during the 1960s, yet full equality remains elusive. Looting, property damage, and interpersonal violence are performed as rituals of compensation for historical injustice. The riot taxonomy presented here views racial collective violence as an evolutionary social phenomenon that has changed over time in association with two critical variables: (1) Black citizenship status and (2) the behavior of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. This framework extends the work of Allen D. Grimshaw, who specified four patterns of urban racial violence: *spontaneous brawls*, which involve an immediate disturbance among bystanders; the *mass, uncoordinated battle*, when groups of race attack isolated members of another; the *urban pogrom*, a “full-scale assault” of one group upon another; and *stray assaults*, or conflicts between individuals or small groups that do not reach riot-level status (1960:110).

During the 1960s and 70s, black urban rebellions were viewed as non-purposive and meaningless, a short outburst or release of aggression. These views tended to exclude the possibility that riot events might actually be “purposeful or rationally related to relatively well-defined aims or objectives” (Feagin and Hahn 1973:30). Joe Feagin and Harlan Hahn criticize the “frustration-aggression analyses” often used to explain riot events: “anger and consequent aggression can occur without the postulated frustration.” An African American may watch as a police officer engages in some form of unjust brutality (Feagin and Hahn use the example of a pregnant woman beaten and dragged to a police car) and decided to respond with violence because the situation “violates his ‘learned standards of justice and right,’ not because of frustration in the sense of blockage of his own goal-oriented activity” (Feagin and Hahn



1973:19). The same is true of the relative deprivation theory: “Persons can react in violent fashion to an affront to their learned values, their sense of what is right and just, without any *personal sense* of deprivation” (1973:22; emphasis added). Anger can exist without one being personally frustrated or personally deprived. It is the collective resentment, the kind that slowly builds over decades—centuries, in the case of African Americans—which drives the individual to engage in a riot event.

Nathan Caplan (1970) argued for the existence of a ‘riot ideology,’ a new set of values and beliefs prevalent in a large segment of the African-American population confined to urban ghettos. A burgeoning Black consciousness, paired with a rejection of passive acquiescence in accepting ghetto conditions common in the past, created a new kind of Black character. Socialization in this black consciousness typically produces a militancy: “the outbreak of ghetto violence was inspired and perpetuated by a developing riot ideology among black Americans—a view of riots which sees them as protest, as a legitimate and productive way of making demands on the existing authority structure” (Feagin and Hahn 1973:26). Similarly, Feagin and Hahn conceive of black rebellions—they use the term ghetto revolt—as “politically meaningful acts in a struggle between powerholding groups and powerless blacks on the urban scene” (1973:vii-viii). They contend that viewing ghetto riots as “politically disruptive acts in a *continuing politically motivated struggle* between competing vested interest groups on the urban scene, therefore, seems the most promising and suggestive framework for a comprehensive understanding of recent shifts in the direction of collective violence” (Feagin and Hahn 1973:53).

Researchers in Los Angeles found evidence for the existence of a psychological paradox within those who participated in the Los Angeles riot of 1965. Rioters felt a “a psychology of hope coupled with the politics of despair. The rioters’ own personal disadvantages apparently were not at issue nor did they assume that the riot would immediately change the circumstances of their lives,” writes Sears and McConahay. “Rather, the system appeared frozen and unresponsive,” hence engagement with riot rituals functioned as a symbolic protest against the white-controlled system. Black violence was “aimed not so much at personal return, then, as at inducing powerful whites at all levels and in all areas of society to redress blacks’ grievances (1973:105). Cheryl Greenberg (1992) presents a similar argument in her analysis of the Harlem and Detroit riots that erupted during the war efforts of 1943. *White Discipline, Black Rebellion* views black-initiated violence during the 1960s and early 1970s as a collective political response

to the continued denial of rights—despite the progress made with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

This study extends existing historical sociology on race riots by extending the comparative approach across a wide swath of American history. In *Race, Space, and Riots* (2007), sociologist Janet Abu-Lughod shows how the historical development of a physical space structured the trajectory of race rioting in three large cities: Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. Her study examines how cities were formed and grew through migration, how “systems of class and caste” shaped their economic development, and most important, how “distinctive local political cultures,” are formed and transformed by amidst shifting “racial and ethnic tensions” (Abu-Lughod 2007:9). I draw upon this approach and apply it within each chapter in order to compare and contrast riot events that took place during the same time period; in this way, I identify patterns in racial collective violence both within and across historical eras. *White Discipline, Black Rebellion* contributes to the sociological literature on racial violence in the tradition established by Tolnay and Beck in *Festival of Violence* (1995), their innovative analysis of Southern lynchings between 1882 and 1930. The statistical analysis conducted here is far less sophisticated than Tolnay and Beck; nevertheless, the book includes a systematic analysis of race riot data between 1863 and 1972 to identify patterns both within and across historical eras.

## RACE RIOTS & LAW ENFORCEMENT

*White Discipline, Black Rebellion* also contributes to the literature on race, policing, and historical bias in the criminal justice system. By demonstrating how local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies failed to protect the life, liberty, and property of Black Americans throughout the entire 110-year-period under study—and in both the North and the South—I illustrate the criminal justice system’s failure to protect African Americans, basically from the start. From the first moments of freedom right up to the urban rebellions, when law enforcement was militarized in both their weaponry and tactics, Black Americans have not received equitable treatment from the United States criminal justice system. This history contributes to the growing field of Criminal Justice by shedding light on another aspect of the Black Lives Matter movement. Not only has police abuse and brutality disproportionately impacted Black Americans; not only have law enforcement agencies at both state and federal levels have failed to protect Black citizens from white violence; this book demonstrates that throughout the history

of policing in the United States, court systems staffed by white folks have consistently denied justice for Black victims of white violence. This dereliction was not limited to any one state or region of the country, nor has it ever been seriously addressed, except through so-called ‘race riot’ commissions appointed to study the root causes of violence and the Florida ruling that provided survivors of the Rosewood Massacre of 1923 with financial compensation for suffering (examined in more detail in Chapter 4).

The militarization of urban police departments began in the late 1960s, a direct response to policing Black communities following the riots. In 1966, there were “no armored personnel carriers” on display at the annual convention of the International Association of Police Chiefs; at the Kansas City meeting that took place in the fall of 1967, “four cars were exhibited and four more were advertised as in the planning stage,” explained Gary Wills, writing in 1968. “Riot weapons of all sorts—including automatic rifles—have become a great new field for commercial competition. The police are buying everything the politicians will let them” (17). Military equipment was imported directly from Vietnam to the nations’ streets to prevent further Black rebellion. “The tanks embody that psychic wall of separation the cop wants to pull around him when he moves into any group of Negroes,” explained Wills. “That is why they are necessary” (1968:18). With the Watts riot in 1965 commenced the so-called ‘white backlash’ against Black progress, and in the years to come, police departments across the nation began purchasing military-grade equipment in preparation to fight Black Americans in the nation’s urban ghettos. In 1967, the Los Angeles Police Department developed their first S.W.A.T. unit, (Special Weapons and Tactics) “as a result of several sniping incidents against civilians and police officers around the country,” including those that “occurred in Los Angeles during and after the Watts riot,” according to the Los Angeles Police Department’s website ([lapdonline.org](http://lapdonline.org)).

Nine armored tanks rolled through the streets of Detroit once the National Guard arrived in July 1967, and one emptied its guns into an apartment building (the Algiers Motel incident). White response to Black violence in Detroit was unprecedented: “Armored personnel carriers, two-ton trucks, jeeps with gun-mounts, [and] five Commando armored cars” were loaned to the Detroit Police Department so that they could wage war against Black residents (Wills 1968:55). MACE, a stream of liquid carrying irritants that evaporate once the chemicals hit the target, was instituted in police work “just when the problem of riots had made police look for new weapons, and the public was ready to accept them,” explained Wills. So in 1967, a weapon that had been

called “paralyzing gas” only a year earlier when civil rights groups attempted to have it banned, “became wildly popular in 1967. Wildly profitable” (1968:104). Smith and Wesson began distributing Wolverine Riot Helmets; other firms looked into developing gas grenades and “liquid banana peels” to cause rioters to fall. The Commando, made by Cadillac Gage and used in the Detroit riot, “swims Vietnam swamps, punches cannon fire into the jungles, repels armor-piercing bullets,” and perhaps most importantly, it functions as a “powerful psychological deterrent” (Wills 1968:109). Cadillac Gage also demonstrated a “Stoner gun that rips through brick building,” perfect for debilitating snipers firing from behind windows and walls (Wills 1968:113). *White Discipline, Black Rebellion* contributes to the Criminal Justice literature by documenting how Black-initiated collective violence proved mostly detrimental for the African-American community, in stark contrast to the history of white disciplinary violence, which time and again proved instrumental in the maintenance of white supremacy, politically, economically, and socially. Race rioting provided a pretext for the militarization of urban police departments.

White racial violence directed against Black communities has been a consistent feature of American social life—and the failure to indict and produce justice a consistent feature of the White criminal justice system. So yes, we must remember this history, as Briggs and Krakauer suggested in their *New York Times* article, but first more white Americans must be educated, not only regarding the ubiquitous nature of white-initiated collective violence across American history, but of the *instrumentality* of White violence, how it has been used as a mechanism to deny rights to Black Americans throughout our history.

# Part I

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# White Discipline

# Chapter 1

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## **Forever Free, But Always Unequal**

## **Forever Free, But Always Unequal: Emancipation, Black Citizenship, and Racial Cleansing, 1863 - 1868**

Wherever I go—the street, the shop, the house, the hotel, or the steamboat—I hear the people talk in such a way as to indicate that they are yet unable to conceive of the negro as possessing any rights at all. Men who are honorable in their dealings with their white neighbors will cheat a negro without feeling a single twinge of their honor. To kill a negro they do not deem murder; to debauch a negro woman they do not think fornication; to take the property away from a negro they do not consider robbery. The people boast that when they get freedmen affairs in their own hands, to use their own classic expression, ‘the niggers will catch hell!’ (Schurz 1865:101).

- Colonel Samuel Thomas, “Report on the Condition of the South” (Schurz 1865:101)

### INTRODUCTION

Black Americans comprised less than two percent of the North’s population in 1860, with fewer than a quarter million residents, yet they were subjected to prejudice and discrimination in nearly every aspect of social life. In most states, Black Americans were barred from suffrage, from public schools, and from public accommodations; they were confined to menial occupations when seeking employment and lived in the poorest, dirtiest, and most unhealthy quarters of the city. Race relations between Blacks and whites actually deteriorated in the North in the years leading up to the Civil War, despite the rise of abolitionist sentiment: “Indeed, the political conflict between free and slave societies seemed to deepen racial anxieties within the North,” explains historian Eric Foner in his seminal work *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution* (1988). The rise of antislavery politics in the 1840s and 1850s was “accompanied by the emergence of white supremacy as a central tenet of the Northern Democratic party.” States like Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Oregon “closed their borders entirely to blacks, reflecting the fear that, if slavery weakened, the North might face an influx of black migrants” (Foner 1988:26). And with the end of slavery came debates on even broader questions, like should the freedmen be considered citizens? Were Black folks ready to become competitive participants in the economic sphere, or did their “unique historical experience oblige the federal government to take special action on their behalf?” (Foner 1988:67).

The Emancipation Proclamation marked the beginning of Reconstruction, the reimagining of a nation still feeling the carnage of Civil War. It was a revolution, as Foner’s title indicates, inaugurating a process of transformation in American race relations. Northern racism “varied from its southern variety only by degree,” notes historian Douglas Egerton; many

northern voters “failed to stand by far-reaching racial policies,” including Republicans (2014:15). Northern whites were often critical of “what they perceived to be special-interest legislation designed to assist southern freedmen.” Many felt that, having served in the Union Army, northern whites had already “fulfilled their obligation to former slaves.” Most northern legislatures “only grudgingly endorsed black voting rights and shied away from legislation that promoted social or gender equality (Egerton 2014:16).

Irish immigrants had been flooding into northern cities like New York, driven by another famine comparable to the devastation wrought by the Great Famine (1845-1852). New York City was concentrated on eight square miles of lower Manhattan in 1863, less than a quarter of the island, and Irish immigration had increased to more than three times the average of the previous two years due to the famine. The city had roughly one million residents by the mid-1860s; of those, about half were poor or working class, packed into a two-square mile quarter of Manhattan. As Irish immigration grew, so did racial resentment: “In order to distinguish and distance themselves from African Americans at the bottom of the social ladder, Irish craftsmen and longshoremen formed trade unions and welcomed other ethnic groups, but not blacks,” explains Barnet Schecter. “Irish workers insisted on segregated workplaces—on the docks and in the factories—and threatened to quit as a group if a single black was hired. Having once been the ‘blacks of Europe,’ the Irish insisted on their membership in the white race, which at least gave their men the right to vote” (2005:35). Democratic politicians courted them in earnest with promises of money and political favors.

After the Emancipation Proclamation, Irish Americans realized that now they were competing for “acceptance in American society,” perhaps more than ever before. New York’s *Weekly Day-Book* declared that the elevation of black men and women from slavery to freed peoples lowered the status of the Irish worker, who was now ‘degraded to a level with negroes’ (Schecter 2005:99). Driven by an intense “desire for acceptance in their adopted country,” many Irish immigrants aimed to prove their loyalty through service in the Union Army (Schecter 2005:79). The *Irish-American*, an Irish-community newspaper, “backed the Union cause but opposed the Republican party and abolition with equal vehemence” (Schecter 2005:78). A complex logic, then, motivated New York’s Irish immigrants to volunteer for service in the Union Army—even as they harbored a deep antipathy to African Americans in general and the abolition of slavery in particular. The Democratic Party in New York played upon racial feeling



in a “resurgence that had peaked in July 1862 with the statewide anti-emancipation meetings” (Schechter 2005:91). A massive rally was held in Manhattan, with Democrats embracing white supremacy.

#### A RACIAL CLEANSING IN THE CITY OF LIBERTY

The mob carried placards reading NO DRAFT as they marched in two columns, one down Fifth Avenue, the other down Sixth. Both columns converged on Forty-seventh Street, marching east toward the Ninth District Draft Office. Located on Third Avenue at Forty-Sixth Street, the four-story brick building was a symbol of government intrusion upon the rights of the laboring class, and “no one anticipated resistance [to a federal draft] at so early a stage in the execution of the law, and consequently, the City and National authorities were totally unprepared to meet it,” notes *The New York Times* (Jul7 14, 1863). At 10:00 a.m. on Monday morning, July 13, the lottery “wheel was placed prominently upon the table.” The blindfolded man, whose duty was to turn the wheel, stood ready. Provost Marshal Charles Jenkins set the draft lottery wheel in motion. Conscription had begun. “Scarcely had two dozen names been called, when a crowd, numbering perhaps 500, suddenly made an irruption [sic].” The Black Joke Engine Company howled down Broadway, and a gunshot pierced the thick summer air; it was as if a signal had been given, and the chaos commenced: “clubs, stones, brickbats, and other missiles” were launched at the brick building. Families occupying the upper part of the building, “terrified beyond measure at the smashing of the windows, doors and furniture,” screamed in panic. ‘Down with the rich men, they shouted! The mob rushed the draft office, furiously seizing the “books, lists, records, and blanks, [which] were dragged into the street, torn into fragments, and scattered everywhere with loud imprecations and savage yells” (July 14, 1863).

Smoke was soon wafting from the windows as flames leapt from the building. White rioters raised their clubs amidst “vociferous shouts, and other indications of delight,” according to *The New York Times*. Stones and bricks rained down upon the burning building, despite the shouts of women and children hoping to escape from the upper floors. The fire spread rapidly, “from the enrolling office to the adjoining buildings, and the entire block was consumed” in a only a short time. The Provost Marchal’s Office was “gutted of its contents,” and the adjoining building, a “wheelwright’s shop” containing a great deal of “combustible material,” was also burnt to the ground. Next to go were the telegraph wires, as rioters hacked the lines with axes

and knives. All communication between police precincts, between the military and police, and between government officials and agents of intervention, had been suspended. The fire bellowed a “large and dark volume of smoke,” adding a horrific yet alluring quality to the ritual of collective violence. “The rioters meantime danced with fiendish delight before the burning building, while the small boys and ‘Rocks’ and ‘Softs’ sent showers of stones against the office, smashing in the doors and windows,” explained *The Times*. Apparently, the flames were doing “the work too tardily to suit them. The murky atmosphere and the heavy black clouds which lined the horizon, formed a strange, weird spectacle, which was made the more complete by the demoniac yells of the mob” (July 14, 1863). An estimated fifty thousand New Yorkers flooded the streets in the next two hours, most as spectators, according to Headley (2009:164). The New York City Draft Riot, to this day perhaps the most devastating example of racial collective violence in American history, had begun.

The Five Points was home to more than half of New York City’s Black population, and it also had a significant concentration of Irish Americans. Tenements around a single courtyard could contain as many as a thousand people. Squalor, overcrowding, and disease were serious problems in the Five Points, where “three city blocks of tenements housed more people than all of Fifth Avenue” (Schechter 2005:108). Racial segregation existed in nearly every facet of social life in New York City, but during the 1860s, ghettos exclusively for Black residents simply did not exist. Though African Americans did not “live in a distinct, large ghetto,” they were heavily “concentrated in individual buildings and streets” across the city. And this structural feature of residential space proved critical for collective violence during riot week, for their concentration in specific buildings and streets “left them easy prey to the roving mobs,” whereas, were black residents segregated in a single ghetto, that kind of dense organization may have caused residents to rally and “defend their turf” (Schechter 2005:141-2).

Irish gangs engaged in turf warfare in the Five Points, the five-corner intersection of Park, Worth, and Baxter Streets in New York City. The Forty Thieves, Kerryonians, Shirt Tails, and Plug Uglies were names given to the most prominent Irish organizations, “each with a particular grocery-groggery as its den and command center,” explains Schechter. The ‘nativists,’ American-born white men, also had their gangs, such as the American Guards, who “congregated instead on the Bowery, which was also home to the Bowery B’hoys, O’Connell Guards, and Atlantic Guards. The True Blue Americans, however, “were not nativists but

Irishmen,” and given the confusing nature of the names, each gang wore a uniform to help distinguish their organizational affiliation: “red stripes, blue-striped pantaloons, black coat and top hat, shirttails out, plug hats stuffed with wool and leather” (Schechter 2005:49).

White New Yorkers were enraged when President Lincoln announced the Enrollment Act of March 3, 1863—also known as the Civil War Military Draft Act. Many whites felt that the war was being fought for a preferred minority while little was done to benefit the plight of the Irish, who were heavily stigmatized and branded with the distinction of an inferior status. Poorer citizens were infuriated by the three-hundred-dollar ‘exemption clause,’ which provided a pathway to subvert military service by paying \$300. Indeed, the clause appeared to many New Yorkers as a “flagrant case of class discrimination,” especially since those with means could excuse themselves from war service while the working-class needed to procure an amount equivalent to the average worker’s *yearly* salary (Schechter 2005:18). The first military conscription draft in the nation’s history was held on the previous Saturday, nearly in secret, when a list of 1,200 names was drawn in a lottery. This list was published in the newspapers on Sunday morning, and class resentment began to boil immediately. “If a well-known name, that of a man of wealth, was among the number, it only increased the exasperation,” described Joel T. Headly, author, newspaper editor, and New York politician who chronicled the five days of rioting. “[F]or the law exempted every one drawn who would pay three hundred dollars towards a substitute,” and this practice produced soldiers almost exclusively from the laboring class. Since the Irish were overwhelmingly working class, a “great proportion” of the names drawn were Irish. As Headley explained, “It was in their eyes the game of hated England over again—oppression of Irishmen. This state of feeling could not be wholly concealed” (2009:149).

### *First Day*

The draft office lay in ruins. Burnt bricks, stones, and window shards were scattered across the street in black soot and crimson dust. Telegraph wires had been cut and law enforcement temporarily destabilized. Chaos reigned in the streets, and by noon, the hot sun was “obscured by heavy clouds that hung in ominous shadows over the city” (Headley 2009:164). For thirty blocks, from Cooper Institute to Forty-sixth Street, “the avenue was black with human beings—sidewalks, house-tops, windows, and stoops all filled with rioters or spectators. Dividing it like a stream, horse cars arrested in their course lay strung along as far as the eye could reach. As the glance ran along this mighty mass of men and women north, it rested at length on huge columns

of smoke rolling heavenward from burning buildings, giving a still more fearful aspect to the scene.” (Headley 2009:164). The drafting office for the Eighth Congressional District, located on Broadway near Twenty-eighth Street, conscription was “conducted without interruption until 12, when the announcement was made that further proceedings would be suspended,” according to *The Times*. “The mob soon afterward paid a visit to this place, sacked it, and then set it on fire. It was totally consumed, as well as the remainder of the block.” The Eighth and Ninth District draft offices provided tangible symbols of federal power—the authority of the national government to compel military service in the Civil War—and since these symbols also became intertwined with class exploitation, they were the first structures consumed by the mob’s desire for vengeance. These riot rituals illustrate the nature of *compensatory rebellion*: an oppressed group, in this case mostly Irish, use murder and property destruction to express existing grievances. Arson and assault were not the only rituals used to convey the message of compensation, however; widespread plundering proved more instrumental.

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## **THE MOB IN NEW-YORK.**

**Resistance to the Draft--Rioting  
and Bloodshed.**

**Conscription Offices Sacked  
and Burned.**

**Private Dwellings Pillaged and  
Fired.**

**AN ARMSBY AND A HOTEL DESTROYED.**

**Colored People Assaulted--An Unoffending  
Black Man Hung.**

**The Tribune Office Attacked--The Colored  
Orphan Asylum Ransacked and  
Burned--Other Outrages  
and Incidents.**

**A DAY OF INFAMY AND DISGRACE.**

*Source: New York Times, ProQuest Historical Newspapers*

In the sweltering afternoon of that first day, mobs began sacking houses on Lexington Avenue. The entire block on Broadway, between Twenty-eight and Twenty-ninth Streets, was decimated. Jewelry, clothing, and commodities “of all kinds were plundered and their contents carried off,” writes Headley. “A vast horde followed the rioters for the sole purpose of plunder.” On Fifth Avenue, when wealthy residents were spotted on the street, rioters would shout ‘There’s a three-hundred-dollar fellow,’ then spring to attack. “Fury at class discrimination” fueled collective resentment among the Irish (Schechter 2005:153). Wealthy New Yorkers—many of whom profited in their business ventures from the war and were now able to exchange that money for exemption from military service—became targets. New York’s bloody affair might have appropriately been labeled a ‘draft riot’ if the nature of white collective violence did not dramatically shift. And dramatically shift it did, beginning Monday afternoon. Railroad cards

entering the city “were searched, to see if any negroes were on board,” and in other sections of the city, black folks were “hunted down ... as though they were so many wild beasts.” Indeed, hundreds of black residents began seeking refuge in police stations, “and all were filled with terror” (Headley 2009:181). In the streets running north of Canal Street, in neighborhoods where many African Americans resided, “mobs of foul-looking boys and men scoured up and down in the afternoon and evening, in pursuit of negroes, who were assailed wherever found.” Even Irish women were participating in the carnival of violence, according to *The Times* (July 14, 1863).

As the first day of rioting progressed, the rituals of violence changed—and the meaning of the riot shifted with this progression, from attacks on symbols of federal and local government, to assault and murder of African American residents. Smaller mobs broke from the main force, and these groups began targeting blacks “wherever they could be found: individuals on the street, waiters in restaurants, families in mostly black tenement houses, seamen in boardinghouses, prostitutes in brothels” (Schechter (2005:141). These collective assaults reveal the initial features of a *racial cleansing*—white violence coordinated by domestic terrorists (ironically, in this case, by Irish immigrants who were viewed as ‘foreigners’ practically on the same status level as African Americans) and designed to intimidate, with extermination and exodus the primary objectives. The Irish mob was “impelled by a strange logic” used to rationalize and justify the violence: “There would have been no draft but for the war,” explains Headley, and “there would have been no war but for slavery. But the slaves were black, ergo, all blacks are responsible for the war” (2009:169). The New York Draft Riot had shifted from a compensatory rebellion, in which lower-status Irish immigrants direct their collective resentment (i.e., ‘No Draft’) against symbols of federal authority (e.g., the Ninth District Draft Office) and wealthy Republicans (e.g., like Horace Greeley and the *Tribune* building) to a racial cleansing.

The children were busy attending school. The infants and toddlers were playing in the nursery. Some were deposed in a sick bed in the infirmary. The Colored Orphan’s Asylum, located on Fifth Avenue, between Forty-third and Forty-fourth streets, was home for more than 230 children, ages four to twelve. Built of brick, the main building of the orphanage was nearly 200 feet in length. It was attached to a hospital, 100 feet in length and also built with brick, by a covered walkway. The three-story orphanage had a “large, airy and cheerful school-room in each wing, beside an infant school-room in the main building,” wrote Anna Shotwell, its founder and director (Schechter 2005:147). The grounds were well kept, with “fine shade trees” and

“flowering shrubs” that made for a fine courtyard for the kids to play (Merchants Committee 1863:25). The property also contained several workshops and the residence of the Superintendent, William Davis. Dr. James Barnett, the orphanage’s physician, “gave the first alarm” to gather the children, according to Shotwell (Schechter 2005:147).

An ax was used to split the front door. The crowd “went professionally to work” in their efforts to destroy the entire building; at the same time, they also appropriated anything of value “by which they might aggrandize themselves.” Beds, chairs, tables and “every species of furniture” were eagerly seized, according to the Merchants Committee’s report (1863:24). When the plundering had mostly been accomplished, someone hollered, ‘Burn the nigger’s nest!’ As the flames spread, teachers and staff hurriedly gathered the children on the second floor. One teacher asked, ‘Children, do you believe that Almighty God can deliver you from the mob?’ The children answered they did. Then ‘pray silently to God to protect you from this mob,’ instructed the teacher. As she rang the bell, “tears were streaming down their cheeks,” but the students “made no noise” (Schechter 2005:147). Shotwell and the others led them single file, down the stairwell. Shrieks of fury and delight awaited them outside, but miraculously all managed to escape the building unharmed, at least physically; as the Merchants’ report notes, “[s]everal cases of insanity among the colored people appear, as directly traceable to the riots” (1863:25). Members of the mob saturated the floors with inflammable substances, and the fire accelerated: “The main buildings were burned. The trees girdled by cutting with axes ; the shrubs uprooted, and the fence carried away. All was destroyed except the residence of Mr. Davis, which was sacked” (Merchants Committee 1863:25). It was insufficient to terrorize and personally enrich—absolute destruction appeared to be the objective, as indicated by the decimation of the grounds. White violence was used as a cleansing mechanism. Arson, accompanied by the absolute destruction of the grounds, delivered a message to both the whites running this institution and the broader African-American community in New York: Get out, for there will be nothing left to return to once we’re through.

William Jones left his residence on Clarkson Street in Lower Manhattan early in the evening, around 6:00, to buy a loaf of bread. He was nearly home with his bread when an Irish bricklayer along with two other white men seized Jones. The three men were enraged; they had been pursuing three African-American men down Varick Street, but each of them managed to escape the assault. The last of these black men had fled to Clarkson Street, and unfortunately for

William Jones, he served as a substitute to satisfy white fury. They beat Jones unconscious, then took his body and ‘hung him from one of the trees that shade the sidewalk by St. John’s Cemetery, according to a report from *Harper’s Weekly*. ‘The fiends did not stop there, however. Procuring long sticks, they tied rags and straw to the ends of them, and with these torches they danced around their victim, setting fire to his clothes, and burning him almost to a cinder’ (cited in Schechter 2005:157). The white violence perpetrated against African Americans on Monday evening was essentially a cleansing, an effort to purge New York City of all black residents. At about the same time that Jones was being lynched, the Eighth Precinct telegraphed the Central Office, requesting reinforcements: ‘Can’t you send five or ten men here? They are driving all the niggers out of the ward, as soon as they show on the street.’ An hour later, the Fourth Precinct warned that ‘colored boarding-houses’ were being attacked, robbed and burned. The Metropolitan Police ‘have not force enough to prevent it’ (Schechter 2005:158).

### *Second Day*

Broadway appeared deserted on the second day of rioting, Tuesday, July 14, 1863. “Stores were shut up, stages and cars stopped running, and all business was suspended,” reported Headley. “The city held its breath in dread.” (2009:209). Boats were filled to their “utmost capacity with people leaving a city that seemed doomed to destruction” (2009:210). Some groups targeted structures symbolic of power, such as police precincts, military arsenals, the homes of political officials and wealthy Republicans; other groups used myriad tactics to exterminate the African-American community. Differences in the kinds of targets selected indicated “that the original cause of the uprising had been forgotten” (2009:214). These violent rituals unmask the collective resentment New York’s Irish harbored towards black Americans. The extreme nature of the tactics reveals that expulsion—that is, *cleansing*—became the objective.

James Costello was a black shoemaker, and at 6:00 a.m. on Tuesday morning he was chased down Thirty-second Street by William Mealy, a volunteer fireman who was also a shoemaker. Mealy “may have resented the incursion of a black man into the trade,” but Costello had the tenacity to defend himself. He secured his pistol from his waist as he was running, stopped, turned, and stood, arm outstretched. He fired, hitting Mealy in the head. Mealy’s mother, who was “howling and yelling” in her grief, arrived to the scene along with her other son. Black resistance incited white discipline, and soon a “mob of two or three hundred rioters” chased Costello down, seizing his black body just before he could escape their terror into the

shelter of a residence” (Schechter 2005:204). The *Tribune* reported that the white marauders dragged James Costello’s body into the street and “pounded him with their fists and stones until his life was extinct.” A young white boy named Jacob Long, only 14-years old, threw several stones at the body, and with that, the vindictive crowd soon began chanting ‘Hang him! Hang him!’ The owner of a local horse stable provided the rope, and the mob hoisted Costello from a tree. Soon, ‘his fingers and toes had been sliced off, and there was scarcely an inch of his flesh which was not gashed’ (Schechter 2005:204). The mob “gutted and burned” his mother’s house. When a local woman informed the rioters that the row of tenements behind Costello’s mother’s home “were full of black families,” the mob proceeded to burn the building. Luckily, the tenants fled after a neighbor warned all residents in the building that whites were coming to fire it.

Many incidents of racial violence were clustered in the Fourth Precinct on Tuesday evening, especially on Roosevelt Street. Rioters attacked a “colored seaman’s boarding-house,” located at “Nos. 64 and 76 Roosevelt-street, occupied by Mr. Beverly,” at around 6:00 p.m. Lodgers were robbed and evicted from the building before it was set on fire. Four African American men (William Armstrong, William Heath, Theodore Turner, and James Scott), all residing on Roosevelt, were beaten so badly they were sent to the hospital. At 6:30 p.m., the “colored boarding-house of Albert Lyons, No. 20 Vandewater-street,” had its doors busted down and all its windows shattered; nine of the boarders suffered injuries in the attack. Several other attacks against black New Yorkers that took place on Tuesday evening, according to “Facts and Incidents of the Riot,” an account published in *The New York Times*. Thomas Johnson jumped from a third-story window of his burning building, located on Roosevelt Street. He broke his arm in the fall, and was immediately attacked by white rioters thereafter, though thankfully, police intervened and rescued Johnson from further abuse (or perhaps death). Mary Williams, a 24-year-old Black woman, jumped from the window of a tenement on Roosevelt Street “while being pursued by the infuriated mob.” Her building was also on fire. Around 7:00 p.m., a house on Dover Street occupied by William P. Powell as “a Colored Seamen’s Home, was attacked by the rioters, the doors and windows broken, the occupants driven out and the furniture destroyed.” All occupants were rescued by the police and transported to the station house for protection. Many Black New Yorkers spent the night huddled in terror in one of the city’s precincts as a wave of white violence swept over lower Manhattan. In the Sixth Precinct, a mob of nearly 500 white rioters invaded the residences at “Nos. 104 and 105 Park-street.” White marauders drove Black



Americans from their tenements, “assaulting them with stones and other missiles” (July 15, 1863). For more than three hours late Tuesday into Wednesday morning, a ‘reign of terror’ existed on both Sullivan and Thompson streets. Several buildings were fired, and “a large number of colored persons were beaten so badly that they lay insensible in the street for hours after,” according to *The Times*. “Two colored children at No. 59 Thompson-street were shot and instantly killed. Men, women, and children in large numbers flocked to the Eighth Precinct Station-house for protection” (July 16, 1863). More than 100 African Americans huddled in the police station seeking shelter from the barbarians now on parade.

Mobs of white men were hunting and tracking black people all the way to the waterfronts, so much so that it “became a regular hunt for them.” When an Irishman spotted a black person in the streets, he “would call forth a *haloo*, as when a fox breaks cover, and away would dash a half dozen men in pursuit.” Whites “struck deadly terror to the heart” of black New Yorkers, especially on this Tuesday, the bloodiest of rioting during an historic week of violence. If caught, the black man was “pounded to death at once,” and if the target escaped to a residence for safety, “it was set on fire, and the inmates made to share a common fate” (Headley 2009:207). Black folks were sometimes driven in fear all the way to the Hudson or the East River, forced to leap off a pier, “preferring to take his chances in the water rather than among these bloody men” (Headley 2009:208).

The pillaging of entire black neighborhoods continued Tuesday night. White rioters raided “a number of negro dwellings” on Thirty-Second Street, between Sixth and Seventh avenues. The buildings were practically demolished, according to *The Times*; multiple attempts were made “to fire the whole vicinity” (July 16, 1863). Though *The Times* only gives scant attention to two lynchings that occurred that night, it remains the most terrorizing of all riot rituals—and perhaps the most effective, symbolically, in terms of motivating Black residents to flee the city. “An unfortunate negro, who made an attempt to fly for his life from the fury of these persecutors, was caught and severely beaten with stones and bludgeons,” explained a reporter for *The Times*: “the infuriated mob, not satisfied with thus brutally mangling their victim, slipped a rope around his neck and hung him to a tree in the neighborhoods, where he remained until quite an early hour” on Thursday morning. “Another negro was also hung by the mob in the forenoon,” this time on Thirty-Sixth Street, between Sixth and Seventh avenues (July 16, 1863). Captain Morr of the United States artillery arrived at Thirty-second Street with a force

of soldiers to lower the body, but they were met with defiant opposition from rioters in the area. “After requesting them to disperse, and being still menaced by the crowd,” Captain Morr ordered his men to fire: “three rounds of grape were poured into them with fearful effect,” and when they finally dispersed, “it was ascertained that upward of twenty-five had been killed and a number seriously wounded. Late in the evening, around midnight, whites even attempted to burn an African-American church located on Thirtieth Street, between Seventh and Eighth avenues, but the attack was thwarted with the arrival of police (Headley 2009).

White violence grew in intensity on Tuesday as the rioting consumed “vastly larger numbers than on Monday,” according to *The Times*. Thousands of spectators watched in awe as the disorder spread through the city. All large manufacturing establishments in the city were shuttered for the day: “labor on the docks and at the shipyards was suspended, and every branch of business was arrested, leaving thousands of persons at liberty to participate in the excesses, either passively as spectators, or in an active manner.” There was “no mistaking the fact that pillage was the prime incentive of the majority,” *The Times* concluded. “Resistance to the draft was the flimsiest of veils to cover the wholesale plundering which characterized the operations of the day” (July 15, 1863).

### *Third Day*

By Wednesday, July 15, draft riots had also broken out in Staten Island, Newark and Jersey City; other cities, including Tarrytown, Hastings, Jamaica, New Rochelle, and Rye were also afflicted with violence. That Wednesday was the hottest day of the year, and it “dawned with black smoke from sixty charred buildings” hovering in the air (2005:203). Many who tried to flee the city were prevented as rioters managed to tear up railroad tracks; roads in Westchester “were jammed with refugees, as were the docks and railroad stations” (Schechter 2005:203). New Yorkers feared their city would soon be in ruins, a smoldering tract of debris sites rife with scavengers.

Abraham Franklin, a 23-year-old Black American who was disabled but served as coachman for a member of the upper class, stopped in to visit his mother who lived at Seventh Avenue and Twenty-eighth Street. Perhaps the whites had spied his entrance, for they “broke down the door, seized him, beat him over the head and face with fists and clubs, and then hanged him in the presence of his mother,” according to the Merchant’s Report (1863:14). Their blood lust yet satisfied, this deranged group dragged Abraham Franklin’s body into the street. An Irish laborer who lived nearby shouted, “Hang the damned negro!” The mob then set his mother’s

house on fire; they proceeded to “pummel his body, kicking and beating him mercilessly before finally hanging him from a lamppost while his mother watched helplessly” (Schechter 2005:205). When soldiers finally arrived to disperse the crowd and lower Franklin from the tree, the young man “raised his arm once slightly and gave a few signs of life,” but for some reason, the soldiers decided to leave the body in the street. After the authorities left the scene, the mob returned, and Franklin’s body was again suspended in the air. In an event foreshadowing the age of spectacle lynching, whites began “cutting out pieces of flesh and otherwise mutilating it” (Merchants’ Committee 1863:14). A sixteen-year-old butcher’s apprentice ‘took hold of the private parts . . . and dragged the body’ through the streets,” writes Schechter (2005:205-6).

Collective white violence took the forms of both compensatory rebellion and racial cleansing during the third day. Marines armed with howitzers “guarded all entrances to the Navy Yard,” and Broadway “was almost deserted—no stages were running, street-cars had disappeared.” Headley describes New York appearing as if it was “Sabbath day,” with stores mostly shuttered (2009:230). At 12:50 p.m., the Fifteenth Precinct sent a telegraph requesting assistance for officers at the Twenty-first Precinct, and five minutes later, a telegraph from the Twenty-sixth Precinct announced that “Government stores in Greenwich, near Liberty, are on fire; fired by mob.” By 1:47 p.m., word arrives from the Twenty-ninth Precinct that the attack was finished: “The mob have cleared Twenty-first Precinct Station house” (Headley 2009:235). Near Eighth Avenue and Thirty-second Street “a vast crowd, numbering some five thousand” began furiously “sacking houses and hanging negroes.” The Eighth Regiment Artillery was dispatched to the scene, and as they marched up the avenue, they saw three negroes hanging dead, while the crowd around filled the air with fiendish shouts.” Officers lowered the lynched black bodies, but this further ignited the wrath of the mob, who rushed the soldiers with “stones, brick-bats, and slung-shots” (Headley 2009:231). After the military fired five or six rounds into the crowd, the rioters scattered down side streets. But after General Dodge, Colonel Mott, Captain Howell and the rest of the Eight Regiment Artillery marched to another part of the city, members of the mob gathered again at the ghastly triple lynching “and strung up afresh the lifeless bodies of the negroes” (Headley 2009:232).

William Henry Nichols was attacked in his home at 147 East 28<sup>th</sup> Street during the afternoon on Wednesday. His mother, identified in the Merchants’ Report as Mrs. Statts, had arrived to visit with her son the day prior; she provided the following account: At 3:00 the mob

arrived at his mother's doorstep and "immediately commenced an attack with terrific yells, and a shower of stones and bricks, upon the house." Williams lived in a room next to a poor woman, "who had been confined with a child on Sunday, three days previous. Some of the rioters broke through the front door with pick axes, and came rushing into the room where tiffs [sic] poor woman lay, and commenced to pull the clothes from off her." Nichols claimed that since their "rage was chiefly directed against men," he hid his son behind him and ran through the back door, down into a basement. "In a little while I saw the innocent babe, of three days old, come crashing down into the yard," he recalled. Several white rioters "had dashed it out the back window, killing it instantly." Streams of water began pouring down into the basement where he lay huddled with his son—the mob had "cut the Croton water-pipes with their axes." Fearing they would all be drowned in the cellar—there were ten people hiding with Nichols and his son, mostly women and children—William Henry Nichols took his boy and "flew past the dead body of the babe, out to the rear of the yard," hoping to escape through an open lot into 29<sup>th</sup> Street:

But here, to our horror and dismay, we met the mob again; I, with my son, had climbed the fence, but the sight of those maddened demons so affected me that I fell back, fainting, into the yard; my son jumped down from the fence to pick me up, and a dozen of the rioters came leaping over the fence after him. As they surrounded us my son exclaimed, 'save my mother, gentlemen, if you kill me.' 'Well, we will kill you,' they answered; and with that two ruffians seized him, each taking hold of an arm, while a third armed with a crow-bar, calling upon them to stand and hold his arms apart, deliberately struck him a heavy blow over the head, felling him, like a bullock, to the ground.

Nichols's boy died in a New York hospital two days later. "I believe if I were to live a hundred years I would never forget that scene," he said, "or cease to hear the horrid voices of that demoniacal mob resounding in my ears [sic]" (Merchants' Report 1863:16-17). His account reveals the devastating psychological effect of white violence. Like ripples that emanate from a stone cast into a still lake, the memory reverberates from this incident throughout her life, causing continued debilitation. The total dispossessing effect of the Irish violence perpetuated against the African-American community in New York City could never be entirely accounted for; the sense of security is stripped from their possession, and behavioral adaptations to insecurity and the threat of white violence was likely passed down across generations, to the children of those who survived.

Telegraph exchanges between precincts during the afternoon on Wednesday indicate the extent to which racial violence had intensified throughout the city. A 3:15 p.m. the Twenty-fourth Precinct notified law enforcement that a mob was firing a building on Second Avenue,

near Twenty-Eighth Street. The houses were “occupied by negroes, who are fleeing for their lives.” Fifteen minutes later, the Twenty-first Precinct released an alarm: “attack on the colored people in Second Avenue, between Twenty-eighth and Twenty-ninth Streets.” By 4:00 p.m., the Twenty-first Precinct reported that a mob had “captured some five or six negroes, and are preparing to hang them.” Reinforcements needed immediately. Just over an hour later, police from the Twenty-ninth Precinct reported that rioters on Seventh Avenue and Twenty-Eighth Street had just “killed a negro,” and at 5:25 p.m., the First Precinct reported that Irish rioters “have killed negroes” at Pier 4 on the North River (Headley 2009:236). The techniques of racial cleansing were also occurring at the corner of Seventh Avenue and Twenty-seventh Street, where General Sandford and an infantry force of 150 had assembled to combat rioters engaged in “gutting, and plundering, and firing houses.” General Sandford and his unit fell upon a horrific atrocity: “As they approached, they saw flames bursting from windows, while, to complete the terror of the scene, the body of a negro hung suspended from a lamppost, his last struggle just ended.” After a violent exchange between the regiment and the rioters—including sniper violence from the rooftops—for “some cause not fully explained, the imposing force . . . marched away, leaving the mob in full possession of the field.” General Sandford’s dereliction in protecting the area proved fateful for his unit “had hardly reached the protection of the arsenal again, when the plundering and violence recommenced.” It wasn’t long before “two more negroes were amusing the spectators with their death throes, as they hung by the neck from lamp-posts. This was the second expedition sent out by Sandford, the commander in chief of the military, during the riot” (Headley 2009:239). By 10:00 on the Wednesday evening, a mob began “pulling down the negro houses in York Street, which they soon left a heap of ruins,” writes Headley. Houses were plundered and set on fire in various parts of the city. The cacophony created by ringing “fire-bells, thunder of cannon, and marching of troops, made this night like its predecessor—one of horror” (2009:242).

The Metropolitan Police actively combated both property destruction *and* racial violence during the riot. Coordinated communication by telegraph permitted vastly outnumbered police and military forces to counteract the overwhelming collective violence that had spread throughout the city. General Brown and the police commissioners were able “to dispatch men quickly to a threatened point,” and to shift officers from ward to ward. If trouble was percolating in another part of the city, telegraphs were fired to the precinct station, a response allowing

police to quickly “change their route.” Headley explains how New York’s communication infrastructure aided state intervention in response to white violence: “A force sent to a certain point, after dispersing the mob, would be directed to make a tour through the disaffected districts—all the time keeping up its communication with head-quarters, so that if any serious demonstration was made in that section of the city, it could be ordered there at once, thus saving half the time it would take to march from headquarters” (2009:219). The level of force presented against the rioters increased by Wednesday evening as well. After reports that a mob was mobilizing in strength on First Avenue, between Eighteenth and Nineteenth streets, Colonel Winslow, of the Fifth regiment, ordered a detachment of 150 armed volunteers and “a battery of two howitzers” to the disturbance. The volunteers march down Nineteenth street, which was lined with tenement houses, where many of the rioters called home. These buildings provided both shelter from attack and elevated perches from which to attack, an advantage in combat: “From the roof and windows of every house the mob at once opened an attack, delivering a brisk and persistent fire upon the military of musketry and pistols, as well as a volley of bricks and other missiles,” reports *The Times* (i.e., “Another Day of Rioting”). The howitzers “raked the avenue up and down with canister, of which ten rounds were discharged,” killing perhaps thirty people. The rioters were dispersed, for the moment, but violence was renewed at 11:00 p.m.; conflict continued until well after midnight (July 16, 1863).

Following “an utter rout of the army of Lee on the Potomac,” Secretary of War Edward M. Stanton telegraphed Mayor Opdyke. Five regiments had been given orders to return to New York. ‘The retreat of Lee, now become a rout, with his army broken and much heavier loss of killed and wounded than was supposed, will relieve a large force for the restoration of order in New York,’ Stanton announced (*The New York Times*, July 16, 1863; Schechter 2005:201). New York’s police force, and those soldiers stationed in the city, were “succumbing to fatigue” when federal reinforcement began to arrive at roughly 10:00 p.m. By midnight on Wednesday in York Street, located in the neighborhood of St. John’s Park off of West Broadway, “two rows of small wooden and brick houses” were attacked by “a crowd of Irish, about a hundred strong,” according to the Merchants’ Report: “amid the shrieks and groans of the unfortunate women and children the whole precinct was devoted to destruction.” White raiders “carried off the little of all these unfortunate creatures, in the way of beds, chairs, tubs, smoothing irons, etc.” before a body of cavalry arrived (Merchants’ Report 1863:23). Only the arrival of toops prevented the mob

from torching all of homes. The Seventy-fourth Regiment of the New York State National Guard was the first unit of soldiers to arrive; around midnight, the Sixty-fifth Regiment hit the streets. Around 4:30 a.m., Acton received a telegram from the Twenty-eighth Precinct: the Seventh Regiment arrived from Pennsylvania, and about six hundred troops “disembarked at the foot of Canal Street” (Schechter 2005:222). It was the beginning of the end.

#### *Fourth Day*

Shortly after midnight, a throng of Irishmen raided a predominantly Black neighborhood on York Street, a single block running from West Broadway to a lane in the back of St. John’s Church. Known as St. John’s Park, the community contained “two rows of small wooden and brick houses” occupied predominantly by African-American “white washers and ironers,” according to an account published in the Merchants Committee’s report (1863:23). More than 100 men and boys participated in the assault; drunken revelers flooded from a “low tavern” at the corner of York Street and West Broadway, wielding clubs and knives. Most of the occupants “somehow managed to get away,” and despite several attempts to fire the entire neighborhood later in the early morning hours, Thursday, July 16, their efforts were unsuccessful. Plunder would prove quite instrumental for the Irish invaders, however, and as the sun rose over the city, “the scene presented was desolate beyond description.” Rioters had carried off “beds, chairs, tubs, smoothing irons,” essentially what little these working folks had. “Not a vestige of glass remained in the windows,” reported the Merchants Committee: “the sashes were gone, the doors presented the appearance of lattice-work with the apertures very large, and great heaps of bricks and stones were piles upon the stoops and dispersed about the floors of the rooms.” When asked whether the mob “had robbed her of everything, a poor negro woman replied, with a look of abject despair and quiet resignation: ‘Pretty much all, sir’ (1863:23). The Merchants Committee’s report indicates the extent to which whites capitalized on disorder and used violence to profit while African Americans were dispossessed of all they owned. White collective violence has a duality—it enriches the poor and working-class Irish while simultaneously stripping blacks of their property, their sense of personal security, and in some cases, their lives. This is instrumental white violence; it elevates the wealth of one particular class, improving their chance at upward social mobility in an increasingly competitive economic industrial context while rendering another class beaten, propertyless, and potentially even homeless. The cumulative burden of this violence for the Black community is great massive, and

the impact does not simply end with the immediate victims of white violence. It is far more challenging to help one's children achieve upward mobility in the social hierarchy when all property has been stolen, or when one is beaten so badly that he or she is unable to work, and therefore unable to earn a living. Yet these were the kinds of difficulties confronting hundreds of African Americans in New York City following the riots.

Rioting was like warfare in form once again that Thursday, with the police and military combatting the Irish subversives throughout New York. At 1:25 p.m., a telegraph arrived from the Twenty-first Precinct: "The mob has charged our military, about twenty-five in number, and driven them into Jackson's foundry, First Avenue and Twenty-eighth Street. The mob are armed, and every time a regular shows himself, they fire" (Headley 2009:247). Not thirty minutes later, another telegram arrives to headquarters from the Twenty-first Precinct: "Send military assistance immediately to First Avenue and Twenty-eighth Street. The mob increases, and will murder the military force." The arrival of military reinforcements "increased the boldness of the mob," and in fact, they "forced the soldiers to retire." Headley reports that once news of the struggle reached the Seventh Regiment, they marched to scene, and the mob dispersed—only to reassemble on Twenty-ninth Street, "plunder[ing] the stores in the vicinity, and spread[ing] devastation on every side" (Headley 2009:248).

It was not until 9:00 that evening, when General Brown dispatched Captain Putnam to the scene of violence at the corner of Thirty-first Street and Second Avenue, that the rioters were cleared from the area. Headley reports that 11 of the "ringleaders were shot down, and bodies lay thick on the pavement. But this did not intimidate those in the windows, or on the roofs, and they kept up a steady fire" (2009:249). The violence up to this point on the fourth day, at least in this part of the city, featured the elements of *compensatory rebellion*—local police and military are targeted, as are stores and the homes of wealthy Republicans for looting. Sniper tactics were utilized to inflict 'compensation' on those forces that ignited collective resentment among the Irish. By evening of the fourth day, "over a thousand special policemen had been sworn in, and five hundred or more citizens had volunteered their services, while the steady arrival of returning regiments swelled the military force into formidable proportions" (Headley 2009:252).

By Saturday morning, though it was announced that the federal government was planning on enforcing the draft, despite rumors to the contrary, there were "perhaps ten thousand" troops stationed in New York City. Governor Seymour finally gave the order "to arrest the march of



regiments hastening from various sections of the city” (Headley 2009:267). Headley suggests that the “entire cost to the city was probably three million dollars,” and the Police Commissioners estimated the number of rioters killed at about 1,200 (approximated by taking the reported number of deaths in the city for several weeks prior to the riots and the number of deaths for the time after, with the excess roughly 1,200). “The dead and wounded were hurried away, even in the midst of the fight, and hidden in obscure streets, or taken out of the city for fear of future arrests or complications. Hence there was no direct way of getting at the exact number of those who fell victim to the riot (Headley 2009:270).

### *Instrumental White Violence*

The anti-Black violence that erupted in New York City during July 1863 directly impacted the structure of the nation’s largest city in the decade following the riot event, likely the deadliest in the nation’s history. “Nearly one thousand persons, most of them the heads of families, lost all they had, excepting what they took with them in flight, or had deposited elsewhere,” reported Charles Ray, the Reverend at Bethesda Congregationalist Church (Schechter 2005:250). More than 100 buildings in the city been destroyed by arson. More than 200 other buildings had been “looted or damaged,” with estimates of the total property damage ranging between \$3 million and \$5 million dollars—in today’s money, the equivalent of between \$60 and \$100 million (Schechter 2005:250). Wealthy whites, particularly those who supported the Republican Party, were also targeted during the week of violence, thus this figure cannot be directly attributable to property loss suffered by the African-American community; nevertheless, with thousands of black families directly affected, the riot exacerbated the already tenuous economic circumstances for most in the black community. And Schechter notes that the “process of expelling blacks from the city continued,” but took on new forms: “Blacks had trouble getting their old jobs back, particularly on the docks, where white longshoremen drove them away. Blacks could not get to jobs that were available, because conductors and passengers on street railroads, both from prejudice and fear of renewed attacks by white mobs, refused to let them onto the cars. Blacks also continued to be assaulted sporadically by bands of white youths” (2005:266). Black residents fled the violence, seeking shelter in smaller Black communities like New Brooklyn, Flatbush, and the Flatlands where “armed blacks patrolled the edges of the settlements, keeping rioters away and creating havens for hundreds of refugees from New York City and Brooklyn” (Schechter 2005:243).

The Merchants' Committee for the Relief of the Colored People opened its office at No. 350 Fourth Street on Thursday, July 23. Thirty-eight applicants received aid on the first day. Then on Friday, 318 applicants were provided relief, and by Saturday, July 25, "the streets in the neighborhood were literally filled with applicants," notes the report. The *N. Y. Express* estimated that the building 'was soon surrounded by nearly three thousand negroes' (1863:8). By August 21, 1863, nearly 6,400 "persons of mature age" had been relieved; because a third of these cases were initiated by applicants who were heads of families, the total number of persons relieved was 12,782. The Merchants' Committee Report provides an assessment of relief cases in the weeks following the riots among New York's Black community: the committee totaled 12,121 applicants "whose cases were considered and acted upon at the office during the month." In addition, several lawyers assisted with "1,000 notices of claims for damages against the city" and clerks working for the Merchants' Committee "have recorded on the books over 2,000 claimants for a sum of over \$145,000" (1863:10). This data only begins to indicate the extent to which black folks were dispossessed of their property during riot week in New York, and this is not the only technique by which whites successfully inhibited the upward social mobility of African Americans. Black workers were also systematically denied employment through a variety of coercive mechanisms *after* the racial violence had ended:

[O]bstacles have been thrown in the way of the attempt of colored laborers to resume their wonted occupation, cases having occurred where men who had labored faithfully for years in a situation have been refused a restoration to their old places. Street railroads, by which many had been accustomed to pass from their distant homes to their usual places of business, have refused them permission to ride, and have thus deprived them of the ability to perform their customary duties and earn their needful pay. (1863:12)

The merchants called upon their fellow citizens to protect the "full and equal right of the colored man to work for whoever chooses to employ him," yet despite the aid and their public declaration of good will, many black residents began leaving New York City as a result of the racial cleansing: "Within two years, the city's black population had dropped to below 10,000—a 20 percent decline from more than 12,500 in 1860." As Schechter explains, the riots "inaugurated an exodus of African Americans from New York City that lasted for seven years" (2005:265).

In 1865, the Citizens Association's inspectors concluded that the riot had definitive consequences—the "decline of New York's black population ward by ward throughout the city." The black neighborhood on Sullivan Street "had been replaced by Germans," according to the report, "and across the city, 'the colored population formerly so numerous have almost entirely

disappeared” (Schechter 2005:304). Evidence suggests that the draft riots, then, had serious structural consequences for African Americans in the decade following white collective violence, consequences that reverberate across generations, beginning with those directly affected by white racial violence. After losing personal property and any savings they may have accumulated, these Black Americans are prevented from passing an inheritance to their children. Collective white violence has consequences for the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Feelings of white solidarity intensified in the years following the riots, and with it, the relational and cultural distance separating blacks from whites became more extreme. A Democratic resurgence, fortified by white supremacy, would seize New York City, helping to “undermine Republican plans for national Reconstruction” over the next dozen years (Schechter 2005:270). The draft riots produced “deeper and more long-lasting damage to the fabric of American society,” writes Schechter, consequences that seriously altered black-white social relations in the city: “The rioters had succeeded in scattering free blacks to the edges of white society, a prelude to the formation of large black ghettos in New York and other cities.” The campaign of terror that developed across the south that confronted Reconstruction “would bear a striking resemblance to the racial pogrom in the streets of New York” (Schechter 2005:252).

### *A Question of Black Citizenship*

The Emancipation Proclamation was a “fit and necessary war measure” for suppressing the Confederate rebellion,” declared President Lincoln. He explicitly called upon Black folks to “abstain from all violence,” unless necessary in self-defense, and should be permitted to “labor faithfully for reasonable wages.” On that September 22 in 1862, President Lincoln essentially invited all former slaves to join the Union Army: “And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service” (Lincoln 1863). And come in service they would. The *freedmen*, as they were called—as opposed to *freemen*, Black men who had been born free or obtained their freedom prior to the Civil War—immediately began to flock from the plantation to Union lines. Black migration began in earnest, and the exodus of black labor from southern plantations began nearly the instant former slaves “became aware that they could do so with impunity” (Schurz 1865:32).

In the South there were 3,953,740 Black slaves and 261,918 free Black persons when Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation. As soon “as it became clear that Union

armies would not or could not return fugitive slaves,” the freedmen offered his services to the Federal Army, and Black soldiers were responsible for carrying the North to victory in the war. It was “also true that his withdrawal and bestowal of his labor decided the war,” wrote Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction* (1935:57). Indeed, the military service of Black men was *the* first step toward social equality—a strategy Black Americans would follow again in 1898, with the Spanish American War; then again in 1917, when the United States entered World War I; then again in 1941, after America was attacked at Pearl Harbor and entered World War II. Nothing else but the threat of defeat made emancipation possible in the United States. “Nothing else made Negro citizenship conceivable,” wrote Du Bois, “but the record of the Negro soldier as a fighter” (1998:104). General Oliver Otis Howard, known as the ‘Christian General’ for his compassion, reported on the conditions facing the Freedmen’s Bureau in the wake of slavery’s collapse: “In every state many thousands were found without employment, without homes, without means of subsistence, crowding into towns and about military posts, where they hoped to find protection and supplies. The sudden collapse of the rebellion, making emancipation an actual, universal fact, was like an earthquake. It shook and shattered the whole previously existing social system. It broke up the old systems and threatened a reign of anarchy” (Du Bois 1998:224).

In December 1865, the South was paralyzed with anxiety and acquiescence after their surrender at Appomattox. “Men of standing in the political world expressed serious doubts as to whether the rebel States would ever again occupy their position as States in the Union, or be governed as conquered provinces,” wrote Carl Schurz in his report on conditions in the South. “The public mind was so despondent that if readmission at some future time under whatever conditions had been promised, it would then have been looked upon as a favor. The most uncompromising rebels prepared for leaving the country. The masses remained in a state of fearful expectancy” (Schurz 1865:4). In the same month, Thaddeus Stevens declared in Congress that the federal government must provide some form of economic base for the freed people, for if it failed to do so, former slaves would have no chance at survival in the South. “We have turned, or are about to turn, loose four million slaves without a hut to shelter them or a cent in their pockets,” Stevens declared on the floor of Congress. “The infernal laws of slavery have prevented them from acquiring an education, understanding the commonest laws of contract, or of managing the ordinary business life,” and as such, Congress was “bound to provide for them” until they could care for themselves. “If we do not furnish them with homesteads, and hedge

them around with protective laws; if we leave them to the legislation of their late masters,” Stevens warned, “we had better have left them in bondage” (Du Bois 1935:265-66). African-American leaders gradually “turned toward emphasis on economic emancipation.” The *right to work* was the cornerstone of freedom, its foundation, but the freedmen also expected that “the *right to vote* would come,” perhaps when the freed people had gained a “sufficient education” and a “minimum of property to deserve” the privilege (Du Bois 1998:351).

President Lincoln’s ideas regarding how to best establish the former slaves appears to have been evolving right up to the time of his assassination. In December 1863, the president issued an order that would allow black families to claim up to forty acres of land, with the price fixed at \$1.25 per acre and a down payment of 40 percent due up front at the time of the claim, thus “for as little as twenty dollars, black families might obtain a plot of land, and as Congress equalized the pay of black soldiers in 1864 at sixteen dollars each month, that sum was hardly out of reach” (Egerton 2014:99). “As with Lincoln’s evolving views on black suffrage,” notes historian Douglas Egerton, “his December edict revealed an increasingly flexible politician willing to reconsider old positions as new contingencies arose” (2014:99). Unfortunately for Black Americans and their descendants, ‘increasingly flexible’ was not a character trait of the intransigent Andrew Johnson, Lincoln’s successor in waiting after Wilkes Booth’s bullet.

There were four classes of Southerners after the Civil War, according to Carl Schurz, who traveled the South gauging white attitudes on issues of race and the relationship between the states and the federal government. He organized the attitudes of White Southerners into four classes, the first of which expressed sentiments of reconciliation: “We acknowledge ourselves beaten, and we are ready to submit to the results of the war.” This kind of individual acknowledged the emancipation of slaves, and though they maintained their “principles and convictions of right,” they reluctantly accepted the “facts as they are.” These men wanted to be “reinstated as soon as possible in the enjoyment and exercise of political rights,” and, while not free from “traditional prejudice,” these individuals were planters, merchants, and professional men. The second class of men were those ‘incorrigibles’ who continued to yearn for southern autonomy in all matters; composed mostly of young men, this class “persecutes Union men and negroes whenever they can do so with impunity, insist clamorously upon their ‘rights,’ and are extremely impatient of the presence of the federal soldiers,” wrote Schurz. “A good many of them have taken oaths of allegiance and amnesty” to a third class of men—those “whose

principle object is to have the States without delay restored to their position and influence in the Union and the people of the States to *the absolute control of their home concerns*" (1865:5; emphasis added). This class is "strong in numbers, deals in brave talk, addresses itself directly and incessantly to the passions and prejudices of the masses, and commands the admiration of the women" (1865:6). Finally, the fourth class consists of the "multitude of people who have no definite ideas about the circumstances" they find themselves; these individuals, "whose prejudices and impulses are strong" but whose "intellects are weak" find themselves in a precarious ether and are "apt to be carried along by those who know how to appeal" to their racism (Schurz 1865:6).

White southerners fought to continue the tradition of plantation discipline in their efforts to maintain a racial caste system. Schurz notes that throughout his journey through the south, the practice of corporal punishment "was still continued to a great extent," so much so that it is "hardly necessary to quote any documentary evidence" on the matter: "The habit is so inveterate with a great many persons as to render, on the least provocation, the impulse to whip a negro almost irresistible. It will continue to be so until the southern people will have learned, so as never to forget, that a black man has rights which a white man is bound to respect. (Schurz 1865:21). Schurz characterizes the southern feeling toward blacks as the *spirit of persecution*, and the 'impulse to whip' clearly belies the false (forced) intimacy that existed on plantations prior to the fall of slavery. Emancipation awoke a *new spirit* in the freed people, but perhaps surprisingly—and certainly mind boggling to the white population, for whom the ominous specter of slave insurrection and rebellion was an ever-present threat—retaliatory violence was not common. Schurz wrote that "the conduct of the colored people is far more submissive than anybody had a right to expect," and acts of violence perpetrated by freedmen against white folks "do not stand in any proportion to those committed by whites against negroes," for which he cited southern newspapers as evidence. "Every such occurrence" of black violence was "sure to be noticed in the southern papers and we have heard of but very few" (Schurz 1865:33).

Newcomers flocked to Memphis after its capture by Union forces in June of 1862, and by 1865 when the Civil War finally ended, returning Confederate veterans found a very different Memphis than the city they left. Union troops had now occupied the city three years. Former slaves fled the countryside, searching for employment away from the plantation and its systems of white control. "Along with the army and the benevolent association agents, a third cohort of

Yankee invaders came to Memphis during and after the war, and in far greater numbers,” writes historian Stephen Ash. “These were men on the make (‘carpetbaggers,’ as they would eventually be branded by the Rebels) who saw the post-slavery South as a new frontier of business opportunity” (2013:19). The war years had been devastating, but in the spring of 1866, commerce was surging along with the steamboats down the Mississippi River, and Black folks flocked to the city in search of lost relatives—forcibly separated during slavery by white owners—and economic opportunity. It was a crucible of resentment rife for racial conflict, and on May 1, 1866, white residents unmasked their hostility.

### A RACIAL CLEANSING IN A RIVERBOAT TOWN

A crowd of Black soldiers congregated on South Street in Memphis, cheering Abraham Lincoln’s name. It was a warm Tuesday afternoon on May 1, 1866. Several members of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Colored Heavy Artillery were drinking whiskey, celebrating their mustering out from the Union Army the day before, when four Irish police officers passed the area around Fort Pickering, located on lower South Street. One of the officers recognized a soldier celebrating. What’s going on here, he asked. “Just drinking and going on,” the black soldier tells him, to which he responds, “This will not do.” The policeman ordered the congregation to move out of the street, but his order is ignored. Some of the black men began taunting the policemen, calling out ‘Hurrah for Abe Lincoln.’ (Ash 2013:96). ‘Your old father, Abe Lincoln, is dead and damned,’ snapped one officer (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:7). The police arrested two of the men, but as they did, Black soldiers “began to gather around the policemen, threatening them in an excited manner, and calling out ‘Club them,’ ‘Shoot them,’ according to congressional testimony.

The four Irish officers were outnumbered, and they began to retreat with the two Black soldiers they had placed under arrest. Black folks continued to gather on the streets; fierce shouts can be heard from the crowd: ‘stone them,’ ‘club them,’ they said, which eventually escalated, to shouts of ‘shoot them,’ ‘kill them.’ One young Black man came up and gave one of the officers a shove, but the officers “just keep moving east” (Ash 2013:97). That is, until a pistol shot pierces the commotion, momentarily silencing the raucous, vengeful crowd. Now the policemen, who had reached the bayou bridge, momentarily froze; they spun backward, facing a throng of black soldiers and civilians, and began firing. A general fight between Irish policeman and African-

American soldiers ensued. White police officers began “firing and shooting every negro they met,” according to testimony. A Black man was chased for blocks before “thirty shots” were fired at him. A white police officer shot and killed a Black man on the Bayou bridge, and two other Black men were also killed during a different exchange.

The police officers returned to town with reinforcements, as did the Black Union soldiers who were again thrust into battle against white racists. ‘Halt you white son of a bitch,’ one soldier cried as he aimed his Spencer rifle and fired. A “promiscuous running fight between the police and colored soldiers” ensued, though it does not appear anymore people were killed during the exchange. When the gun battle finally ended, it was dusk. The Black soldiers returned to Fort Pickering, not to leave again that evening; the white police officers again went for reinforcements, and returned about 10:00 that night with over two hundred white men, composing a *posse comitatus*. These men “found nobody on the streets and nothing to oppose them,” as all the fighting from Black men had ended earlier. This did not stop the white posse, which “commenced an indiscriminate robbing, burning, and murdering” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:8). White violence would prove instrumental over the coming three days.

Memphis’s Irish population had “adopted an especially fierce strain of racism,” one encouraged by a “working-class ethos masculinity” that valued physical power over calculated restraint (Ash 2013:52). Some native-born whites “questioned whether the Irish deserved to be considered white, or at least in the same category of whiteness as themselves.” As Ash explains, Irish status deprivation in part explains why their racism was “so vehement. Asserting their superiority to blacks was a way of claiming an equal place in white America” (2013:59). *Irish Negrophobia*, then, characterized social relations; some even “thought it more virulent in Memphis than in any other place they had seen.” The Irish extended their “intense antipathy” to Northern immigrants as well, “especially missionary teachers and preachers, deemed too friendly to the freed people—‘damned Yankee niggers,’ the Irish called them” (Ash 2013:67).

Before the riot erupted there were twelve missionary schools operating within the city with 22 teachers. More than 1,200 students were enrolled in these schools; despite the fact that these missionary schools were the “only formal education a black Memphian could get,” only “a minority of the black school-age population” were able to attend (Ash 2013:79). More schools were certainly needed, but whites were going to see to it that such a development never



transpired. Regardless, the evidence is clear: Black institutional culture, in the form of churches, schools, and benevolent aid societies had proliferated rapidly in Memphis after the demise of slavery, and a sudden, dramatic shift in black culture likely proved quite threatening for the white community, especially given education for slaves was practically unheard of in the South prior to the Civil War.

White newspaper culture in Memphis had two organs that regularly condemned black Americans and routinely supported the racist policies of the Democratic Party—the *Avalanche* and the *Argus*. Native-born Southern whites were predominantly secessionists who “remained unrepentant now, resentful of Union victory and federal authority, furious about their political disenfranchisement, hostile to equal rights for the freed people, and contemptuous of the Yankee newcomers in their city.” Ash explains that nearly every local newspaper was “controlled by such Rebels, and in the months leading up to the riot they ran lurid editorials that further inflamed by prejudice against blacks and Northerners” (2013:4).

The ‘old citizens’ of Memphis had believed “the white race was inherently superior to the black, that the black race was incapable of improvement on its own.” The slavery practiced in the ‘Old South’ “had been a benevolent institution. It had granted civilization and Christianity to people who would otherwise be heathen primitives in the African jungle” (Ash 2013:38). In March 1866, “no doubt provoked by the recent militancy of the city’s Republicans, the Conservative movement surged.” Ash reports that Conservatives organized the Johnson Club of Shelby County, and after a “series of enthusiastic meetings” in the months to follow, members “adopted a constitution and bylaws,” in addition to actively recruiting new members (2013:45). Like other white Southerners, native Memphians were concerned about “contamination by Yankee culture,” by the Northern textbooks arriving “which would only poison the minds of Southern youth.” Missionary and benevolent aid societies amounted to “a ‘concerted effort’ by Northerners, a campaign of cultural imperialism intended to warp the minds of Southern youngsters, induce them to adopt noxious Yankee notions, and turn them against the faith of their fathers” (Ash 2013:43). Ash’s analysis indicates that white cultural institutions were proliferating in Memphis just as an institutional culture was burgeoning among black residents, and in such an environment of rapid (and intense) growth (and change), Black’s theory predicts increased conflict. And conflict was particularly violent in Memphis during the spring of 1866.

Historian Stephen Ash notes that before the war, “Southern-born whites had comprised nearly half the city’s population; by 1866, perhaps one-fourth or less. There were dramatic political changes, too: the old citizens were now disenfranchised and the Irish dominated the city government” (Ash 2013:33). Memphis attracted Irish immigrants—who play a central role in the anti-black collective violence, just as they had done in New York City in 1863—and by 1866, six or seven thousand had inhabited the city, “perhaps one-fifth or one-sixth of the total population” (Ash 2013:51). African Americans far outnumbered the Irish, however. By April 1866, approximately 20,000 black folks lived in Memphis in cabins just outside Fort Pickering in an area that became known as South Memphis (Ryan 1977). In 1860, there were fewer than four thousand African Americans residing in Memphis and they comprised less than one-fifth of the population; by 1866, black folks accounted for “no less than half the total population, and very likely more” (Ash 2013:70). Racial segregation was not clearly demarcated in Memphis in the years following the collapse of the Confederacy. Blacks and whites “rubbed shoulders every day,” and most African Americans worked for white employers—many, in fact, lived with those employers. For black residents who lived on their own, racially mixed neighborhoods were the norm. While it is true that the freed people were “concentrated in South Memphis,” that district was also home for many whites, and as Ash notes, “thousands of blacks lived in other parts of the city, where whites predominated” (2013:84).

Irish resentment for blacks “had a long history,” according to Ash, an antipathy stoked by economic competition and social status. During the antebellum years, “Irish workers in the city—especially draymen, hack drivers, and day laborers—had had to compete for jobs with slaves whose masters hired them out for such work.” “Rabid antiblack sentiment” infiltrated the mindset of both Irish laborers and the city’s police department (Ash 2013:65). Indeed, there was “little ambivalence in blacks’ attitude toward the Irish,” particularly the Memphis Police, “who it seemed could not arrest a freedman without beating him senseless.” Black Union soldiers “were frequent victims of police brutality,” according to Ash. “Hardly a day passed that some black soldier, his courage perhaps fortified by liquor, did not confront a policeman and damn him as an Irish scoundrel and a son of a bitch. The policeman would invariably react violently, and a scuffle would ensue” (2013:86).

*First Day*

After the gunfight between the Irish police and black Union veterans, Sheriff Winters “immediately sought aid from the Tennessee military commander.” General Stoneman “refused to heed the Sheriff’s plea,” and when several other officials requested military intervention, “Stoneman dismissed them as irresponsible and demanded a request from the major as a prerequisite for military action.” The general was “chiefly concerned about guarding public property” until he finally received a written request from Mayor Park. General Stoneman “did not declare and enforce martial law until the afternoon of May 3—after nearly forty hours of anarchy and atrocities” (Ryan 1977:252). Though federal intervention was slow to arrive in New York City during the riots of July 1863 (New York regiments were actually engaged in Pennsylvania fighting in the war), once military force asserted itself, the riot de-escalated rather quickly; in comparison, though troops were on hand and requests for assistance had been made, delays in federal intervention “needlessly exposed Memphis’ black community to the naked fury of armed white mobs” (Ryan 1977:244).

Jackson Goodell was among the first victims of the racial cleansing carried out in Memphis. Two white policemen saw Goodell as he exited a grocery store; they followed him as he fled, unsuccessfully, called him a ‘damned rascal, “and knocked him down his head falling in the gutter. They struck him fifteen or twenty times,” then they shot him after he was down. A policemen perched above the crowd on horseback, a sergeant or lieutenant, according to the report, cried out, ‘*Kill them altogether ; the God d—d niggers ought to be killed, no matter whether the small or big ones.*’ Goodell was beaten to so badly that someone in the neighborhood had the kindness to notify his wife that her husband had been killed. She found Goodell laying in the street, alive, groaning in agony as he clung to his life. Acts of kindness ended with simple notification, however, because, according to the Select Committee’s report, the people in the neighborhood were so terrified by the mob’s vicious brutality “that none of them dared to aid her [Goodell’s wife] in bringing him into the house. She was finally encouraged to get herself in doors, “for the policemen were going to kill every negro they could catch.” But it was too late: “While she was sitting by her wounded husband holding his head in her hands, three policemen came along, and one of them said, ‘Here is a d—d nigger; if he is not dead we will finish him.’ She went out in the morning, but he was not there, and she was afterwards informed that four men had taken him off in the night.” The police refused even to

“give up the body to her for burial although she begged for it in the most piteous terms” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:9).

Albert Harris, a 53-year-old black man who was born in Virginia and raised as a slave but for the last “twelve or fourteen years,” had lived in Memphis. “Ever since I quit my owners I have been a shoemaker,” he testified. His shop was located at the corner of Winchester and Alabama Streets in North Memphis. Harris and his wife were at home on Tuesday evening, the night the riot commenced, when they were terrorized by a group of eight men, who claimed they “had orders to search [his] house for arms.” Harris volunteered that he owned a “shot-gun,” and though the men did not find any other weapons, they confiscated \$350, all that he had. Harris recognized two police officers among the group—“I just knew them by their stars,” he noted—and after they finished with him, these same men robbed \$50 “belonging to the sick man in my care, and \$10 belonging to another man who was away” (but who lived in the same building). The men did not assault Harris or his wife, but as they were leaving, the men declared “they were going to burn up the house we lived in the next night.” Later that same evening, a “blacksmith’s shop about fifty yards from me, on Alabama street, was set on fire” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:63). The shop belonged to Henry Alexander, a black man of about thirty-six years old, and his partner, George Jones. Alexander estimated the property at \$400 or \$500 (1866:117). “They burnt up everything he had there,” Harris recalled (1866:63).

Albert Harris’s case illustrates how a ‘negro riot’ became justification for the dispossession of the burgeoning African-American community in Memphis. Black families such as Harris’s were stripped of *everything* they owned, including clothes and other material possessions beyond their life savings. According to calculations by the Select Committee, at least 100 robberies were committed during more than two days of racial collective violence. The Freedmen’s Bureau estimated “the loss sustained by the government and the negroes up to the date of making their report, was \$98,319 55; and it was reported that subsequent investigations would increase the amount to at least \$120,000” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:36). Whites targeted black men and women who were industrious, like Henry Alexander, and practically eliminated his chances for economic competition by robbing him and burning his property. And they dispossessed other prosperous freed persons of everything they had been able to save since their release from bondage. Potential for upward mobility via the intergenerational transmission of accumulated wealth could easily be erased if a black person drew the ire of white laborers,

especially the Irish. Widespread disorder provided a context in which whites conducted rituals of dispossession, with devastating consequences for a black community only beginning to accumulate property as free citizens of the United States.

Late Tuesday night seven white men visited Frances Thompson, two of whom were police. "I know they were policemen by their stars," Thompson testified. "They were all Irishmen." Frances Thompson had been a slave all her life, and she used crutches to walk, since she had "a cancer on her foot," according to the congressional report. And after Frances Thompson fed these men, they began sexually assaulting her and her roommate, a 17-year-old girl named Lucy Smith who was also a former slave: "One of them then laid hold of me and hit me on the side of my face, and, holding my throat, choked me," she said. "They drew their pistols and said they would shoot us and fire the house if we did not let them have their way with us." Frances Thompson and Lucy Smith were raped by all seven of these white men. "Four of them had to do with me," Frances told members of Congress, "and the rest with Lucy" (1866:196). Like Thompson, Lucy Smith refused to have sex with the men, so they beat her. "One of them said he would make me, and choked me by the neck," she said. "My neck was swollen up next day, and for two weeks I could not talk to anyone." After the first white man raped her, a second began sexually assaulting Lucy Smith, but she had bled so badly from the first rape that the man refused to continue. "He gave me a lick with his fist, and said I was so damned near dead he would not have anything to do with me," she said. Frances Thompson was beaten and bruised so badly that she lay in bed for three days. "They took the clothes out of my trunk and took one hundred dollars that I had in greenbacks belonging to me," Thompson explained, "and two hundred dollars that belonged to a colored woman, that was left with me to keep safe for her." The white men spent nearly four hours at Thompson's home that night. They left carrying "two pillow slips" stuffed with their plunder: tonight we "burn up the last God damned nigger," one of them muttered in disgust (1866:197). Ann George testified that she "could not begin" to tell the Congressman investigating the riot how many houses were burned down. George saw one white resident shoot at a freedman for throwing a bucket of water on the fire: 'Never mind, God damn you,' the man shouted, 'we will clean you out to-morrow night' (U.S. Congress 1866:258).

*Day Two*

The sun was just about to crest the horizon, a half hour before daybreak that Wednesday, May 2. “Let us go and help get the things out of Adam Lock’s house,” said Rachael Hatcher, who was only 14 years old at the time. Rachael was an excellent student who already “had become a teacher of the smaller scholars,” according to her mother, Janet Sneed. White men had already abducted a boarder who was staying with Sneed, her husband, and her daughter; they “took him down to the bridge and shot him.” Now they had “set fire to the house of an old colored man by the name of Adam Lock,” who lived next door. Rachael insisted on helping Lock, even after her mother pleaded that they try and “save themselves.” According to the Select Committee’s report, while “engaged in an act of benevolent heroism,” young Rachel Hunter implored her captives, in “piteous tones,” to let her escape. White “savages surrounded the burning building, and with loaded revolvers threatened to shoot her” if she tried to escape. John Pendergrast, the Irish grocer who participated in many of the atrocities that unfolded across South Memphis, answered her plea: ‘No, if you don’t go back I will blow your damned brains out.’ But Rachel Hunter chose to fight. “As the flames gathered about her, she emerged from the burning house,” according to the report, but “the whole crew ‘fired at her as fast as they could’” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:16). She fell dead between her family’s home and her neighbor, Adam Lock, whose personal belongings she tried desperately to save. Dr. S. J. Quimby, a physician who arrived in Memphis only five months earlier, testified that she “fell right under the house, and the house burned up over her; the shot, however, was immediately fatal; it went directly into her mouth.” Rachael Hunter’s clothes “were all burned off, except her shoes and stockings,” explained Quimby: “on the lower part of her body her flesh was burned very badly, and a portion of the upper part was also burned very badly ; her face was very much burned ; there was a stream of blood running out of her mouth in front of her, it seemed to me there must have been four quarts of it—a stream of blood a foot and a half long, and six or eight inches wide” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:105).

Adam Lock’s testimony reveals the deliberateness behind the white violence, the premeditated intent to dispossess African Americans of their property. “All through the course of the night there were fires burning all around us,” he recalled:

By-and-by I heard some one tramping outside ; they piled up some planks and stuff against my house and set it on fire ; when I looked out it was blazing up as high as my head, as high as I could reach. I went out and threw a bucket of water on the fire, and they shot right against my house all the while, I then went in, got my things and carried them away about thirty yards from the house ; when I saw a man put fire to my house and kindle it a second time. Said he, ‘Old man, pull off your hat and lie down or they will kill you.’ Said I, ‘Massa George, what is the reason you are burning my house down? I want to live where I am living as well as anybody else.’ This was George McGinn. Said he, ‘I am ordered to do it, and I must or they will

shoot me.' I said to him that he was one of the men doing it for himself, and that I had some valuable things for a colored man, and I wanted to go there and get them. 'No' said he, 'stay right where you are.' In about a couple of minutes a man walked up to us and said, 'Leave there, damn quick.' There were about a half a dozen standing around ; we went off about one hundred yards, and had not been standing there ten minutes, when they broke open my trunk and took out the things. (U.S. Congress 1866:116)

And the men were not done. The Sneed-Hunter home was slated next for the torch. Jane Sneed testified that a Mr. Callahan, apparently a neighbor (for she identified his residence at the corner of Causey and South streets), arrived at her home. Callahan "pushed open the door where I was standing, with the biggest pistol in his hand I ever saw in my life," Sneed recalled. "He asked, 'Who is in here?' I told him nobody but me and my husband. He said, 'Come out,' and asked me if we had any arms." Another man said to her husband, 'Come over here till I shoot you.' Sneed says she "begged him hard not to shoot my husband." Fortunately, two soldiers arrived in time to prevent a shooting, and they suggested Sneed and her husband go to Fort Pickering for protection; unfortunately, this offering also provided Callahan with an opportunity to plunder. Sneed returned a half hour later, only to be told by a neighbor that "Mr. Callahan took my bed-clothes and chickens, and everything he wanted, and then set fire to the house." She testified that Callahan was "staying in his grocery right now," but he was never apprehended for shooting her daughter. "Did you lose everything you had?" the chairman asked. 'I lost everything I had except what I had on my back,' she replied (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:99).

"On Wednesday morning at 8 o'clock the street was as quiet as any time on Sunday that I ever saw," recalled Dr. S. J. Quimby, a physician who had arrived in Memphis only five months prior to the cleansing event. "I do not think there were ten soldiers to be seen on the street anywhere, and there was not a man armed" (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:105). Though "everything was through and the soldiers were all at the fort," 200 armed men "patrolled up and down the street by fours." When they "found there no soldiers there they scattered around in small squads and went among the shanties, 'hunting for arms,' they said. They were breaking open houses, and killed four men that I knew" recalled Quimby (1866:106). "I am certain [these men] had not had anything to do with the affair," he continued. "[T]hey were at the time unarmed, and did not belong to, or had not had anything to do with, the army. Two of them were men who had been out to work" (1866:105).

Sheriff Winters was riding in John C. Creighton's buggy. They were heading downtown. At the intersection of Vance and Causey streets they came upon a crowd of more than 50 white

men, some of whom were police officers. Winters tries to reinforce the posse with recruits, but it is Creighton who puts his oratory skills to work: “*Boys, I want you to go ahead and kill the last damned one of the nigger race, and burn up the cradle, God damn them. They are free, free indeed, but God damn them, we will kill and drive the last one of them out of the city,*” according to testimony (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:23-4; 355). Sheriff Winters testified to having heard him say that he would not fine anyone for carrying concealed weapons during the riot. And in finishing his harangue, Creighton declared, “*let us prepare to clean every God-damn son of a bitch out of town.*” He was rewarded with hearty cheers from the crowd; he had captured the essence of a racial cleansing—exterminate black lives and stunt black economic growth as it begins to grow in earnest after slavery; and exterminate black institutions, especially schools and churches, as black cultural life blossoms post enslavement.

Attorney General Wallace led a crowd of men, some mounted on horseback. Many were intoxicated. They filed off toward a row of shanties, and then shots could be heard in that direction: “shouts of ‘kill him,’ ‘shoot him’ rang out in the dark night. And when the group of whites returned, they said there were “two damned niggers out of the way.” A few minutes afterwards, “two shanties were on fire,” and after their achievement, “the crowd went into a grocery ‘to wet their whistles,’ and celebrate their successes.” Another mob began chasing Black residents from the streets, if they dared venture out: “the disposition of the crowd seemed to be to shoot colored children and to maltreat or to kill any colored person who came along. They drove the colored men out of their shanties, and if they started to run would shoot them down indiscriminately” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:12). White rioters turned to arson to as a cleansing ritual on the night of Wednesday, May 2, 1866. The schoolhouse at Hernando and Potomac was set afire at about 10:30: “A sizeable crowd of white men is gathered around watching the fire as Winters and his men arrive, a crowd that includes some policemen and Recorder Creighton. The recorder and many of the others are drunk and jubilantly celebrating the fiery obliteration of this institution of black learning—and black worship, for it doubles as a meeting house known as Grace Church” (Ash 2013:149). The next target was a “U.S. Government-owned building used as a freedmen’s school and church,” located at the corner of Main and Vance Streets. After torching the structure, one of the Irishmen declared the mob’s intention: “Burn ‘every nigger building, every nigger church, and every God damn son of a bitch that [teaches] a nigger’” (Ash 2013:150). This white rallying cry captures the essence of racial cleansing, the deep desire to



wash black life entirely from the city's streets. Collins Chapel was also set fire, a Methodist Episcopal Church whose "basement has been used as a school for freed people" since the war (150). William Wells Brown, a Black abolitionist who watched Collins Chapel burn, testified that he witnessed a crowd of white revelers clamoring for a "white man's government" as the flames engulfed the church, which also functioned as a school (Ryan 1977:249).

The case of Lucy Hunt reveals how total dispossession resulted from racial violence. An Irishman named Chris Pigeon went with several others to Hunt's home and set it on fire. When Lucy Hunt emerged from her home, they pushed her back into the flames "three or four times. One of them caught her by the throat and said he was going to burn her up." Another white man "put his pistol to her head and said, 'G—d d—n you, if you leave, I will shoot you.'" These men "broke open her trunk and robbed her of \$25, the proceeds of sixteen months' work at the fort, where she had been cooking for a company of soldiers." They also took "all her clothes and everything she had, leaving her nearly naked and penniless." Hunt was left with absolutely nothing—total dispossession—and hers was not an isolated case. Chris Pigeon was among those who broke into the house of Mary Black on Wednesday night; after raiding the home they "poured turpentine on the bed and set the house on fire" (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:17).

Just before midnight several men visited the home of Primus Lane, a fifty-nine-year-old African American who tended a brewery in South Memphis. "Make a light—make a light damn quick," they demanded, as he fumbled in the dark to find a piece of candle. He lit a match and the men looked in the dark until they found a candle. Then they searched his home, though he did not know what they were searching for. As they ransacked his home, Primus thought it might be a good opportunity to slip out the door. "If you go out we will put daylight through you," warned three white men with guns. Lane lost nearly everything he and his wife owned that night: "they had set the house afire and it had begun to burn up pretty severely. The fire frightened me and I went back to get out my trunk ; I ran back and got two bed quilts and carried them away. Everything else I had was burned up." The fire would have been sufficient to leave Primus Lane nearly destitute; before they applied the torch, the men ensured such a fate. "They heard some money jingling in my wife's hand, and they just grabbed it," Primus testified. 'Gentlemen, do not take what little money I have,' his wife pleaded, to which the man replied, 'God damn you, hush,' before striking her on the head. Primus testified one of the intruders said, 'Gentlemen, give her the money back.' And they returned part of it: 'I never found but \$4 ; there was \$7 in

all.’ The white men “set the room on fire inside and on the outside,” according to Lane. Even when the home was completely engulfed, they refused Primus his liberty: “it was burning on the sides and top before they would let me go out,” he said. Primus Lane was held captive inside his burning house for what must have seemed as eternity. ‘God damn you!’ the men declared, before fleeing from the structure. Primus and his wife finally escaped; the fire had “got so strong they could not stay there.” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:97). These Irish invaders capitalized on the disorder in several ways: first, by enriching themselves through confiscation of property; second, by dispossessing Primus Lane and his wife of most of their life’s savings (meager as they were, considering both were born in slavery), making it difficult for them to continue on in Memphis; and third, by striking terror into the Lane family, whose son had recently visited, home from serving in the Union Army. Lane speculates that his son’s service is likely what motivated white vengeance, given he had done nothing to stir the ire of local whites.

“Wednesday night when the burning took place I took a walk with the Rev. Mr. Pearne, who was boarding with me,” recalled John Oldridge, an Iowan who moved to Memphis before the Civil War, in 1858, “and as we passed the corner of Hernando and Vance streets I saw a negro church which had been set on fire. A fire at that time on Echols street was burning very brilliantly.” The building on Echols was “nearly all consumed” by the time they arrived, so the men ventured “back near Grace Church—a negro church there—it was also nearly consumed,” Oldridge reported. Sheriff Winters and Recorder Creighton were present at Grace Church, according to Oldridge’s testimony, but there “was no attempt made to put the fire out; the whole crowd appeared to be having a regular jubilee.” Oldridge walked down Vance Street, between Shelby and Main, where he met a man named O’Hearn, along with sixteen other white men. None of them had rifles, Oldridge claimed, “but every man was armed with one or more revolvers.” After O’Hearn consulted with four other white fellows in the middle of Vance, they walked over “to the northeast corner of that negro school-house. I saw him pile up some matter and strike a match,” Oldridge recalled: “when he struck the match I saw the reflection on his face as plain as I see you now. I waited until it burnt up. The first fire went out. The noise of the crowd drew the attention of a man who lived in the cottage adjoining,” Oldridge explained. The man came out and “begged them not to put fire to the building,” that if they set it on fire his cottage would surely burn. O’Hearn called out, ‘Shoot the God damn son of a bitch; if he comes out I’ll shoot him myself.’ Oldridge claimed the man then went back towards his cottage, at

which point O’Hearn called out, ‘If they burn your property we will pay for it; keep in your cottage’ (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:123). O’Hearn and the others fired the building a second time.

John Oldridge claimed to have overheard a conversation between O’Hearn and his men. The group declared it was their intention to burn “every nigger building, every nigger church, and every God damn son of a bitch that taught a nigger.” They were going to burn Caldwell Hall because “it was used as a negro church and school.” This group of white men, at least sixteen Irishmen in addition to O’Hearn, walked about Memphis using arson as a cleansing ritual. All symbols of the progress made by the freed people in Memphis would be incinerated in a single night—all Black churches, all Black schools, and all property otherwise owned by thriving Black folks were targeted, first as buildings to be plundered, then as structures to be burned. Those fiery flames made illuminated white hatred for all of Black Memphis to witness—if that racism was not already abundantly clear from the vitriol against African Americans peddled in the pages of the *Avalanche* and the *Argus*—that they were not welcomed. That their progress would not be tolerated. This was another mechanism of dispossession, for it temporarily stripped African-American children from a chance to become educated; thankfully, it would not succeed.

William Coe worked at a blacksmith’s shop owned by Henry Alexander and George Jones. The shop was located at Alabama Street, near Albert Harris’s residence (Harris was the black man who claimed Irish policemen robbed him of more than \$350). Around midnight several men who had been standing about “Mr. Finne’s grocery store all day” arrived at the blacksmith shop. Coe saw three men “slipping into the shop.” He had been laying down in one room; though he no longer had a family of his own, another man lived in the home in a second room. These men broke down the door of the room Coe was staying in. The “found a tin on a bench, and turned the oil out into that; the men had “a can of coal oil with them.” ‘Gentlemen, don’t trouble that tin ; there’s something in it,’ Coe said. ‘What are you doing in here?’ one of them barked. ‘Go out, or I’ll blow your brains out.’ Coe provided a harrowing account: “I started to go out, and they wouldn’t let me go. I said, ‘Gentlemen, what’s the matter? I’ve not done anything.’ They told me they wouldn’t hurt me, if I’d go out. I said I’d get my shoes and go out. They said no, they would not let me get my shoes, and were *going to burn up everything I had*. Then they would let me go out, and I saw them pour the oil around, and set the shop on fire. One man there seemed to know me, and said I was a mighty good boy, and not to hurt me ; that I had done a job of work for him, and he didn’t want me hurt” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:102). The

evidence clearly shows that whites intended to dispossess William Coe of everything he owned. Asked “how much damage was done to you by burning up the shop,” Coe replied that the men took “some few tools I had there and all the other clothes I had—both bed and wearing. They took them, spread them out, poured oil over them, and set them on fire.” Coe recalled having nothing on but a pair of pants: ‘I came near not getting my shoes,’ he said, ‘but they finally had the consideration to let me get my shoes, and I went back for them, and I pulled down this old coat and my hat’ In other words, William Coe testified before the United States Congress wearing the only clothing he still owned. And this was by design; in fact, it wasn’t even the first time it had happened! When asked how the “citizens of Memphis” typically treated him, Mr. Coe responded, “They have treated me pretty badly. I’ve had pretty bad luck myself ; this makes four times I’ve lost everything I had.” Just last year white men invaded his home: they “just came in and took from me a new suit of clothes I had just bought,” he noted. They took all of his clothing and money, and now, a year later, William Coe is again victim of total dispossession.

The mob also directed its hatred toward white folks who sympathized with the former slaves—particularly those who took any interest in helping to educate African Americans or otherwise assist in their upward mobility. The Coopers were from Britain, and they “had put up a building, a portion of which was to be let out for a colored school, which was to be taught by a Mr. Glasgow, who had been a soldier in the Union army. Mr. Cooper was called an ‘abolitionist,’ because they said he was doing too much for the colored people, and spoke occasionally in their chapel.” The Cooper’s house was set on fire, despite the presence of their four children, and when Mr. Cooper and Mr. Glasgow attempted to put it out, the mob fired upon them. The building and all the furniture were decimated, and Mr. Cooper fled the city to save his own life. “The most intense and unjustifiable prejudice on the part of the people of Memphis seems to have been arrayed against teachers of colored schools and against preachers to colored people,” according to the Select Committee’s report. “They would not teach the colored people themselves, and seemed to think it a reflection upon them that benevolent persons and societies outside should undertake the work” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:19-20).

The Tennessee Disfranchisement Law of 1865 had “removed from the voting rolls all who supported the Confederacy, directly or indirectly” (Hennessey 1978:30-1), thus eligible Irish citizens held prominent positions in politics and municipal government. Hennessey notes that over 90 percent of the 180-man police force in Memphis was Irish, as were 86 percent of the

fire department (1978:30). Historian Stephen Ash is more specific. Under the command of Benjamin G. Garret, a Memphis resident and native Southerner were 177 men—and of these, 162 were Irish (Ash 2013:62). There were “no formal, printed regulations governing the department,” and misconduct was rampant. Ash notes that many policemen “spent more on-duty hours in saloons than they did patrolling the streets,” and during one three-week stretch in 1865, “nine officers were charged with serious criminal offenses: four with abusing prisoners, two with unjustifiable homicide, one with stabbing a man in a quarrel, one with shooting and wounding a fellow policeman, and one with counterfeiting.” In fact, “Chief Garrett himself lamented the deplorable character of so many of his men” (2013:63). General George Stoneman, commander of the U.S. Army troops—soldiers stationed in Memphis during the days of rioting—likely proved fatal for African-American residents.

There is evidence indicating black resistance during the three days of racial violence in Memphis. Historian James Ryan notes that a “small cadre of black veterans briefly escaped Fort Pickering and fired a few shots at the mob.” The distance between the soldiers and rioters was too great, however, and all bullets “fell far short of their targets.” More importantly, African Americans simply did not have enough firearms to actively retaliate against the mob; in fact, as Ryan suggests, the actions of these soldiers probably incited further violence since any kind of black resistance was sufficient to “start wild rumors that Negroes planned to invade Memphis” (Ryan 1977:248). The mustered out Black Union officers “engaged an equally willing group” of Irish policemen in gun battle, but the “spontaneous” nature of their attack “suggests a lack of premeditation.” If the Black soldiers had planned an organized attack, they probably would not have wasted “the crucial element of surprise” by haphazardly firing their guns into the sky. Conversely, the white mob roamed different sections of the city “for the express purpose of killing and maiming blacks of both sexes and ages” (Ryan 1977:253). Thus, though evidence indicates a modicum of Black resistance to white terror—and since that resistance largely stems from black troops, what would technically be considered third party agents rather than principals to the conflict—the self-defense was mostly limited to military personnel rather than Black civilians in Memphis.

### *Instrumental White Violence*

After interviewing 177 witnesses, the Select Committee on the Memphis Riots concluded that the “whole evidence discloses the killing of men, women, and children—the innocent, unarmed,

and defenceless pleading for their lives and crying for mercy; the wounding, beating, and maltreating of a still greater number; burning, pillaging, and robbing; the consuming of dead bodies in the flames, the burning of dwellings, the attempts to burn up whole families in their houses, and the brutal and revolting ravishings of defenceless and terror-stricken women” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:5). During the racial cleansing that erupted in Memphis on May 1, 1866, 46 blacks and two whites were killed; 75 persons were wounded and white predators raped five black women (and potentially more). The homes of more than 91 families—89 of these families were black—were destroyed by arson; four African-American churches and 12 newly established schools for the education of formerly enslaved children were also torched (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1986:34-6; Ryan 1977:243).

More than \$100,000 in property was destroyed by arson during the three days of violence, nearly all of it belonging to members of the black community (Ryan 1977:249). Using affidavits collected by the Freedmen’s Bureau in their investigation of the riot event, I compiled an index of the property damage suffered by African Americans between May 1<sup>st</sup> and May 5<sup>th</sup> (see Appendix I). This index is not entirely inclusive; certainly, many African-American residents were robbed and plundered who did not report their losses. Without question, many fled and never returned to file claims. This exercise is useful, however, in that it gives a baseline from which to proceed in estimating the extent to which the African-American community in Memphis was dispossessed of their property through instrumental white violence. Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter provides a table of findings based upon an analysis of those claims. These data demonstrate the instrumental nature of white violence, and when local and state law enforcement fails to intervene, the potential for racial cleansing is greatest.

The testimony of Sophia Garey, a German immigrant who moved from Cincinnati only three months prior to the riot, illustrates the instrumental nature of white violence. It was Wednesday morning, for during the terror Tuesday night, she was afraid to even look out here window. She saw a man named Callahan, another named McGinn, and a third whose name she did not know “coming down the hill from where the houses had been burned. Mr. Callahan had a feather bed on one arm and a pistol in the other hand,” she recalled. “The young man had on the hoop skirt and the Balmoral skirt of the girl who had been shot the night before.” McGinn had “a lot of things in his arm looking like bedclothes, and went into Callahan’s house. There were others coming from the same direction whose names I did not know,” she said. “Some men on

horseback had chickens and ducks they were carrying away. They appeared like police. I saw them knock the chickens and ducks on the head and take them off,” Garey told Congress. “They all ran into Callahan’s store. I saw, I should think, two hundred people right at Callahan’s store. He came out with bottles and commenced treating them (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:114). The chairmen then asked Mrs. Garey whether she saw “anything of the burning? No. In the morning we moved away,” she replied. ‘We were afraid to stay there. My husband kept a saloon and we moved away everything we had.’ They called them ‘damned Yankee niggers,’ she said. “Some of them came and sat on our door-steps, and we heard them talk. They said the next night would be our turn; so we left the next morning early” (1866:114). Garey’s testimony indicates these white Irishmen were looting. Unlike those impoverished African Americans, who ‘looted’ white store owners during the urban rebellion of the 1960s and early 1970s, in earlier periods people we would today consider middle-class participated in the looting of African American households. Callahan looted from those who owned much less than he did; he also threatened to kill the owner of a bar nearby, Garey’s ‘brother-in-law’ and ostensibly a damned Northerner, “and three or four more” northerners who were perhaps direct competition for his grocery (1866:114). White violence afforded men like Callahan an opportunity to directly profit in two distinct ways: stolen currency and other property directly enhanced their wealth while the elimination, either through murder or intimidation, of economic competition would bolster their profits in the future. It would not be surprising if men such as Callahan also purchased burnt-out real estate after the cleansing event at a heavy discount.

John Callahan targeted Adam Lock for retribution the night of Tuesday, May 1. According to Lock, Callahan refused to pay him for the sixteen cords of wood he had hauled; apparently, the load was light upon the second measure, and Callahan accused Lock of lifting his property. After Lock secured the provost marshal, who made Callahan pay for the work, Callahan attacked Lock, an assault for which he was then charged. Yet Adam Lock was also prospering in Memphis, and men like Callahan appeared to seethe with resentment. When Congressman Shanklin asked Lock how much he lost, Lock replied that he could not say: “I had put up two snug little buildings there, about twelve by thirteen, since Christmas, and I had put up three others ; they have all been burned. I think my little buildings and other stuff was richly worth \$1,500. I am now left without anything, with a family of one child of my own; my wife also has a child, and my daughter has a child” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:117).

Black residents also suffered significant loss of human life, significant loss of institutional life, and a significant loss of personal property, in addition to the psychological and emotional trauma that endures well beyond an atrocity such as Memphis. Shortly after the riots ended, a leaflet began circulating through Memphis:

**“MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE, *May 6, 1866.***

**‘To \_\_\_\_\_ :  
“You will please to notice that we have determined to rid our community of negro fanatics and philanthropic teachers of our former slaves. You are one of the number, and it will be well for you if you are absent from the city by the 1st of June. Consult your safety.  
“ANONYMOUS.”**

What happened in Memphis was a devastating attempt at racial cleansing, made possible only because the police force was complicit—it *was* an active part of the white mob. And the “city government was utterly and completely Irish in nearly all its branches: the mayor was an Irishman; the recorder was an Irishman; nine out of sixteen of the city council were Irish, and all the members of the police committee were Irish” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:23).

Black resilience confronted white racism and violence in the weeks after the cleansing event that devastated Memphis. By the end of May—not even a full month after the three days of violence—four freedmen’s schools were already in operation, “with nine teachers and about eight hundred students” (Ash 2013:170). Horatio Rankin went on a speaking tour in the North to help finance reconstruction and on May 30, the Phoenix Educational Institute was dedicated in a ceremony. Despite black resilience, the race riot that transpired in Memphis in 1866 qualifies as a racial cleansing, an attempt by the larger white community to murder and expel those recently freed slaves who had been flooding to the city in the wake of emancipation seeking shelter and increased opportunity. Third parties, especially the Irish police force and certain city officials, actually participated in the violence

When asked by the Select Committee whether the white citizens of Memphis had “taken any steps to bring the perpetrators of these outrages to justice,” Judge William Hunter testified, “None that I know of.” When asked “what are the chances for white persons being convicted for outrages committed upon Negroes,” Judge Hunter noted that the chances “would be remote”: “We have in this city a class of people, intelligent, moral men, who really have participated in the rebellion against the government, but who are above these prejudices. How large that class is I do not pretend to say; they would do justice to the Negro as a general thing,” he explained. But



there is “another class, *from whom most of our juries are made up*, that would be utterly incapable of doing justice, and enforcing the law with anything like impartiality” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:75; emphasis added). Jurors in Tennessee were composed largely of men who “sympathized with, or been engaged in the late rebellion.” They were composed of the “ignorant portion” of the population, “the poor white people of this country, as well as foreigners,” and Hunter concluded that the chances of conviction would be very remote indeed, given “the material we have for jurors.” No effort was made by the civil authorities to “bring to justice the perpetrators of these stupendous and multiplied outrages,” an affront to the notion that Americans are guaranteed a right to life and liberty. The Memphis Massacre, according to the Select Committee, represents “a burning and lasting disgrace to the officers of the law, and a blot on the American name” (39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1866:27).

## CONCLUSION

The anti-Black violence that erupted in New York City in 1863 had lasting consequences, not just for those directly impacted by the event, but for the structure of neighborhoods moving forward from it. White rioters burned more than 100 buildings to the ground during the racial cleansing event that unfolded following the initial conflagration of the draft office. More than 200 additional buildings were damaged and looted. Residences of wealthy white Republicans were plundered as well, indicating targets were chosen for political, economic, and racial considerations. Reverend Charles Ray of Bethesda Congregationalist Church reported that nearly 1,000 Black residents lost all they owned, except what they could carry with them as they fled the city. Records from the Merchants’ Committee for the Relief of Colored People that by August 1863, more than 6,400 African Americans had received some form of riot aid, but because most of these individuals were considered heads of family, the total number of persons affected was 12,782. Black Americans filed more than 1,000 claims for damages against the city, and the Merchants’ Committee documented another 2,000 claims, with property claims totaling over \$145,000 in 1863. These data only begin to indicate the extent to which whites used violence as a technique of dispossession, a ritual to bankrupt their Black neighbors while simultaneously instilling fear, a terror so intense many were compelled to leave—permanently. Specific objectives were achieved by white Irish rioters in New York to exert dominance over the burgeoning Black population, but a total cleansing was not.

Forced expulsion of Black New Yorkers continued even after the riot had been suppressed as refugees fled Manhattan for smaller communities like New Brooklyn, Flatbush, and the Flatlands. White disciplinary violence had an effect on the residential structure of the city in the years following the riot: the U.S. Census indicates that New York City's Black population had been more than 12,600 in 1860; by 1865, two years after the riot ended, that figure had declined to fewer than 10,000, a reduction of 20 percent. While this reduction cannot be attributed exclusively to the effects of the riot, it undoubtedly had an impact; as Barnet Schecter notes in *The Devil's Own Work*, the riot "inaugurated an exodus" of Black Americans from New York City that "lasted for seven years" (2005:265). Black residents who did remain were systematically denied employment opportunities, partially due to continued threats from white rioters. White rioters in the so-called 'New York City Draft Riots of 1863' attacked political targets, including draft offices run by the United States federal government and the residences of prominent white Republicans who were profiting from the war while also able to pay the \$300 exemption fee, but that label obscures the attempted racial cleansing conducted during the riot event *and* the days after its suppression. Rioting catalyzed a resurgence of white supremacy, which helped create a "new political culture" in New York City that ultimately would assist in undermining Republican goals during Reconstruction (2005:270). Three years later and three thousand miles to the Southwest, white Irish residents would again use violence to undermine Republican influence in a rapidly growing Union city.

The terror that unfolded across those two days in Memphis decimated the burgeoning Black community—and specific objectives were satisfied through racial violence—but the event did not succeed in forcing African Americans into exile. The massacre was an attempted racial cleansing with enormous economic consequences for a community seeking to establish itself in the dawn of a new era. Slaves were not freed simultaneously across all of the South's plantations; some of the freed people may have had several years to establish an economic footing, while others may have been free for fewer than 12 months. Regardless, as data from the Freedmen's Bureau attests, white rioters (mostly of Irish descent) used riot rituals to dispossess African Americans of what little property they owned. White invaders burned the dwellings of more than 89 Black families, leaving them homeless; they also burned four Black churches and 12 schools for the children of slaves established by the Freedmen's Bureau in conjunction with Northern missionary organizations. The targets for arson reveal several objectives: (1) destroy

Black homes, plunder Black property, and through a spectacle of flames, compel Black residents to flee; (2) decimate Black churches because they were centers for community fundraising and organization, thus these properties were instrumental in advancing the race; and (3) abolish Black education through fire, thereby eliminating the possibility that Black children might rise above the status of their enslaved parents.

Memphis's Black community suffered on multiple levels following the attempted racial cleansing, including a significant loss of human life—at least 46 Black Americans were killed, another 75 (minimum) were wounded, and five Black women were raped—a significant loss of personal property (at least \$100,000 in property was destroyed), and a significant loss of institutional life (16 schools and churches). The Memphis Massacre also left emotional trauma that endured beyond the atrocity. Psychological terror continued in the aftermath, much like we saw in New York City, only this time anonymous leaflets were circled throughout town notifying remaining Black residents that white folks were “determined to rid our community of negro fanatics and philanthropic teachers of our former slaves.” Black institutions were attacked in New York City, most notably the Colored Orphans Asylum, but Black churches and schools were not targeted to the same degree. Perhaps one explanation is the difference in professionalization of law enforcement: the Metropolitan Police were far more prepared to combat the rioters in New York City, given the city's history with ethnic violence, and its officers actively sought to protect Black residents; conversely, Memphis Police officers, most of whom were Irish, actively helped instigate the riot event and a large number actively participated in the rituals of violence rather than protect Black residents. This distinction is critical when examining the history of American race riots and the trajectory of racial violence. Police departments become active participants in the formation of racial collective violence—their behavior shapes the contours of a riot event. The sheer scale of participants in New York City dwarfed those in Memphis, yet the formal control efforts of law enforcement contained the spread of violence, thereby preventing an even more barbarous cleansing event from becoming a reality; conversely, in Memphis, law enforcement officers failed to seriously intervene and prevent the total destruction of Black institutional life in Memphis. In fact, many participated in the attempted cleansing, a dereliction of duty that would define the Southern policing of Black bodies for generations to come.

The freed people in Memphis proved resilient, as Black Americans have done regularly throughout the history of this republic, when confronted with white racism and violence. Not even a month after the end of the riot, four schools with nine teachers serving approximately 800 Black children were already operating, in direct defiance of white disciplinary violence. Then on March 2, 1867, the United States Congress passed the First Reconstruction Act over President Andrew Johnson's veto. The attempted racial cleansing in Memphis "figured prominently in the deliberations that produced this legislation" and helped compel Congress to take action (Ash 2013:187-88). The bill abolished those Southern state governments previously resurrected and acknowledged by Johnson, except for Tennessee, which had already ratified the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and was thus readmitted to the Union. Also known as the Military Reconstruction Act, it imposed temporary federal military rule in ten of the former Confederate states and divided the territory into five districts. Thus while the "race riot" in Memphis was an attempted racial cleansing supported by the Irish police, it engendered such national alarm that the 39<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress conducted an investigation, the findings of which inspired legislation to use the military in reconstructing the South.

# **Chapter 2**

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# **Democratic Murder Clubs**

## **Democratic Murder Clubs: Black Voting Rights and the Fall of Reconstruction, 1868 - 1876**

Radical Reconstruction, like the Confederacy, was an ephemeral experiment. By comparison the work of the Redemption was more enduring. For it was not the Radicals nor the Confederates but the Redeemers who *laid the lasting foundation* in matters of race, politics, economics, and law for the modern South.

- C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* ([1955] 1971:22)

Reconstruction did not fail; in regions where it collapsed it was violently overthrown by men who had fought for slavery during the Civil War and continued that battle as guerrilla partisans over the next decade. Democratic movements can be halted through violence.

- Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction* (2014:19)

### **BLACK VOTING RIGHTS**

In some regions of the South, violence against Black Americans reached “staggering proportions in the immediate aftermath” of the Civil War (Foner 1988:119). “I saw white men whipping colored men, just the same as they had did before the war,” testified Henry Adams, a former slave who claimed that “over two thousand colored people” were murdered in the area around Shreveport, Louisiana in 1865 alone. White Southerners “wreaked horrible vengeance for offenses real or imagined,” explains historian Eric Foner. “In 1866, after ‘some kind of dispute with some freedmen,’ a group near Pine Bluff, Arkansas set fire to a black settlement and rounded up the inhabitants.” The next morning, “24 Negro men, women, and children were hanging to trees all round the Cabbins [sic],” according to a witness who stumbled upon the carnage. Black schools, Black churches, and Black Republican party meetings all became targets for white violence. And in their efforts to *legally* control the movements of the freed people, Mississippi and South Carolina “enacted the first and most severe Black Codes” (Foner 1988:199). Most other Southern states followed suit, enacting “sweeping vagrancy and contract laws, supplemented by ‘antienticement’ measures punishing anyone offering higher wages to an employee already under contract” (Foner 1988:200). To appear in compliance with the federal Civil Rights Act of 1866, most subsequent laws “made no reference to race.” Whites not only controlled local legal systems—as Foner explains, Southern courts “appeared more interested in disciplining the black population and forcing it to labor than in dispensing justice” (1988:205)—but also the militia units which roamed the countryside, especially in the Black Belt counties:

“Often composed of Confederate veterans still wearing their gray uniforms, they frequently terrorized the black population, ransacking their homes to seize shotguns and other property,” writes Foner (1988:203). These men assaulted and abused any Black person who refused to sign plantation labor contracts.

Republicans outnumbered Democrats in both houses of Congress “by better than three to one” in 1866, so clearly, a “unified party would have no difficulty enacting a Reconstruction policy.” It would also have had no trouble overriding presidential vetoes, if necessary. Practically every Republican expected President Andrew Johnson to sign the Freedmen’s Bureau Bill and the Civil Rights Bill, both of which first passed Congress in February 1866. But to “the utter surprise of Congress,” Johnson vetoed *both* bills—and a ‘veto at that time,’ Illinois Congressman Shelby Cullom later recalled, ‘was almost unheard of’ (Foner 1988:247). The radical-wing of the Republican party was led by Charles Sumner, Ben Wade, and Henry Wilson in the Senate, and by Thaddeus Stevens, George W. Julian, and James M. Ashley in the House. Radical ideology presented a “utopian vision of a nation whose citizens enjoyed equality of civil and political rights, secured by a powerful and beneficent national state,” explains Foner (1988:230). Congressional Radicals did not elevate economic issues above those created by Reconstruction, particularly ensuring the rights of the freedman, and the core of their ideology, “the idea of a powerful national state guaranteeing blacks equal standing in the polity and equal opportunity in free labor economy—called for a striking departure in American public life” (Foner 1988:237).

Thaddeus Stevens argued in favor of confiscating property from the Rebel traitors and redistributing that wealth among former slaves to give them a strong economic footing on their road toward freedom. Confiscation “would break the power of the South’s traditional ruling class, transform the Southern social structure, and create the basis for a triumphant Southern Republican party composed of black and white yeoman and Northern purchasers of planter land.” But it was an egalitarian and redemptive vision shared by few others, including those in the Republican party. Even among abolitionists and Radical Republicans, “only a handful stressed the land question as persistently and forcefully as Stevens,” explains Foner. “Radicals proved reluctant to support a program that so contravened the sanctity of property as confiscation” (1988:236). Mainstream Republicans even rejected Black suffrage, but they had “embraced civil equality for blacks, a commitment strengthened by continuing reports of violations of free labor precepts in the South” (Foner 1988:242). The “legal system of

Presidential Reconstruction had profound consequences,” explains Foner. This system limited the options available to Blacks, reinforced “whites’ privileged access to economic resources,” shielded planters from “the full implications of emancipation,” and greatly inhibited the development of a free market, both in land and labor (1988:210).

Ratified on July 9, 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment was a broad statement of principle that gave constitutional authority to resolving a national crisis, “permanently altering American nationality’ (Foner 1988:257). Originally passed two years earlier in June, the amendment represented “an essentially moderate measure devised as a compromise between the two major Republican factions,” explains William Gillette (1978:5). The Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to all persons born in the United States and required the States to recognize those rights of citizenship: ‘No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities’ of American citizens. No State shall ‘deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.’ Political terrorism escalated swiftly following the passage of this Amendment, beginning with white violence in Louisiana and Georgia during the fall election season of 1868. The Ku Klux Klan and similar organizations, such as the Knights of the White Camelia and the White Brotherhood, would become “deeply entrenched in nearly every Southern state” within two years (Foner 1988:425).

The Ku Klux Klan functioned as the militant arm of the Democratic party, a terroristic force serving the planters “and all those who desired the restoration of white supremacy.” Foner notes that the Klan’s objectives were “political in the broadest sense”; their *raison d’être* was altering power relations across the Southern landscape: “It aimed to reverse the interlocking changes sweeping over the South during Reconstruction: to destroy the Republican party’s infrastructure, undermine the Reconstruction state, reestablish control of the black labor force, and restore racial subordination in nearly every aspect of Southern life” (Foner 1988:425-6). One primary technique of power used to destabilize the Republican party—Black leadership, in particular—was assassination. “At least one tenth of the black members of the 1867-68 constitutional conventions became victims of violence during Reconstruction, including seven actually murdered” (Foner 1988:426). Several men active in Republican politics were murdered during these years as Democrats decimated the party



White vigilante groups began implementing rituals of violence as a mechanism for controlling black bodies. As early as 1866, “small-scale but highly lethal violence” spread throughout the South, particularly as “Confederate veterans grasped that the White House would not crack down on their retribution.” Historian Douglas Egerton explains how white violence was instrumental in destabilizing the Republican party during Reconstruction: “Rather than continue to engage in the sort of wholesale, public savagery that attracted the wrath of northern journalists and politicians, dogmatic southerners quietly but methodically attacked the rising generation of Republican Party functionaries.” The Reverend Benjamin F. Randolph was among those assassinated in 1868. Prominent black leaders became target, and other black activists “who might have taken their places often opted instead for survival, unhappily aware that the price of abandoning the work of Reconstruction meant that a future generation of activists would have to risk *their* lives in the cause of voting rights and integration. (Egerton 2014:19). During the first half of 1871, “vigilantes burned twenty-six schools in one Alabama county alone” (Egerton 2014:293). In Green County, Alabama, a riot was staged at a political rally for Congressman Charles Hays: Fifty-eight blacks were shot and four were killed; two whites were injured (Egerton 2014).

Three of 11 states in the former Confederacy had populations in which African Americans constituted a majority: Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. These three states also experienced the largest number of race riots during Reconstruction. Melinda Meek Hennessey identified 33 major riots during the Reconstruction era, and all of them consisted of politically motivated rituals of violence. More than one third “occurred within two weeks of an election,” with five outbursts orchestrated on election day, and more than one half “began with an attempt by whites to break up a black political meeting or to keep blacks from voting” (Hennessey 1985:100). Twenty three Reconstruction riots identified by Hennessey, or 70 percent, occurred in counties where the population was more than half African American; a full third of the riot events that erupted during this period occurred in counties where black folks constituted at least 70 percent of the total population (1978:414). These rituals predominantly targeted African Americans, but white Republicans were hunted as well in a crusade of violence that lasted throughout the 1870s and beyond. ‘Redemption’ was the label “white Southerners chose to denote the bloody events of the mid-1870s,” and the leaders behind those violent campaigns “called themselves ‘Redeemers,’ writes Nicholas Lemann. “The name implied a

divine sanction for the retaking of the authority the whites had lost in the Civil War, and a heavenly quality to the reestablishment of white supremacy in the post-Reconstruction South. ‘Reconstruction,’ the North’s word, was sturdy, purposeful, and optimistic. ‘Redemption,’ the South’s, was empyrean” (2006:185).

#### WHITE TERRORISM: LOUISIANA’S BLUEPRINT FOR POLITICAL CONTROL

Henry Adams’s told Congress in 1880 that in some parts of Louisiana, black folks “most as well be slaves as to be free,” because come election time, if the democrats “have any idea that the Republicans will carry a parish or ward, or something of that kind, why, they *would do anything on God’s earth*. There aint nothing too mean for them to do to prevent it; nothing I can make mention of is too mean for them to do.” Adams reveals how quickly social relations between planter and laborer could shift based exclusively on political ideology: “If I am working on his place, and he has been laughing and talking with me, and I do everything he tells me to do, yet in time of election he will crush me down, and even kill me, or do anything to me to carry his point. (46<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress, *Removal of Negroes*, 1880:111). Relations between most white planters and African-American laborers depended upon political ideology: submit to white supremacy in political affairs, vote the democratic ticket, and relations remain harmonious; demand equal civil rights and access to the political arena, vote the republican ticket, and relations could turn violent. Amidst the structural instability of Louisiana government in the years following the Civil War, Adams’s experience depicts the volatile nature of black-white social relations.

The Knights of the White Camelia, a secret society devoted to preserving white supremacy in political and economic affairs, was formed in St. Mary Parish by Alcibiades DeBlanc and Daniel Dennett in the summer of 1868. In certain parishes, men rode through the countryside covered behind a sheet or some other disguise, much like the Ku Klux Klan. In other parishes, armed and disguised horsemen darkened their faces with “lampblack,” and began wielding violence as a political weapon. “During its peak period of growth in the fall of 1868,” writes one Louisiana historian, the KWC managed to organize in nearly every parish in the state and appeared to have been more centrally organized and directed than Nathan Bedford Forrest’s KKK” (Dauphin 1989:175). Alcibiades DeBlanc, a colonel in the Confederate Army and the ‘grand commander’ of the Knights, led an expansion of the organization into Franklin, Ouachita,

Caldwell, Union, and Morehouse parishes during the summer of 1868. Incidents of violence were increasingly reported throughout the state—and it appears that in places where KWC councils “determined it was necessary to intimidate Republicans from voting,” the duty to engage in rituals of violence was left up to the parish’s young men (Dauphine 1989:186). But this does not mean that the Knights was composed of a bunch of ruffians recruited from the lower class; on the contrary, leaders in the Knights of the White Camelia, “in every community and parish in Louisiana, were generally leaders of the Democratic party clubs and organizations and, in every case, were also men of economic and social stature in their communities,” according to Dauphine’s analysis (i.e., *Report of the Joint Committee of the General Assembly of Louisiana on the Conduct of the Late Elections and the Condition of Peace and Order in the State, Session of 1868*). Such men were doctors, lawyers, politicians, judges, and planters with huge stakes in the preservation of their prominence.” Republican ideas for reform in the South posed a significant threat to the hegemony of Southern elites, “stiffening their resolve to oppose Radical Reconstruction” (Dauphine 1989:181).

Louisiana experienced more than four significant race riots in the fall of 1868 leading up to the presidential election between Ulysses S. Grant, Republican and former Commanding General of the Union Army, and his Democratic rival Horatio Seymour, former governor of New York. Often labeled ‘negro uprisings’ in the Democratic press so as to conjure the ever-present white fear that their former slaves would finally arm, unite, and kill them all, these events were aimed at controlling black political influence in government. In most parts of the state, a “systematic series of outrages, robberies and murders were committed on the loyal people with the avowed intention of intimidating, and thus forcing, them to abstain from voting,” explained the Joint Committee of the Louisiana General Assembly in its *Supplemental Report* of the 1868 elections. White Democrats drove Republican leaders out of the state, and “[o]rganized efforts were set on foot to compel the laborers of the State [i.e., the freedmen] to vote the Democratic ticket, under penalty of not obtaining employment, and even of being discharged from work in violation of existing contracts.” Black men were “threatened with death” unless they accepted what some termed ‘protection papers,’ a document identifying them as Democrats (1869:v)

### *St. Landry*

St. Landry, a planting parish located on the River Teche, had a population of more than 23,000 in 1860, the third most populated parish in the state behind only Orleans and Rapides. More than

11,400 of these were slaves; just over 10,700 were white, while another 965 were free people of color (Christensen 2012). The Republican Party formed in St. Landry in April, 1866, and by July 1867, the parish had its first Republican newspaper, the *St. Landry Progress*, edited by the carpetbagger Emerson Bentley, formerly of Ohio and Wisconsin. The *Progress* “was unique in its relations with freedmen in the region,” writes Matthew Christensen. An “attached clubhouse to the *Progress* office” served as a meeting hall for the local Republican Party; meetings were held on Sundays, usually containing three to four hundred (Christensen 2012:42). The office also safeguarded a “roll book containing all the names of members of the Republican clubs in the parish” (Joint Committee 1869:33). This registry would prove quite useful for the democrats.

Republicans had been holding armed political meetings behind closed doors during the summer of 1868—and this practice greatly incensed local Democrats. Whites harbored great anxiety, especially for Radical ‘incendiaries’ like Emerson Bentley who many feared might “provoke the freedmen into riotous behavior.” On August 3, 1867, Bentley’s *St. Landry Progress* published a list of murders and other ‘outrages’ committed against freed persons in the parish. Christensen notes that 32 incidents were identified in this report, most involving the murder of freedmen, and according to the *Progress*, in none of these cases were the perpetrators “avenged by Justice” (Christensen 2012:36). Several weeks later in early September, Bentley arrived at the schoolhouse he had established in Opelousas. A note had been nailed to the door. It read, ‘E.B. Beware! K.K.K.,’ according to Bentley’s journal; it contained a “dripping dagger, skulls and bones, and coffin painted on” (Christensen 2012:44). Undeterred, Bentley published a scathing indictment of Democratic tactics in the *Progress* on the very day that a tentative ‘peace treaty’ had been signed between the two parties in St. Landry. In his editorial, Bentley declared that Republicans “do not plot in the dark; we do not assassinate inoffensive citizens or threaten to do so; we do not seek the lives of political opponents; we do not seek to array one class against another; but we intend to defend our just rights at all hazards” (Christensen 2012:48-9).

“White men of St. Landry, see that your shot guns, rifles and six shooters are in good condition,” called the *Opelousas Journal* in September 1868. “An ounce of prevention is better [than] a pound of cure. ... keep your guns in order” (DeLatta 1976:44). And so it was that on Monday September 28, 1868, white men all over St. Landry would be rushing for their guns. Three democrats, all Seymour Knights—Sebastian Mayo, a local constable; John Williams, a stranger in town; and James K. Dickson, an attorney who would later be district judge—burst

into the Methodist Church, where Emerson Bentley had been teaching school. ‘We warned you,’ said Dickson, ‘that in case you lied about that affair, you could not escape our revenge,’ said Dickson. ‘Notwithstanding our warnings you have published statements that are both malicious and false.’ ‘Do you mean to say that I lied in that report’ Bentley retorted. ‘Yes sir, god damn you, I do,’ proclaimed Dickson, who proceeded to strike Bentley “several blows with a heavy cane on his shoulders and back.” Constable Mayo moved to guard the door, and as Dickson continued to strike Bentley, “the pupils commenced jumping out of the windows.” Some of the children “passed through the door where Mayo stood,” point his pistol at them. Bentley later testified that Dickson “struck him about fifteen times with his cane, cursing him meanwhile in an outrageous manner, calling him a ‘damned Radical dog.’” Dickson then drew from his pocket a document of retraction, in effect “an acknowledgment that [his] editorial report of the Washington meeting was false and malicious.” ‘Now, god damn you, sit down and sign,’ seethed John Williams as he slid a wooden chair in front of Bentley, ‘or we will have satisfaction.’ Williams took the cane from Dickson. ‘Let’s do it right; let’s do it thoroughly,’ he said, as he struck Bentley several more times. Incredibly, Emerson Bentley still had the tenacity to question these men, asking what part of the editorial they considered false. ‘We do not want to talk with you,’ snapped Dickson: “sign that, or we will use you up” (Joint Committee 1869:35). Bentley signed the paper.

The children ran screaming from the schoolhouse, “telling every one they met that Mr. Bentley was being killed.” Couriers were sent throughout town to gather all black Republicans; on the “adjoining plantations, the colored people hearing the news armed themselves with what they could lay their hands on, and proceeded to Opelousas to protect Mr. Bentley, as he was looked upon as the leader of the Radical Republican Party.” A line of black men were met on the edge of town by a “band of white Democrats,” who ordered them to lay down their arms. ‘I am the chief of this band; boys, fire!’ one of the black men proclaimed. Three horses were shot in the opening burst; the mounted whites exchanged fire, “killing one colored man dead and wounding two or three others” (JC 1869:32). The band of democrats proceeded to capture the party of black republicans seeking to defend Bentley and confined them in the Opelousas jail. This act of defiance was the incendiary incident, as good as a signature on a death certificate. White retribution would follow.

Frenzied by fears of ‘Negro insurrection,’ whites swarmed from the surrounding countryside into Opelousas. By nightfall between 2,000 and 2,500 whites had gathered in Opelousas, and more would arrive by morning. They broke apart in groups, rushed off into the woods, and captured 29 black prisoners. The following night, September 29, a crowd battered down the door to the jail; one by one black men were led from the jail and executed, 27 in all, by gunshot. The bodies were left on the ground for two or three days. “They were finally buried in the following manner,” explained Wilson: “a hole was dug about a foot deep, laying the bodies therein and covering them over with earth so as to leave some portions of their body out of the ground; some had their feet, some their arms, uncovered, upon which the *buzzards were feeding*” (Joint Committee 1869:33; emphasis in original). At about the same time, white men tore through Emerson Bentley’s *St. Landry Progress* office: “they took the type and threw it into the middle of the streets,” recalled Wilson; “they then broke up the press and all the furniture that they could lay their hands on in the office, his materials and printing press dragged to the street” (JC 1869:33). Everything was destroyed and set on fire. Bentley’s schoolhouse was treated in similar fashion: the benches were splintered into kindling and the entire building was broken apart (Christensen 2012:53). But it was the *Progress* that contained the roll book of membership in St. Landry’s republican clubs, and the marauding democrats seized control of opportunity.

“They took the names of all the prominent Republicans and went about hunting them up,” Beverly Wilson told the Joint Committee of the Louisiana General Assembly in 1869. “Those that they could fine they killed on the spot; others who hid themselves in the swamp and bush saw armed white men approaching, burning up their houses and furniture” (JC 1869:33). On Wednesday, September 29, Pierre Young, a 37-year-old former slave—now registered republican voter of Opelousas in St. Landry—testified that “a large force of white men, about two or three hundred in number, armed with pistols, guns and swords, came to his place, headed by one Camillie Petrie (sheriff of Washington), Dr. MicMillan, Capt. Prescott and Yorick Vallard.” The following night, about 8:30 p.m., ten men from this group, led by Sheriff Petrie, returned to Young’s home; his wife answered the door, and told them he was gone. Petrie then called her a ‘black, lying bitch’ and said he would kill her husband when he caught up with him. Pierre Young was hiding in a bush some ten feet from the home. He escaped to testify, but several others met an armed group of white men—Paul Lambert, Pierre Gradny, Sustan Lamber, and a son of Mr. Achille Dupre—who went hunting through the parish on September 29. First

they took a black man named Francois from the field where he was working. They asked for his weapons; he told them he didn't have any. Then Paul Lambert "stepped up and calling him a lying son of a bitch, shot him dead." Then they went to the house of another black man, Willis Johnson, who lived on the same plantation: "Paul Lambert asked him if he would vote the Democratic ticket; he replied that he belonged to the Republican party. A son of Achille Dupre, (a boy of fifteen), then drew a pistol and shot him (W. Johnson), dead, the ball entering just over the right ear." Their next move illustrates how this racial violence was not motivated purely by political interest alone—economic dispossession and personal enrichment were also factors. The gang of whites then went to Paul Lambert's own plantation. They abducted Wilson Deacon and his son only "a short distance from their house and shot them dead." Wilson Deacon had voted the Democratic ticket, and according to Pierre Young's testimony, "*he was killed so that these white men could get their crop of cotton, which was a fine crop. When Mrs. Wilson Deacon asked these men why they had killed her husband, they replied, 'by order of Dr. Thompson.'*" (Joint Committee 1869:41; emphasis in original).

For the next two weeks, white men swept through St. Landry killing black folks. Armed men "went from house to house seizing arms in the possession of colored people" (JC 1869:37-8). One lieutenant called it a "quiet reign of terror so far as the freed people were concerned." According to Captain E. A. Hooker, one African-American resident led him outside of town, where he was shown between 16 and 18 bodies, partially exposed with limbs protruding from the dirt. "Similar discoveries were made at other points in the parish," writes Carolyn DeLatte (1976:47). Republican witnesses claimed that between 200 and 300 African Americans were killed during those two weeks in September 1868; the Democrats took credit for killing between 25 and 30 (DeLatte 1976:47; Rable 2007:76). Beverly Wilson claimed he had been told "by respectable white men in the parish" that the number killed "could not be less than (200) two hundred, and all those that wanted to have any protection for their lives, were told that they *must join the Democratic party* [sic]" (JC 1869:33). Whites in St. Landry Parish used violence to systematically attack and eliminate Republican leadership. C.E. Durand, another editor of the *Progress*, was not seen again after the night of September 28; though the exact date of his assassination is unknown, by the third day of violence Durand's body "was put on display outside of the Opelousas drug store as a warning to other 'incendiaries' (Christensen 2012:55). Jesse M. Lee, a lieutenant in the United States Army, arrived in St. Landry on October 3 to

investigate the condition of affairs: in ‘most parts of the State a systematic series of outrages, robberies, and murders were committed on the loyal people with the avowed intention of intimidating, and thus forcing, them to abstain from voting, and of driving’ Republican leaders from the area. Lee estimated that 223 people were murdered during the riot event. The Board of Registrars for St. Landry Parish estimated there were more than 200 deaths, while General Hatch’s report for the Freedmen’s Bureau reports only 23 deaths (with considerable difficulties in obtaining information regarding the violence). According to Christensen, democratic testimony generally “fell between 23-75 total deaths” while republican estimates “ranged between 200-500” (2012:61).

By October African Americans were not permitted to travel in Opelousas without a red ribbon tied around their arm, “a symbol of Democratic conversion and safety from violence.” Black men and women were forced to carry protection papers: Each freed person who signed these certificates were ‘entitled to the friendship, confidence, and protection of all good Democrats,’ as they were now compelled to self-identify as members of a Democratic club. “There were no political meetings after September 28, Republican or Democrat,” notes Christensen. “There was no need, with *the regional Republican presence eradicated* and the November vote secured for the Democrats” (2012:54).

The election that November was “a strange one, and has surprised everybody” wrote the *Opelousas Courier*, for out of the total vote of the parish, 4,787 votes to be exact, “not one was cast for Grant” (DeLatte 1976:48) Radical Republicans managed to take control of the Louisiana state government in 1868—but not in St. Landry, where Democratic violence effectively silenced the Republican vote. And white disciplinary violence had lasting implications, especially for Republican political organization. The Knights of the White Camelia, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Seymour Knights wielded terror throughout Louisiana, attacking both African Americans and white Republicans. Night riders raided Republican political meetings; a nighttime firebombing awaited anyone who might challenge the status quo in Louisiana race relations and politics. The only places in Louisiana where the KWC did not openly intimidate anyone voting the Republican ticket were in several river parishes, where the presence of federal soldiers offered at least some hope for protection among African Americans and white Republicans:

Comparatively little pre-election violence occurred in the parishes along the Mississippi River, with the exception of Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard parishes, near New Orleans. Grant received his largest majorities in the river parishes, especially in Carroll, Concordia, Madison, and Tensas parishes across the border from Mississippi. Farther south, along Bayou Lafourche and the Atchafalaya and Mississippi rivers,



intimidation was more extensive than in the northern river parishes, but much less than in places requiring overland transportation to reach. Similarly, Rapides and Natchitoches parishes, along the Red River, witnessed less violence and gave majorities to Grant in November. (Dauphine 1989:183)

Hennessey notes that between late September and late October, Louisiana experienced four serious riots: in Opelousas (i.e., St. Landry), in Bossier and St. Bernard parishes, and in New Orleans. Voting returns after each race riot event reveal the instrumental nature of white racial violence, especially in structuring local political power throughout Louisiana: Bossier Parish, which was more than 70 percent African American, “returned a single Republican vote in November,” as did St. Bernard Parish, which was more than 50 percent African American; St. Landry Parish “went from a 678-vote Republican margin in the April state election to a Republican tally in November of zero,” and in New Orleans, the Republicans managed less than three hundred votes. In the state as a whole, as Hennessey notes, “the Republican vote declined by over 26,000 between April and November, while the Democratic total jumped by over 44,000” (Hennessey 1985:100-01). The success of white violence prompted further spread of terrorist organizations in the South: “membership and influence of Ku Klux Klan-style organizations reached an apex in Louisiana, and throughout the South, in 1869 and 1870” (2008:68). Demobilization of federal troops coincided with the proliferation of white militant organizations, essentially ensuring the decimation of the Republican Party in the South. Louisiana saw its U.S. troop level decline precipitously, despite its widespread vigilantism, “from nearly 2,000 statewide in 1868 to only 598 in 1870 and 421 in 1872. Left increasingly to their own defenses just as morale and capacities of their enemies surged, Black and Republican voters endured an extended mean season” (Keith 2008:69).

### *Colfax*

Four Black men, led by Captain William Ward, rode on mules just outside of Colfax. They met with four white men attempting to negotiate peace. It was April 5, 1873. But a black man named Louis Meekin disrupted the meeting and frantically relayed disturbing news. A white posse out roaming Grant Parish rode upon Jesse McKinney, an African American who was repairing the wooden fence that lined his home. His wife and children were out in the yard, yet “with no provocation,” one of the white men “shot him through the head. McKinney had ‘cried like a pig,’ one white witness to the incident said later, and then died, and the men who shot him hung around the scene of the crime, ‘cavorting’ for a couple of hours” (Lemann 2006:12-13). The

murder was met with outrage from the African-American community: “brief, inconclusive skirmishes between white posses and black patrols” occurred into the evening of April 5 and into the following day. No one was killed, but it’s important to note the *bilateral* nature of the collective violence simmering beneath the surface in Colfax. As Lemann notes, “the effect on the whites of encountering successful *black armed self-defense*, a thing constantly feared during the centuries of slavery but hardly ever realized, would be hard to overstate” (2006:13; emphasis added). It’s just as significant, however, to note that black Louisianans did not resort to proactive violence; they made no “unprovoked, proven attacks on whites during this period.” What they had done “was take over the courthouse to which they had a right by gubernatorial proclamation, and the force involved had been merely that required to jimmy a window at night when nobody was there. It was the whites who openly treated one political party’s assumption of the powers of local government as provocation sufficient to go to war” (Lemann 2006:14).

On April 12<sup>th</sup>, Sheriff Christopher Columbus Nash and several armed white men on horseback rode into Alexandria, the nearest town to Colfax. The “captain of a steamboat” presented Nash and his men with “a small wheeled cannon” that had previously been mounted to the deck of his ship. Nash and his posse dragged the cannon back to Colfax for service in their war against the former slaves. In the meantime, white Louisianans did their part. The “small ferry that traversed the Red [River] at Colfax” was incapacitated; it sank to the river bottom (Lemann 2006:15). Black families would be unable to escape the violence about to unfold. Early morning, Easter Sunday 1873, Nash addressed his militia, which numbered between two and three hundred white men. He warned that their actions could ‘result in prosecution for treason,’ according to one of the white troops who stood at attention to hear Nash’s proclamation. Those men ‘who were afraid to fight for white supremacy could step out and return home’ (Lemann 2006:15).

Nash and his troops descended upon Colfax at noon, promising mercy if the Black Republicans would voluntarily abdicate the courthouse. They refused, believing federal force may yet intervene in their defense. A fusillade of “nuts, bolts, and other bits of red-hot metal, in lieu of real cannonballs, were raining down into the courthouse, where the black defenders had built two of their own canons “out of old steam pipes” (Lemann 2006:16). The canons proved defective during battle. Nash’s force approached the courthouse from three angles: one unit of whites was “approaching from upriver,” a second was marching from the inland, and a third was

“coming over the levee upstream.” The courthouse was surrounded. Some managed to escape the ‘wholesale execution’ about to erupt, as one white participant remembered the day’s violence, but “whites on horseback pursued” all who fled, and “most were either killed or taken prisoner” (Lemann 2006:17). The ritualistic hunting of human beings—so called because white men united collectively to identify targets for extermination—represents the first feature of a *racial cleansing* evident in the events that developed in Grant Parish on Easter Sunday in 1873. Arson is the second noteworthy characteristic of white collective violence, and in Colfax it served several functions.

Nash and his men had hatched a plan by late afternoon. Several Black men were taken as prisoners of war and were holding them in a building near the courthouse. Nash’s deputy addressed the Black prisoners: ‘You all know you’re going to be shot. I want 6 men to volunteer to set fire to that building, and I will do all I can to save your lives.’ Who was willing to approach the building, the white man wanted to know; who was willing to betray their comrades? A can of coal oil was located, as were some rags. Pinckney Chambers volunteered. The whites gave him a fishing pole, the oil-soaked rags dripping from the end of its line. Then they lit the rags, and Pinckney Chambers undertook the mission none of Nash’s men were brazen enough to risk—getting close enough to actually set the building on fire. Chambers survived a “heavy barrage” of gunfire and reached the courthouse (Lemann 2006:17). According to Isaiah Atkins’s account, Nash had “forced a colored man named Pink” to hold a “pine torch to the edge of the roof until it caught fire” (Meeting of the Colored Men in New Orleans 1873:24). A black man who escaped the courthouse gave an account, “Statement of a Negro Wounded at the Massacre,” originally published in the *New Orleans Republican* (May 12 1873):

I warned our people not to go into the courthouse. I knowed it would be the end of ‘em. But when the cannon went off we were all skeered, and huddled into the building like a herd of sheep. Then the burning roof began to fall on us, and every one was praying and shrieking and singing and calling God to have mercy. The flesh of those furtherest from the door began to roast. I could smell it. ... The hair burnt off our heads, our clothes burn and our skin roasted. (cited in Keith 2008:102)

T.W. DeKlyne arrived on the morning of Tuesday, April 15, and at a warehouse between the courthouse and the river, he discovered “the dead bodies of six colored men who had evidently crept under for concealment, and were shot like dogs.” DeKlyne describes how many of the men “were shot in the back of the head and neck; one man still lay with his hands clasped in supplication,” while the “face of another was completely flattened by blows from a gun, the

broken stock of a double-barreled shot-gun being on the ground near him.” Nearly all of the victims “had from three to a dozen wounds,” indicating the determination of the assailant to mutilate. “Many of them had their brains literally blown out,” recalled DeKlyne. African Americans in the community reported that after the courthouse was consumed, “thirty-four prisoners, who were taken before the burning of the courthouse, were taken to the river bank, two by two, executed and hurled into the river.” T. W. DeKlyne, Colonel and Assistant Adjutant General, wrote he “caused to be buried in the ditch near the ruins of the courthouse the remains of fifty-four colored men, three of whom were so badly burned as to be unrecognizable.” Inside the courthouse remained “the charred bones” of another body; five additional black persons were delivered to family “for internment elsewhere.” Twelve others were so seriously wounded as to be “very unlikely to recover,” and of these men, two “will certainly die” (Meeting of the Colored Men in New Orleans 1873:24-25). And the courthouse was the opening massacre. Property destruction, assault and murder, and a plundering of the entire black community were to follow.

Sunday night, shortly after dark, a boat landed about a mile above Colfax. A young man rushed aboard, requesting the captain land at Colfax. On arriving, the captain “found about a hundred armed men on the bank, and most of the passengers, [himself] among the number, went ashore to view the ‘battle ground.’” The young man had informed him ‘that if we wanted to see dead niggers, here was a chance, for there were a hundred or so scattered over the village and the adjacent fields,’ and he even offered to take him there. The boat captain provided a harrowing account of what he witnessed as he traversed the field in the darkness:

Almost as soon as we got to the top of the landing, sure enough, we began to stumble on them, most of them lying on their faces, and, as I could see by the dim light of the lanterns, riddled with bullets. One poor wretch, a stalwart looking fellow, had been in the burning courthouse, and as he ran out, with his clothes on fire, had been shot. His clothes to his waist were all burnt off, and he was literally broiled. We came upon bodies every few steps, but the sight of this fellow, who was burned, added to the horrible smell of burning human flesh—the remains of those who were shot in the courthouse, which was still on fire—sickened most of us and caused a general cry of ‘Let’s go back.’ (Meeting of Colored Persons 1873:10)

Governor William Pitt Kellogg dispatched Theodore W. DeKlyne and William Whight, colonels from the state militia in New Orleans, with written instructions from the governor “intended to resolve the standoff” over government, but the men arrived to “find the unburied bodies of 71 men. Too little and too late, the militia expedition served its most important purpose in bearing witness” (Keith 2008:111). Keith notes that according to some accounts, thirteen prisoners were hanged from the branches of an old pecan tree, “and may have remained visible to visitors on

April 14. By the time the authorities arrived on Tuesday, however, the only bodies near the tree were the victims of gun violence. Most revealed gunshots to the head. One man's skull had been crushed. He had died with his hands still clasped in the act of begging for his life." A "white veteran historian of the massacre recalled '165 dead was reported within the entrenchment [and] no one will ever know how many met their fate further out as some 25 or 30 men scoured the Country for 4 or 5 miles [and] no report ever reached us of how many they killed in this raid' (Keith 2008:109).

On June 27, 1874, Christopher Columbus Nash arrived on horseback in Natchitoches leading "an armed force said to number a thousand men." Nash's posse "forced the resignation of five Republican parish officials, whose lives were spared in exchange for their agreement to leave the town on the first available boat. The incident was the first in an escalating series of paramilitary attacks on the political enemies of the White League" (Keith 2008:149). Several of the organizers behind the racial violence in Colfax personally profited from their performance. C. C. Dunn "became president of the Grant Parish police jury, the sole agency of local government." Alphonse Cazabat was elected as the Democratic representative for parish attorney. Nash served as Colfax's tax collector in 1877: "his efforts resulted in \$7,307 in tax payments, in contrast to \$863 collected by his Republican predecessor. In subsequent years, Nash opened a prosperous store in town, serving on the police jury, the school board, and every important committee of public interest" (Keith 2008:160).

### *The White League*

After the St. Landry riot event in September and October 1868, no Republican organization existed in the parish until 1872, and not until 1876 did St. Landry have another Republican newspaper (Christensen 2012). By May of 1874, whites in Opelousas established the White League, a paramilitary league composed of many of Louisiana's white citizens. "Yeoman farmers suffering from economic depression were eager recruits in the war against the Negro," writes Rable (2007:132), and unlike the Knights of the White Camelia or the Ku Klux Klan, the White League operated in the open, without attempts to conceal identity. President Grant had received reports from throughout the state stating that racial violence was increasing: this new white vigilante group "appeared to be much better organized and more political in its aims than it had been during the Ku Klux Klan heyday a few years earlier," explains Lehmann. "Well-financed terrorists, armed, increasingly, with the latest in military technology—Prussian needle

guns, Winchester rifles, and Colt revolvers—were engaged in what seemed to be a planned campaign to unseat the Republican Party, and undo Negroes’ civil rights and voting rights, by means of violence” (2006:76). Collective violence “established long-term Democratic dominance in several parishes and created a blueprint for political control for the remainder of Reconstruction” (Christensen 2012:71), a blueprint that spread through Georgia (e.g., the Camilla riot of 1868) and Mississippi as well. In Louisiana, the success of the White League “marked the collapse of Grant’s policies” in that state “and the failure of the Kellogg government to establish any degree of legitimacy” (Rable 2007:140).

In late August in Coushatta, Louisiana, a town not far north of Colfax on the Red River, “a white mob operating under the flag of the White League (and, as usual, under the fantasy of self-protection from marauding Negroes) killed five black men, one of whom was tortured over fire, and then six Republican officeholders, two of whom had already surrendered. Nobody was punished” (Lemann 2006:76). Major Lewis Merrill visited Shreveport, Louisiana in October 1874. He delivered the following report to his superiors in Washington regarding the state of affairs for black Louisianans:

The condition of these poor people is pitiable. They are systematically plundered of their crops and driven away from their homes at best, when they escape personal violence or death, in such numbers that it is not an exaggeration to say that the entire black population of this section is terror-struck, and, if remaining at their homes at all, doing so in almost hourly apprehension of White Leaguers. Large numbers of them dare not get to their homes at all, and ... families are scattered to the four winds—the father here, and wife and children somewhere hidden in the woods. There is absolutely no hope for them from the enforcement of any local law; from this they can get no protection whatsoever. (Lemann 2006:78)

White violence transformed the political landscape in St. Landry, both in 1868 and for the foreseeable future. “During the late registration,” Beverly Wilson told the Louisiana General Assembly “every colored man belonging to the Democratic party was obliged to take his certificate of registration to Mr. Mayo, the druggist, and leave it with him, which they all did” (Joint Committee 1869:33). In other words, Black republicans were coerced to submit their republican voter registration tickets—the very ticket they would submit have submitted to vote Grant for president in November, 1868—to Mayo, one of the three men involved in the beating of republican Emerson Bentley at the Methodist Church in Opelousas. Mayo destroyed these tickets, which helps account for the sweeping changes in election results (see Appendix 2).

In 1867 there had been 2,102 registered republicans in St. Landry Parish, and according to the *Supplemental Report* from the Louisiana General Assembly, not a single Republican vote was cast in the parish during the November 1868 presidential election (see JC 1869:xix). Beverly Wilson, a Black resident of St. Landry, surrendered his voting registration ticket to the

Figure 1. Protection Papers in St. Landry Parish

**" PROTECTION."**

" OPELOUSAS, October 5, 1868.

" This is to certify that Beverly Wilson is a member of the First Colored Hancock Democratic Club of the First Ward, and is entitled to the friendship, confidence and protection of all good Democrats.

" (Signed) LEON MANSO, President.

" Approved, T. L. MACON,  
" President Democratic Central Committee.

" Approved by Central Hancock Club,  
" (Signed) WM. H. ELLIS, Secretary.

" Approved, J. H. OVERTON,  
" President Central Democratic Committee,  
" Parish St. Landry.

" Approved, J. H. HALSEY, Chairman."

Source: Joint Committee, Louisiana General Assembly (1869:34)

were furnished with protection papers by the Central Hancock Club, and were told that no white man would hurt them" if they produced this paper (Figure 1, above left). Pierre Young, a plantation worker who survived the St. Landry violence, testified he "does not know of one [Black American] who voted the Republican ticket," but he did have personal knowledge "of over one hundred and fifty colored men who were murdered" during the end of September, 1868. Young's final act in St. Landry illustrates the power of white violence to decimate its political rivals in the parish: A few days after the riot, Sheriff Petrie arrived at his door and "asked him to be a Democrat," but Young refused, telling him "he belonged to the Radical party." Petrie then said that Young "would be a dead nigger if he did not vote the Democratic ticket." Fearful the threat would be carried out, Pierre Young "took the first favorable opportunity to leave the parish, taking to the woods during the day" (Joint Committee 1869:42).

Politically active black men were murdered throughout the South during this period in a coordinated attempt to destroy the Republican Party, including Georgia's Abram Colby, in 1869; Alabama's Richard Burke, in 1870; and Mississippi's Jack Dupree, also in 1870. Their deaths are indicative of the instrumentality of white collective violence, especially in destabilizing black political empowerment. Abram Colby organized "one of the largest and most enthusiastic branches" of the Equal Rights Association in 1866; two years later, he won election to the state

Democrats; in fact, he claimed he did not know a single African American who kept his registration ticket: "they thought that if they did not they would be looked upon with suspicion, that is, as Radicals, which is equivalent to being an escaped murderer in this parish." These "so-called colored Democrats

legislature, so in 1869, Klansman from Greene County, Georgia “forced Abram Colby into the woods ‘and there stripped and beat him in the most cruel manner for nearly three hours” while his wife, mother, and daughter were forced to watch. Richard Burke was a leader in Alabama’s Loyal League, but Sumter County whites considered him ‘obnoxious,’ a black man who had ‘acquired a great influence over people of his color,’ so he was executed. Jack Dupree’s wife had just given birth to twins in Mississippi, but Jack was president of a Republican club and ‘known to speak his mind,’ so he had to go. Jack Dupree had his throat sliced in front of his wife; as she screamed, he was disemboweled. “Countless other local leaders were forced to flee their homes after brutal whippings,” explains historian Eric Foner (1988:426). Henry Adams, a former slave who traveled across Louisiana documenting white violence, gathered a list containing “the names of 683 victims” for the ten years after the Civil War “just in the upper Red River parishes of Louisiana” alone (Lemann 2006:10).

Henry Adams, a black political organizer based in Shreveport, Louisiana, “observed a range of electoral manipulations in the Red River country between 1876 and 1879. Technically color-blind accommodations, including the last-minute relocation of polling sites and the use of multiple ballot boxes, suppressed and discounted the African American vote.” Adams told Congress “of a practice known as ‘counting out,’” in which “white electoral officials ensured that voting tallies in white precincts sufficed to overwhelm the voices of blacks who managed to cast their ballots. Force remained a ready resort. Throughout the election season, White Leaguers and their allies mounted militant displays that terrified Republican organizers and intimidated would-be candidates and voters” (Keith 2008:159). White violence in Louisiana also had the effect of hastening African-American migration. The Exodusters originated from “a Shreveport-based freedman’s organization known only as ‘the Committee’ (led by Henry Adams), with the hope of establishing “an autonomous community of blacks in an unspoiled location.” The movement, “led by a dynamic former slave named Henry Adams,” reached its climax “in the spring of 1879, when some 6,000 African Americans, including many from the Red River valley, migrated en masse to found a settlement in Kansas. ‘Kansas Fever’ inspired harsh reprisals on the part of white elites, who had already taken steps to halt the disappearance of their disappointed workforce” (Keith 2008:162).

Racial collective violence proved instrumental for Louisiana white folks in other ways as well. In Colfax, after the burning of the courthouse and the slaughtering of many who managed



to escape, whites engaged in rituals of dispossession, stripping African Americans of what property they had accumulated since emancipation. After the couthouse, “[n]ot content with this destruction of human life,” the white democrats stole “horses, mules, wagons, furniture, provisions, money, yea, even the clothes and shoes of the murdered men were taken and carried off.” They went from cabin to cabin, lifting anything of value for their own personal enrichment, “and this practice was being pursued for days after the massacre” (Meeting of Colored Men in New Orleans 1873:11). This kind of violence continued into the 1870s in Louisiana, and most of it classifies as *political terrorism*, a particularly extreme form of disciplinary violence intended to manufacture fear and compel Black submission. In East Feliciana in the fall of 1875, the Bulldozers “killed a dozen politically active Negroes, including a former state legislator named John Gair (Gair ‘was literally show to pieces’); on election day in 1876, *not a single Republican vote was cast* in the parish” (Lemann 2006:178; emphasis added). In West Feliciana Parish “dozens of Negroes” were murdered during the spring of 1876, and in the fall political campaign, two Black Republicans were killed. In East Baton Rouge Parish, a Senate investigating committee reported that ‘more than sixty colored republicans were killed in the parish on account of their politics within the eight months preceding the November election.’ The coroner “ceased taking further inquests” after the captain of the Regulators informed him that, should his work continue, his body would be sent along with the others (Lemann 2006:178). White racial violence structured black culture in Louisiana by stunting all development of the Republican party. The main activities of the White League, as Lemann notes, “were in the public realm,” meaning violence conveyed symbolism driving republican office holders from power and disrupting African American political activity and participation in elections. But the racial violence in Colfax and elsewhere throughout Louisiana was also only the beginning: “White Leagues and Rifle Clubs appeared and riots played an integral part of the redemptions of Alabama in 1874, Mississippi in 1875, and South Carolina in 1876” (Hennessey 1985:100).

**‘A PERFECT CARNIVAL OF RELEASED RASCALITY’:  
BLACK SUFFRAGE, THE WHITE LINE, AND THE REDEMPTION OF MISSISSIPPI**

In 1860, Mississippi had just under 354,000 white folks and just over 437,000 black folks (and of the black population, less than 1,000 were free (Du Bois 1935:431). The sharecropper system

“was rapidly emerging as the dominant economic form” in Mississippi following emancipation (Lemann 2006:53). To escape it, the former slaves needed access to schools, access to the law and a real system of justice, and access to patronage jobs; those goals were not possible without political power. Lemann’s point illustrates the instrumentality of white collective violence in Mississippi: in order to rise above the Black Codes and escape unequal labor relations in the aftermath of emancipation, African Americans would need access to political power, which in this case meant Republican state power. White violence was instrumental in preventing black education, preventing black political assembly and voting, and preventing the upward economic mobility of former slaves. As such white violence directly structured both economic relations (i.e., between white landowners and the freedmen) and political relations (i.e., by preventing black organization and voting). Collective white violence became a tool that directly structured economic and political relations in a new social system gradually evolving in Mississippi.

Mississippi’s prosperous whites were “nicknamed Bourbons by their opponents (and they didn’t find the comparison to prerevolutionary French kings offensive),” and they did not particularly care for black organization of any kind. Black culture was anathema. Most Mississippi white folks “believed so deeply that racial hierarchy was the natural order of things that they considered themselves not as prejudiced against Negroes but merely as protectors of that natural order” (2006:65). Of black-white relations in Mississippi, J. H. Weber, Captain and Acting Assistant Commissioner for the Freedmen’s Bureau wrote the following to Schurz:

The prejudices of the citizens are very strong against the negro; he is considered to be deserving of the same treatment a mule gets, in many cases not as kind, as it is unprofitable to kill or maim a mule, but the breaking of the neck of the free negro is nobody’s loss; and unless there is some means for meting out justice to these people that is surer and more impartial than these civil justice’s courts, run by men whose minds are prejudiced and bitter against the negro, I would recommend, as an act of humanity, that the negroes be made slaves again. (Schurz 1865:97)

Across the state, organizations similar to Louisiana’s White League were appearing on the scene with the intention of reestablishing white supremacy in economics and politics. Local whites facilitated the organizational growth of the White Liners through ‘Taxpayer’ leagues,’ whose membership was all white; these ‘leagues’ were also proliferating across the state in 1874 and “appeared to operate in coordination with the White Liners” (Lemann 2006:82). Their main point of opposition regarded public financing of education for African American children, which, in their minds meant providing the children of freed slaves with a means of escaping the sharecropping and peonage systems designed to exploit black labor.

The White Liners, a “tightly controlled statewide organization,” quite possibly even regional, had ties to the Democratic Party. Lemann describes a group who called themselves Modocs. These young men were Confederate veterans “who made themselves available to travel anywhere that white-on-black political violence was under way, so that they could enthusiastically participate in it, operating on the collective fantasy that they were a tribe of wild Indians” (2006:160). Culture, in the form of organizations that pull like-minded actors together in a collectivity capable of unified action, is crucial for the development of mass racial violence. The Civil War provided the ground for military training, and those former Confederate soldiers continued coordinating against the rise of African-American rights in its aftermath. State lines were irrelevant. Maintaining white supremacy was the goal and terrorism the primary technique.

In the summer and early fall of 1870, in the neighboring state of Alabama, Klan activities in Sumter and Greene counties caused many blacks to migrate across state lines into Meridian, located in Lauderdale County, Mississippi. Meridian was a rapidly growing railroad town in the eastern part of Mississippi under political control of white Republicans appointed by Governor James Alcorn. White “yeomen who feared competition from black farmers joined the Klan to drive them off the land,” writes Rable. “Alabama posses crossed the border into eastern Mississippi to apprehend blacks who had violated labor contracts” (2007:97). After armed Black men paraded against these night riders in March 1871, three African-American leaders were arrested on charges of making ‘incendiary’ speeches. At their court hearing, gunfire rang out—the Republican judge and two of the three Black defendants were killed. A day of rioting followed, and according to one account, every white man “that could do so got a gun or a pistol and went on the hunt for negroes,” according to W.H. Hardy, a local Democratic leader who later wrote about the riot event (Wharton 1947:189).

The violence did not end there. J. Aaron Moore, a Black Republican leader, had escaped from the courthouse in the commotion that erupted. Just after midnight, however, nightriders torched Moore’s house; shortly afterward, “they fired and destroyed the Negro Baptist church” (Hennessey 1978:179). Hennessey notes that by the end of a week of violence, “all of the black and white leaders of Lauderdale County Negroes were dead or exiled, and life resumed a subdued normality in the town” (1978:179). Though it is not known precisely how many African Americans were killed in Meridian, it is estimated that between 25 and 30 were slaughtered (Wharton 1947:189). This instance of racial cleansing illustrates how white violence structured

southern redemption, location by location. By assassinating black leadership and a white judge, white vigilantes decimated the local structure of the Republican party. White folks effectively used racial violence and intimidation to destroy the nascent growth of Southern Republicanism in Mississippi, and it undoubtedly altered the political landscape for generations to come. The Meridian riot marked “an epoch in the transition period of reconstruction,” according one historian, “and was a forecast of the end of carpetbag rule in Mississippi.” Though his analysis reveals his prejudices—Wharton writes that “the Negroes, largely unarmed, economically dependent, and timid and unresourceful after generations of servitude”—he notes that white Democrats learned a valuable lesson from the success of their campaign: African Americans “would offer no effective resistance to violence” (1947:190).

Mississippi’s state elections in the fall of 1873 were remarkable: African Americans held 55 of 115 seats in the state’s House of Representatives and of the 37 state senators, 9 were Black. The new state legislature had a strong Republican majority, and for a few days after the election, it appeared “as if a new political order had emerged, and one so solid that, at last, the rebels would have no choice but to stop resisting the outcome of the Civil War and the authority of the U.S. government,” writes Lemann (2006:61). “It does seem to me that if there ever was a time when the white people of this state, the men in whose veins flows the blood of the ruling races of the world, should rise & with one unanimous voice protest against the domination about to be piled upon them, the present is that time,” wrote Lucius Q. C. Lamar. “Can it be that the soul of our proud people which a few years ago rose with such keen sense of wrong and heroic effort has, by long oppression, been dulled into indifference & sullen despair” (Lemann 2006:69-70)? The answer was a resounding ‘No!’ Early in 1874 “another organization begins to make its appearance,” according to the house report *Vicksburgh Troubles*, published in 1875; this organization, “basing itself upon the embodiment of force and the readiness to use violence for the purpose of controlling and overthrowing the will of the majority, lawfully expressed in the form of elections,” was known as the White Line. These ‘people’s clubs,’ as they were sometimes referred to in Warren County, established a “military organization, officered, equipped, and armed” (U.S. Congress 1875:II). Wharton notes that between 1874 and 1875, “there were a great number of unpleasant incidents, and after each resulting riot, Negro resistance to white domination in the surrounding area completely collapsed” (1947:190). Data

from Mississippi elections held in 1873 and 1875 indicate the extent to which ballot stuffing, violence, and fraud were necessary to carry the election for the Democratic Party (Appendix 3).

### *Vicksburg*

The White Line, “determined to make their first effort toward the political purposes of their organization in the city of Vicksburgh [sic],” focused their efforts on controlling “both the registration and the election of city officers.” The election was to be held in August, 1874, but problems with numbers persisted for the democrats: Vicksburg “was known and admitted to have been republican by a majority of between 300 and 400, and undoubtedly had a clear majority of lawful votes of colored people.” By June White Line clubs had “formed in every ward of the city, and were extended into the country,” with 6 or 7 military organizations, each “varying from sixty to one hundred men each.” All of them were armed, many with Winchester rifles, “and all undoubtedly report[ed] to and [were] commanded by some central authority in the executive committee” (43<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Congress 1875:III).

The White Liners besieged Vicksburg for more than four weeks in 1874, through July and into August. “They patrolled the streets by day and especially by night; they placed sentinels and released guards; they had their passwords and their countersigns; they admitted whom they pleased and kept out whom they pleased; they watched the steamboat landings, the ferries, and the roads,” according to *Vicksburgh Troubles*, a report from the 43<sup>rd</sup> United States Congress, published in 1875. Armed whites attended to the registration of voters, “in clear violation of the law,” and perhaps more importantly, they “impressed upon the whole city that fear which comes naturally” from an organized group with an aura of “mystery which surrounded their numbers, their leaders, their purposes, and their threats” (1875:III; see Lemann 2006:74). It should come as no surprise, then, that this kind of terrorism was instrumental in structuring Mississippi’s state government. August 5<sup>th</sup> brought “a sweeping Democratic victory in Vicksburg” (Lemann 2006:74). But the symbolic significance of the event—both of Democratic victory in a city whose population was predominantly black and of President Grant’s refusal to send federal troops to protect the integrity of the election—was even greater. “The result, moral and political, extended far beyond Vicksburg,” wrote J. S. McNeily, a white Mississippian and historian. “The significant and signal overthrow of a radical ticket, that followed the administration’s refusal to back it with troops, revealed the fatal weakness of the whole reconstruction fabric of

government. It pointed to the certainty of the recovery of white rule whenever the pressure of Federal force should be lifted” (Lemann 2006:75).

By September 1875 young white men all over Mississippi formed militia clubs, accumulated arms and munitions, and trained in preparation for war. The Aberdeen *Examiner* described the situation in Monroe County: total victory would “be achieved by arms if necessary.” The people of Mississippi have “burnished their arms and bought more cartridges, and each county conducted the campaign upon its own plan.” White liners were “ready and willing to support its neighbors physically and morally whenever the emergency demanded aid,” explained the paper, “here and elsewhere in the dark counties we guaranteed peace by thoroughly organizing for war.” With a single call from the County Executive Committee, “it was easy—as demonstrated on several occasions—to put seventeen hundred well-mounted horsemen into line,” due to an exceptionally well-organized and “thoroughly connected” network of courier lines (Wharton 1947:187-88).

At 3:00 am on the morning of Monday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, the alarm on the court-house cupola was “struck by the watchman,” but it proved a false alarm. The watchman, E.D. Richardson, struck the alarm again, this time between 7:00 and 8:00; before long a crowd of white men were marching on Cherry Street, and “the court-house square was filled by a large number of excited men, armed with all sorts of weapons.” Dr. O’Leary, the mayor of Vicksburg, placed the city under martial law and “delegated supreme command over the armed citizens to Horace H. Miller,” a former officer in the Confederate army. Colonel Miller had a “known and declared position in the white line,” and on assuming command, he directed “parties of mounted men to patrol Vicksburgh and drive all colored people off the streets—orders which were executed with extreme brutality.” Colonel Miller moved with a “force of about eighty to one hundred well-armed men” down Cherry Street. There they met a “body of colored men under Andrew Owens.” Though they did not fire a shot, these African-American men were about to be ambushed, with Miller’s men positioned on a hill atop a ravine, located just behind Owens’s men; also situated above the ravine, “a line of skirmishers [waited] to cover the bridge” (U.S. Congress 1875:vii). While the ambush unfolded, another club of White Liners “came by the Jackson road.” Mounted on horseback, this “company of whites, known as Captain Hogin’s, from the Yazoo River country,” began pouring into Vicksburg to help defend their city. “With that curious inconsistency which seems to be part of their nature, they had left their wives,

children, and property unprotected in a heavy black settlement, and gone to defend Vicksburgh, which was already armed to the teeth, against an imaginary [black] invasion,” explains the congressional report. Their behavior should be understood as “proof that no man believed in any actual danger to wife, children, or property, but was fully determined to use this outbreak as a means to political success, for these men who left their families and property unprotected to go to Vicksburgh were members of the people’s club or white line (U.S. Congress 1875:viii).

But this wasn’t all. Another military organization swept through Vicksburg, “this time on the Hall’s Ferry or Grove-street road,” commanded by Colonel French, another former Confederate soldier. “Exaggerated statements of the peril of the city”—‘insurrection at Vicksburgh’—“are telegraphed to all parts of the country,” noted the congressional report. Offers of aid came back “from all quarters,” and on December 7, “one hundred and sixty armed men from Louisiana pour in to the rescue.” A telegram arrived from Texas for the President of the Board of Supervisors: “Do you want any men?” wrote J.G. Gates and A.H. Mason. “Can raise good crowd within twenty-four hours to kill out your negroes” (U.S. Congress 1875:ix). For three days from December 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> at least 29 African Americans were killed. “How many more are missing and unaccounted for, lying in the cane, it is impossible to ascertain. One of the witnesses stated that we (the committee) never could find out ; ‘but *we* watch where the buzzards hover, and there we find the dead men’ (U.S. Congress 1875:xi).

### *Clinton and Yazoo City*

On September 4, 1875 a Republican rally was ambushed in Clinton, Mississippi, a town in Hinds County located ten miles west of Jackson. Senator Charles Caldwell received white visitors to his home after the riot event. Margaret Caldwell, who received the men since her husband had already left town, described what happened in Clinton:

Before sun up, they went to a house where there was an old black man, a feeble old man, named Bob Beasley, and they shot him all to pieces. And they went to Mr. Willis’s and took out a man, named Gamaliel Brown, and shot him all to pieces. It was early in the morning; and they went out to Sam Jackson’s, president of the [Republican] club, and they shot him all to pieces. He hadn’t even time to put on his clothes. And they went out to Alfred Hastings; Alfred saw the coming . . . and they shot Alfred all to pieces, another man named Ben Jackson, and then they goes out and shoots one or two further up on the Madison road; I don’t know exactly; the name of one was Lewis Russell. He was shot, and Moses Hill. They were around that morning killing people before breakfast. (Lemann 2006:115-16)

One of the white men gave Caldwell a reason for the massacre: “You all had a big dinner yesterday and paraded around with your drums and flags. That was impudence to the white

people. You have no right to do it. You have got to leave these damned negroes; leave them and come to our side. You have got to join the democratic party. We are going to kill all the negroes. The negro men shall not live.” No one was ever prosecuted for these murders. No one ever “made an exact accounting of the Negro dead,” either. “Most estimates were that somewhere between thirty and fifty men had been killed” (Lemann 2006:117). White Liners rampaged unopposed through the winding countryside for two or three days, killing African Americans.

Hundreds of African Americans fled from the racial violence. They poured into Jackson, the capitol of Mississippi and the closest city to Clinton (Hennessey 1978). Many black families simply abandoned their cotton crop, which was just ready to be picked; “they would have no money for a year,” writes Lemann, “because they quite rightly feared they would be killed.” They traveled “through the woods and swamps because the whites were patrolling the roads,” and eventually more than 500 African Americans were camped near the federal courthouse where they sought the protection of the U.S. Army (Lemann 2006:117). As news of violence spread out of Mississippi, President Grant’s administration was slow to respond, despite pleas from Governor Adelbert Ames regarding the need for immediate federal intervention. “The “back-and-forth” between President Grant, Governor Ames, and Attorney General Pierrepont “took up an entire week after the Clinton riot—a week in which Northern papers were full of the shocking news from Mississippi and reports on the president’s evident indecisiveness in the face of it—and during that time the Democratic militia solidified its hold on the area around Clinton.” This period represented “a crucial moment in which the *whole fate of Reconstruction, and Negro citizenship, hung in the balance,*” writes Lemann. “Time was short, and the level of civil disorder was as high as it had ever been in American history” (2006:122; emphasis added).

The key tactic to the Democrats plan was, in fact, to “make every incident look spontaneous, local, and personal, rather than like part of a planned campaign” (Lemann 2006:120), and this partly explains the terminology (i.e., ‘race riot’) historically applied to these events. Riots are perceived as events that erupt spontaneously, thus the language used to describe the events helped to mask the incredibly organized nature of the violence in order to prevent federal intervention into southern affairs. Hennessey shows that white violence was instrumental, politically, in Hinds County during the November election: “After losing the 1873 election by 2,264 votes, the Democrats carried Hinds County by 1,515 ballots in 1875. Clinton



was not the last redemption riot in Mississippi,” as other smaller instances of racial violence followed in Friar’s Point, Columbus, and Rolling Fork (Hennessey 1978:296).

Yazoo County is located down in the swamps by the Yazoo and Mississippi rivers, a region “not considered a healthy locality by the whites,” noted Governor Ames. “Somebody rang the town bell, and soon Yazoo City was in an uproar,” writes Lemann. “The streets were filled with armed white patrols on horseback,” and black folks scattered terrified, struggling to escape the range of white shotguns and pistols. “By morning Yahoo City had the quality of an informal White Line military base, filled with armed men from all over the county and points more distant, who had come to defend it against the lustful and bloodthirsty Negro force.” Their ‘defense’ of the city was actually a “forcible takeover of Yazoo City at gunpoint from its elected government. The Democrats were in control now” (Lemann 2006:109).

The story of Albert T. Morgan, an “enthusiastic Radical Republican” who had moved south to Mississippi from Ohio “explicitly to seek his fortune,” shows how collective white violence is instrumental in structuring local authority. Morgan was elected sheriff of Yazoo County in 1873, by a count of 2,365 to 431, in what “was the only Mississippi election in the century following emancipation in which there was truly free Negro voting” (Lemann 2006:101). But after the armed takeover of Yazoo City by White Liners, Morgan took advantage of an opening in the violence; a false rumor of impending federal troops led to a retreat of the marauding white force, and Morgan slipped away, riding through the night to Jackson: “he never saw Yazoo City again” (Lemann 2006:110).

African Americans greatly outnumbered whites in Yazoo County, and in the election of 1873—during which rituals of violence were not widespread—the republican vote was 2,427, and the democratic vote 411, giving the republicans a majority of 2,000. Yet in 1875, the democratic vote was 4,044 and the republican vote 7. “These seven votes, I understand,” testified Governor Adelbert Ames before the Mississippi Committee, “were cast in a spirit of bravado by some democrats, who declared that it should not be said that there was no republican votes cast.” The difference in votes cast is striking, as Ames notes: “In 1873 there were 2,833 votes cast, while in 1875 there were 4,051.” The Sheriff of Yazoo County had been driven from the region, and republicans had no protection, hence white violence proved instrumental in transforming the political structure of the entire county, a predominantly African-American county.

### *Instrumental White Violence*

In Columbus, the Lowndes County seat, rumors of a ‘Negro uprising’ swirled around town the evening prior to the election. By now such rumors were “standard,” and a white posse formed. A “series of fires” were set on the edge of town. Four black people were killed and three were wounded, including an elderly woman.” The following day, at the county courthouse, a “Democratic mob was on hand to greet those black voters who, after the terrors of the night before, dared to show up.” A black Republican who held office in Lowndes County described the situation in a letter to Governor Ames: “The voters did not get to vote, & them that did not voted at the point of gun & pistol of the dimmacte party. My life was throatent at the ballot-box in Columbus as one of the registers or judges of the election” (Lemann 2006:149).

In Claiborne County, just beneath Vicksburg at the opposite end of the state from Columbus, White Liners appeared at the polling place in Port Gibson. According to one witness, who provided a written account, a bugle sounded. Eighty White Liners, “armed with Remington breach loader rifles,” marched from an empty store room located on Main Street “in double file military steps.” The brigade halted their march “within a few feet of the polls. Immediately after the firing commenced. Black folks fled for their lives; John Morris was killed and six others were wounded. In Peytona, also located in Claiborne County, “not a single Republican vote was cast.” One Republican testified to Democratic tactics used in Bethel. Just as the Republicans “were commencing to count out the votes,” a band of Democrats suddenly “burst open the door,” rushed into the room, “and put out the lights.” The armed takeover appears to have been easily accomplished: They “knocked the clerk over, and jerked up the ballot-box, and away they went with it” (Lemann 2006:150). In the 1873 election, Republicans cast 1,844 votes in Claiborne County; in 1875, they cast 496.” As Lemann notes, “The only polling place where there was a substantial Republican votes was in the town of Grand Gulf, where the Negro voters had decided to come armed” (2006:150). White Democrats conducted state-sanctioned violence in order to carry the election. The Republican vote total in the county as a whole went from 1,844 in the 1873 election, to 496 in this one” (Lemann 2006:150). Blacks were denied protection from the federal government, and as a result, white violence produced a landslide election victory that permitted the Democrats to capture power in a region where the Republican vote dominated.

The most well-organized white violence came in Monroe County, located on the Alabama border just north of Lowndes County, where White Line activity was concentrated. Monroe’s African-American population outnumbers its white by a 2-to-1 ratio. Democrats

“posted armed sentries at two fords on the Tombigbee River, which bisected Monroe County, so that the large black population of rural Negro voters living on the other side of the river could not get to their polling places” on election day, writes Lemann. White Liners “drew up a drawbridge at another spot” to prevent blacks from voting, in addition to other tactics. At the polling place in Spring Hill, white men armed with guns and knives “drove dozens of Negro would-be voters away” (2006:152). James Lee, the Republican sheriff, Democrats carried “pistols and sticks,” thrashing “[s]everal hundred colored men.” African American would-be voters “fled in wild disorder and confusion from the courthouse in every direction,” recalled Lee. Republicans in Monroe “had been counting on fourteen hundred Republican voters in Aberdeen” (Lemann 2006:153). They received only 90. The Democrats carried Monroe County.

In the 1875 election for state treasurer, African Americans arrived at the courthouse in Aberdeen, “the most important polling place in the county,” to find a cannon on the lawn, flanked by a “complement of more than a hundred armed and mounted soldiers, wearing makeshift uniforms” (Lemann 2006:152). This election militia was under the command of Reuben Davis, a former Confederate general, and the vote differentials from Monroe County between the state election in 1873 and 1875 reveal the instrumental nature of white violence: in 1873, 2,007 residents voted for the Republican Party, compared with 1,546 in 1875; conversely, the Democratic Party had 1,837 votes in the 1873 election but recorded 2,613 in 1875. Thus while the republican vote declined by more than 460 votes, the democratic vote increased by 776, guaranteeing victory in Monroe County for the Democratic Party. Table 4, below, shows the results of the Mississippi election for State Treasurer in 1873 and 1875 (see Appendix 3 for results from all counties). The Senate Select Committee appointed to investigate affairs in Mississippi did not equivocate in their assessment. They concluded that outrages were perpetuated in at least 22 counties: Alcorn, Amite, Chickasaw, Claiborne, Clay, Copiah, De Soto, Grenada, Hinds, Holmes, Kemper, Lee, Lowndes, Madison, Marshall, Monroe, Noxubee, Rankin, Scott, Warren, Washington, and Yazoo. If there had been a free election in these counties, “republican candidates would have been chosen, and the character of the legislature so changed that there would have been 66 republicans to 50 democrats in the house, and 26 republicans to 11 democrats in the senate.” Therefore, the “present legislature of Mississippi is not a legal body,” nor are its actions “entitled to recognition of the Government of the United States (U.S. Congress 1876:xxviii). Without this terrorism, it is undeniable that Republicans

would have outperformed their democratic counterparts in the election of 1875. State finances would undoubtedly have been distributed differently had a republican legislature been in session.

And since rituals of violence, fraud, and intimidation proved so successful, why not continue to utilize them in upcoming elections, considering the United States federal government did not appear to be interested in intervention? According to Nicholas Lemann, there “was hardly a cessation of political violence between the end of 1875’s campaign and the beginning of 1876’s” (2006:171). White Liners disrupted republican rallies and distributed ‘certificates of loyalty’ to African Americans who promised to vote the democratic ticket. The polling results of the 1876 election were astonishing: Samuel Tilden, the Democratic governor of New York and presidential nominee, “carried Mississippi by more than fifty-thousand votes. Democrats swept almost all the other races. In Yazoo County, only two people cast Republican votes; in Tallahatchie County, only one; in Lowndes County, only thirteen” (Lemann 2006:171). During elections in 1882, myriad extralegal methods were used to ensure Democratic victory over the Republicans [see Wharton’s *The Negro in Mississippi*]. “Independent candidates were run out of their counties, beaten, or murdered,” wrote a local newspaper editor. “Ballot boxes were stuffed, fraudulent returns were made, and thousands of opposition votes were thrown out on technicalities. With mock solemnity, newspapers reported that boxes containing anti-Democratic majorities had been eaten by mules or horses” (Woodward 1971:105).

While Louisiana may have been unsuccessful in 1868—at least in terms of preventing Grant from winning the state in the November presidential election—Mississippi most certainly succeeded in its terrorism in 1875 and 1876. “They have secured power by fraud and force, and, if left to themselves they will by fraud and force retain it,” note the Boutwell committee in their opening report. “Indeed, the memory of the bloody events of the campaign of 1875, with the knowledge that their opponents can command, on an instant, the presence of organized bodies of armed men at every voting-place, will deter the republican party from any general effort to regain the power wrested from them. These disorders exist also in neighboring States, and the spirit and ideas which give rise to the disorders are even more general” (44<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1876:xxix). And so it was that South Carolina carried the torch from Mississippi in 1876, implementing a system of terrorism that would produce total domination for the Democrats.

## ‘THOSE LEADING RASCALS, WE INTEND TO PUT THEM OUT OF THE WAY’: THE RED SHIRTS REDEEM SOUTH CAROLINA

Martin Witherspoon Gary was a Confederate General who in 1874 purchased a plantation in Edgefield County, “a place that shared a reputation for rich soils and violence.” When he first arrived in Edgefield, Gary called 137 local planters for a ‘tax union meeting.’ The men published a notice in the *Edgefield Advertiser* declaring they were ‘ready to strike for white supremacy.’ Economic coercion was the first step, as Gary and his local planters announced that they were “drawing up lists of blacks to whom land would not be rented as punishment for their political activity” (Budiansky 2008:32). Gary was planning a campaign to terrorize active black voters in Edgefield County, and in the spring of 1876, he recorded his ideas, entitled “Plan of Campaign,” in a small journal. The first three items were straightforward: “Determine if it is necessary to kill every White Radical in this county,” every “mulatto Radical leader,” and every “negro leader.” His men were to “make no individual threats,” he wrote, “but let this be known as a fixed settled thing. We must send speakers to all of their political meetings, who must denounce the rascality of these leaders face to face. The moral effects of this denunciation” would be great, he noted, and “through military organization” they would intimidate Black residents and eliminate their vote: “Every white man must be at the polls by five o clock in the morning of the day of election, and must go prepared to remain there until the votes are counted,” Gary explained. “Make no threats—gently in manner, strongly in deed” (Budiansky 2008:30).

The former Confederate General had grown impatient with Democrats “who would compromise or surrender,” writes historian Stephen Budiansky. “He stormed over the refusal of the state’s Democrats to endorse a ‘straight out’ ticket of uncompromising white conservatives in the upcoming elections; there was even talk of the Democrats throwing in the towel altogether and supporting the moderate Republican incumbent governor” (2008:32). Martin Gary gathered his neighbors in the spring of 1876. He told them “one ounce of fear is worth a pound of persuasion.” He told them they must “seize the first opportunity that the negroes might offer them to provoke a riot and teach the negroes a lesson.” Gary believed whites must “demonstrate their superiority by killing as many of them as was justifiable” (Budiansky 2008:34).

Ben Tillman shared Gary’s contempt for compromise when it came to racial and political matters in South Carolina. Tillman joined the Sweetwater Sabre Club along with 45 other young white men from Edgefield and Aiken Counties who had armed themselves with “improved

carbines and Winchester rifles.” The organization also provided a communication network: “In the event of trouble, they had a system of couriers who could spread the alarm and get everyone assembled on two hours’ notice. They would meet at the little Sweetwater Baptist Church about eight miles north of the predominantly black town of Hamburg.” African Americans comprised 60 percent of Edgefield County’s population; in Hamburg, that number was 75 percent, and within a few years after the Civil War, the town “became a small but significant center of African-American political autonomy.” Hamburg had a black mayor and black town councilmen; it had African-American county commissioners and state legislators, and the black community had even formed a “state National Guard company” (Budiansky 2008:32). Hamburg, as with Edgefield County more generally, experienced tremendous growth in cultural organization between both black and white groups. These institutions provided the communication networks for the establishment of systems of collective violence. Without these developments, violence is far less likely, and black resistance is far less likely to coalesce, much less offer a formidable defense should a ‘race riot’ erupt, whether staged or spontaneous in nature.

### *Hamburg*

Thomas Butler and his brother-in-law, Henry Getzen, were riding down Market Street through Hamburg in a horse and buggy. Company A, the 18<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the South Carolina National Guard—an all-black militia unit led by D. L. Adams, 38 years old and known locally as Dock—was parading down Market Street at the very same time, celebrating the 4<sup>th</sup> of July as they marched with “thumb-loading rifles” and bayonets. The unit had 84 members, according to Adams’s testimony, and on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Tom Butler and Henry Getzen stewed as they watched the display of black pride. “They had been on one side of the street, sitting in a buggy, looking at us drill up and down the street, I reckon, for about half an hour” (U.S. Congress 1877:35). Butler and Getzen demanded that the company should make way for them in the street. Dock Adams censored Butler for failure to yield: ‘if ever you had a company out here I should not have treated you in this kind of a manner. I would have gone around and shown some respect to you.’ ‘Well,’ Butler said, ‘this is the rut I always travel, and I don’t intend to get out of it for no damn niggers’ (U.S. Congress 1877:36). Adams complied a let the buggy through, though some of his men were irritated by the insulting manner with which Butler and Getzen drove through the company. The gesture of acquiescence did not pacify Butler, however; he returned

the following morning with his father Robert Butler (and Getzen) at Trial Justice Prince Rivers' office on Market Street. The trial justice issued a warrant for Adams's arrest.

A buggy carrying General Matthew C. Butler (unrelated to Thomas) arrived in Hamburg around 3:00 p.m., Saturday, July 8<sup>th</sup>. General Butler demanded that he speak to Prince Rivers, the town's African-American magistrate, who was not expected to return until 4:00. After a testy exchange with Rivers' constable, General Butler announced that he 'was going to have the guns of that company.' August Robertson acted as a messenger between General Butler, with his men on Centre Street, and Captain Adams, sequestered in the Sibley building. 'What will effect a compromise in this thing, as I am anxious for peace,' Robertson asked Butler. 'Nothing will effect a compromise but for the negroes to give up their arms that they have; they have no right with them here, and they sha'n't have them [sic].' Butler told Robertson they had 'one-half hour to surrender them arms': 'and I will have the arms or put the damn town into ashes' (U.S. Congress 1876:26). John Gardner, Intendent of Hamburg, described what unfolded next. General Butler left his office and talked with several armed men outside. Two or three of Butler's men "mounted their horses and road off up the Edgefield road. Butler got in his buggy and went over the river." About 30 minutes later, "the men who went off up the road came back in company with about one hundred and fifty armed men, under the command of Col. A. P. Butler," recalled Gardner. "These men marched into Cook street and halted" (U.S. Congress 1876:20).

Dock Adams, William Nelson (Rivers' constable) and 23 other black militiamen watched from the second floor of the Sibley building as an armed body of white men concentrated below; thirteen other African Americans had also taken refuge in the building. There were 38 men total, soon to be prisoners. Louis Schiller, a white man and a former county auditor, watched from his office as a troop of horsemen galloped in from the country, "towards the river, right down the main street." The horsemen "turned the corner and filed right around a whole square, forming in a perfect chain, by twos, and sat on their horses, with their guns on their arms—resting on their left arms," Schiller recalled. The white men "formed in a circle right around the square." (U.S. Congress 1877:149). General Butler, positioned by a railroad bridge roughly 75 yards south of the building, commenced placing his men into position: twenty-five or thirty horsemen were positioned in front of the Sibley building, where the 18<sup>th</sup> Regiment was congregated in the second-story 'drill room.' Fifteen or twenty more were placed by the railroad abutment another thirty or forty with rifles stood along the riverbank; about two hundred yards from the armory

was a well, and just beyond it stood “800 men, all in arms,” Adams testified. General Butler placed his men “all around, and up on a hill, about five or six hundred yards—may be a little more” (U.S. Congress 1877:40). Henry Getzen was “the first man to step out from behind the abutment and fire into the drill-room” of the Sibley building, recalled Willis Redrick. “The ball came into the drill-room window. It was from a sixteen-shooter” (U.S. Congress 1876:14). The men “fired rapidly” for about a half an hour, shooting out nearly all of the window panes in the brick building; glass was scattered all over the floor and the “transom lights over the door” were shot out. It was 6:30 p.m., and the whites “kept closing up like they were coming up to the drill-room,” so “I gave orders to fire, for it was the only chance of our lives,” recalled Adams. From his position by a shattered window, Adams heard A. P. Butler holler to Walker McFeeny below: “go over the river and bring two kegs of powder.” They “were going to blow that building up.” Dock Adams didn’t hesitate—he immediately “went to work, and tore up some lumber and made a ladder” (U.S. Congress 1877:40-1).

Harry Mays, a former slave who was working as a porter at the time of the riot, had for the past nine years lived in Hamburg, in a building right next door to the brick armory. Mays watched the entire affair from a second-story window in his building, claiming “there was between nine hundred and a thousand men” in the square below. At first the whites were firing with small arms, but then a much louder booming sound pierced the square. “‘I heard a cannon fire,’ recalled Mays, ‘and when I heard that I said, ‘Jesus! God! We are all done killed! I thought they would shoot every house down in town.’” A piece of heavy artillery, apparently belonging to the Washington Artillery, was brought from Augusta and wheeled toward the armory. Suddenly, a second cannon blast ripped against the brick face of the building. Then a third. “The firing from the building ceased when the cannon fired,” Mays testified, but the cannon fired for a fourth time. Some of the balls had even entered Mays’s home: “good-sized balls, between the size of a hen-egg and a turkey-egg—what they call canister, I think.” White men were “continually firing in the street,” and Mays made his way downstairs, to peek. “Every time they would see a nigger they would shoot at him, and would holler, ‘Here he comes’” (U.S. Congress 1877:32). Soon Harry Mays would also be captured.

Darkness fell and with it many of the militiamen began to abscond from the Sibley using the ladder Adams constructed: “there was no way to get down without a ladder,” he recalled, and “we escaped from the building the back way” (U.S. Congress 1877:42). The armed whites



realized there was no longer any return fire coming from the building, and the hunt began. Adams escaped from the Sibley building down a ladder out back, passing through an open lot into Centre Street. He was fleeing with 12 or 13 other men from the 18<sup>th</sup> regiment; they passed from Centre to Market Street, into John Parker's yard, at around midnight. "It was a moonlight light," recalled Adams. Their "party got squandered and went into different directions," with Adams sneaking into the yard of Louis Schiller, a 33-year-old white man and former Confederate soldier who had abandoned General Butler's democrats in 1868. Adams saw Moses Parker shot "as he tried to jump the fence between Schiller's yard and his neighbor, David Lipfelt. 'There is some damned nigger in this yard,' he heard one of them holler from Lipfelt's yard. 'I've got the damned son of a bitch.' It was Robert J. Butler, according to Adams, who had peered through a crack in the fence. He could hear the sound of axes and hatchets throughout the town as the white men broke down doors and smashed furniture. Adams overheard a party of men who had discovered several persons in hiding, either beneath Spencer Harris's home or that of Jim Cook, who would become the first victim of the riot: 'There's a parcel of black sons of bitches under here ; come here boys and let us get them.' White mobs intended to cleanse Hamburg of its African-American population. 'I've got two of the damned sons of bitches tonight,' declared Jack Venable. White men were rounding up every African American they could find: 'Let us kill the last one of them,' Adams heard one of them say as he watched from his perch in postmaster's house, a man named Rawles (U.S. Congress 1876:19; 1877:43).

The first man killed by the whites was James Cook, the town marshal. "They said that niggers had been arresting white people there [Hamburg], and they wa'n't going to allow it to go on," asserted Roundtree. "Jim Cook was killed on account of his being marshal. He had arrested some of them" (U.S. Congress 1877:141). Paris Williams, a member of the 18<sup>th</sup> who had escaped down the ladder from the Sibley building, was shot in the chest by a white man on Mercer Street; from there he crawled on his stomach to Columbia Railroad, where he witnessed the capture of James Cook: "While there, about twenty-five or thirty white men came down Mercer Street, twelve or thirteen feet from me. At this time Mr. James Cook jumped over the fence. Col. Pick. Butler halted him. I knew it was Colonel Butler. I heard other men say, 'Colonel, kill him.' Colonel Butler says, 'No; I leave that for Tommy, Getzen, and Harrison Butler.'" Colonel Butler then called them off one by one." It was just past 10:00 p.m. 'God damn, this is my beef!' Henry Getzen announced. 'I can ride on sidewalk and drink out of spring without paying five dollars

again.’ “Mr. Getzen then stepped off, fired at Mr. Cook,” recalled Williams. “Tommy and Harrison Butler next, and another gentlemen asked for a part in it, and Getzen said, ‘No; I have been waiting this chance many a year ago, and I have now got it.’ Tommy Butler stood over Cook, admiring his work: ‘Search his pocket and see if he has that five dollars; God damn his black soul.’ Not finding the money, the man responded, ‘but he has a damn good watch, worth about twenty-five dollars.’ Another man lifted his boots. Butler then removed Cook’s tongue with his knife, placed it in his hand, and said, ‘Keep that till morning, and let them see what we have done” (U.S. Congress 1876:23). Let them see what we have done. Judge Blunt did in fact see what they had done, and when the murders asked him the name of their victim, Blunt told them Jim Cook. “They said he would ‘chief no more in Hamburg, but in hell” (U.S. Congress 1876:12). The murder of Jim Cook is indicative of individual resentment rather than collective—evident in the reality that both Getzen and Butler had a bone to pick with James Cook—but the symbolism involved in cutting off the tongue and placing it on display goes far beyond mere killing. Murder becomes a tool in the cleansing operation. Let them see what we have done. Compel them to flee for their lives.

Dock Adams was hiding in Schiller’s house, had been for over an hour. “They were breaking in the houses everywhere and shooting people,” he recalled in his testimony before congress, published in three volumes in 1877 as *South Carolina in 1876: Testimony as to the Denial of the Elective Franchise in South Carolina at the Elections of 1875 and 1876*. Several men broke in the front door of Schiller’s office, causing Adams to flee. “Whilst I was standing in the back yard I could look right into my bed-room window, and also into my sitting-room window,” he testified. “I saw them taking down my pictures and breaking up the furniture. They broke up everything I had in this world; took all my clothes, my mattresses and feather bed, and cut it in pieces and scattered it everywhere, destroying everything that I had. I didn’t have a suit of clothes only what I had on my back” (U.S. Congress 1877:43). They also stole all of his wife’s clothing. South Carolina’s Attorney General noted several instances where white terrorists resorted to arson as a tactic of intimidation:

[T]he party broke open several stores and houses, and, in some instances, robbed the inmates. They took from Mr. Charles Roll, the postmaster, and a very respectable white citizen, a gun which he had in his store, and his private property. From an old colored man, named Jacob Samuels, in his employ, they took a watch and set fire to his house. They broke open the house of Trial-Justice Rivers, and did much damage, as well as robbed him of clothing. They obtained kerosene oil and attempted to set fire to a house, but were prevented by Col. A. P. Butler from doing so. The ropes of the public wells were cut, and some fences were torn down. (U.S. Congress 1876:9)

Hamburg had the appearance of “being raided by a hostile army,” according to H. W. Purvis, Adjutant and Inspector General of South Carolina. “Nearly every colored man’s house in the town (and Louis Schiller’s, white) was broken into, and plundered, furniture broken, bedding and clothing stolen, and a general scene of devastation prevailing everywhere” (U.S. Congress 1876:10). These rituals of violence were more significant than merely plunder for personal enrichment; they signify a contempt for the person’s presence in *their* community. They were intended to manufacture fear among all Republicans, black and white, and in destroying everything Dock Adams and his wife owned, they left a message. It was dire and thick. A warning to leave town. In every house they entered, in every splintered chair and smashed good, they left warnings of expulsion. As Ben Tillman remarked, ‘the purpose of our visit to Hamburg was to strike terror, and the next morning when the negroes who had fled to the swamp returned to the town, the ghastly sight which met them of seven dead negroes lying stark and stiff certainly had its effect’ (Hennessey 1985:103).

‘Good boys!’ yelled General Butler as one of his men returned to their headquarters, located on X Street. ‘God damn it! Turn your hounds loose, and bring the last one in.’ Watching from the second floor of the postmaster building, Adams testified there must have been “over a thousand men” at the headquarters; every time a new prisoner was delivered, “they would bring him right up there to what they called the ‘dead-ring,’ he explained. ‘They had a ‘dead-ring’ down below me there, I suppose about seventy-five or eighty yards, and that is where they would bring the colored men that they would capture. ‘God damn it! Can’t you find that Dock Adams!’ he heard them yell. “One man wrote down my description on the bosom of his shirt, and said, ‘We’ll have him before day,’ and I was standing right there, looking at him. I was looking through the blinds.” Dock Adams “staid right there till day” and watched. The execution began, sometime between 2:00 and 3:00 am. ‘Well, we had better go to work and kill all the niggers we have got,’ one man muttered in disappointment. ‘We won’t be able to find that son of a bitch,’ (U.S. Congress 1877:43).

Allan Attaway, county commissioner and second lieutenant in the 18<sup>th</sup> Regiment, was executed by the railroad tracks. “He was taken across the railroad ; between the ticket-office and fence,” recalled Pompey Curry, who witnessed the murder. “I heard them tell him to ‘turn round, you yellow son of a bitch,’ and then they all fired upon him. Then they came back to the ring

[where the prisoners were kept] and took out Dave Phillips” (U.S. Congress 1876:13). “Dave got up just like a soldier,” claimed Harry Mays, who was one of “about thirty colored men” herded “in a ring and all circled about” with armed white men. “He looked like he didn’t care no more for it than he would about eating, and he walked right along. I heard the guns fire, and they came back, but Dave didn’t come” (U.S. Congress 1877:34). Hampton Stevens was also marched to the railroad tracks and executed. Butler Edwards was captured, taken before General Butler, and then delivered to the camp by the railroad. Attorney General Stone reported that Edwards was among the prisoners “let loose and told to run” (U.S. Congress 1876:9). Armed whites played target practice as these men fled for their lives, but Edwards was “shot in the head. He had not been a member of Doc Adams’s company. Alfred Minyard was marched from the ‘dead-ring’ and “had a great big piece of flesh cut off of his rump, just chopped off with a hatchet or something,” according to Columbus Roundtree. “Then he was cut in his side here, chopped right between his ribs with a hatchet.” When the men “got through with him, shooting him,” one of them said ‘Well, now, I reckon we will turn the rest of these damned niggers loose.’ Minyard didn’t die until the next morning at 9:00 (U.S. Congress 1877:138). One man argued that if they “kill them all there will be nobody left to tell the tale, and if we leave anybody they will go and testify against us”; another man replied that “it won’t do to kill them all.” ‘Now, you damned rascals, get up here,’ the man declared, and they all got up. Then they “made them get down again, and they all got down on their knees and held up their right hands” and swore they would never testify in any court. Captain Roper, a white man, pulled Columbus Roundtree aside, apparently saving his life. He wanted a guarantee in exchange for his generosity: “What I want to say to you is, for you, that you don’t know nobody here to-night; you don’t know anything about this thing at all; that they had you around there [the ‘dead-ring’], but you knowed nobody,” cautioned Roper. These “are unknown parties,” he said, “and if anyone come to get you to go into court to testify or say anything about calling anybody’s name, you don’t know. This time, we will let you off; but next time we get at this thing, we’ll get you (U.S. Congress 1877:140).

After stepping into his home, Roundtree discovered a scene similar to that described by Dock Adams. His wife’s clothes were seized from the bureau and flung all over the floor. “Everything was torn up,” he recalled. He owned three trunks, each of them locked, but white men busted open every one. His wife “lost all her jewelry, watch and chain, and other jewels; and they taken a gown she had made to be baptized in, bran new—had never had it on,” he said.

“It was very fancy made up, and they taken that; that was all her clothes they taken. They taken all mine and all her jewelry. Pick Butler said to me, ‘I understood they took your fine pin you wore in your shirt.’ ‘Yes, sir,’ Roundtree asserted, “it didn’t cost me but sixty-five dollars, and I don’t suppose some of them white fellers ever had sixty-five dollars in their lives.”” Property that was not lifted, like all of the lamps he had in his home, was split open and destroyed; curtains were torn down but not carried off. Instead the men spat tobacco juice on them, staining the fabric. They also “spit all over my wife’s clothes and walked over them,” he testified (U.S. Congress 1877:140). The symbolic nature of these violent rituals is overwhelming, leaving each victim with no doubt of the perpetrators’ extreme resentment.

By now it was just before dawn. “Just afterward someone in the party called to the white men to mount their horses and go home,” testified D. L. Adams. “Getzen remarked, ‘We have not got Schiller or that captain of the company, but we will get them.’ Somebody remarked, ‘Well, boys, we will go home, and if we are ever captured, let it be a know-nothing party.’ Adams thought he recognized the voice as that of General M. C. Butler (U.S. Congress 1876:19). Schiller may have escaped, but his office did not. His printing office was “all broken up,” and his trial-justice records torn up. Of the door to his brick house, which was beat in, “they left but splinters.” All of the doors of his home were cut with an ax and his furniture was broken. “They didn’t even leave me a plate,” Schiller lamented, and they “broke all of my crockery-ware. What they couldn’t break they carried off. I didn’t have a thing left; had to borrow a spoon to eat with” (U.S. Congress 1877:153). Schiller’s testimony reveals the true extent of dispossession, the ritual ensuring total poverty. It also illustrates how democratic vengeance was directed within the race as well, toward white republicans who had friendly relations with African Americans. Schiller escaped into the swamps, fleeing from Robert J. Hunter, a white man of about 67 years with “large gray whiskers,” a very determined man who made his living “by hunting negroes before the war.” R. J. Hunter was involved with the slave patrols, a “professional negro hunter,” and he had dogs to boot (1877:152). From Monday morning, July 10, until Wednesday morning, July 12, Schiller was hiding in the swamps, and by Sunday, he shaved off his mustache, boarded a train for Columbia, and hadn’t returned to his office since.

The Hamburg riot event illustrates the Shotgun Policy in action, a “calculated plan of terrorism generally credited to two of the Edgefield district’s leading citizens, Martin Witherspoon Gary and Matthew Calbraith Butler.” Six African Americans were killed, which

included the “cool-blooded execution of four militiamen,” and one white person was also murdered (Hennessey 1985:103). As D. H. Chamberlain, Governor of South Carolina, wrote in a letter to President Grant: “It is not to be doubted that the effect of this massacre has been to cause widespread terror and apprehension among the colored race and the republicans of this State. There is as little doubt, on the other hand, that a feeling of triumph and political elation has been caused by this massacre in the minds of many of the white people and democrats. The fears of the one side correspond with the hopes of the other side” (U.S. Congress 1876:2-3).

### *Charleston and Cainhoy*

Charleston, South Carolina had an incredibly diverse African-American community, both economically and culturally, and differences in social status pre-Civil War largely account for the variation. Charleston had a community of black folks who enjoyed their freedom prior to emancipation; by 1860, “free blacks followed fifty varieties of occupations, working in many skilled jobs, and paid almost three-quarters of a million dollars in taxes” (Hennessey 1985:101). African American comprised 57 percent of Charleston’s 56,540 residents in 1875, but in the surrounding counties, “black numbers overwhelmed the whites,” accounting for 73 percent of the total population. “This great numerical superiority, combined with a nucleus of antebellum free blacks capable of exerting leadership and infused with some of the entire South’s most outspoken black politicians, came together in Charleston to form a black community that was unique in its ability to defend itself when violence erupted” writes Hennessey (1985:102).

The events that unraveled in Charleston on Wednesday, September 6, 1876 may represent the first *compensatory rebellion* of the period under investigation in this book. The Hampton and Tilden Colored Club of Ward Four held a meeting at the corner of George Street and King Street, but after J. R. Jenkins, a Black Democrat, “delivered an acerbic assault on Republicans,” a riot broke out in the street between a crowd of whites and a larger crowd of blacks. In the opening stage of the riot, white residents fought against African Americans with the police, “but in the ensuing phase,” notes Hennessey, “the blacks moved unopposed through King and other Charleston streets.” Black folks came together in groups on street corners, assaulting every white person they could find. A streetcar on King Street, near Vanderhorst, was halted, shot into, and bombarded by bricks. Two reporters from the *Charleston News and Courier* were beaten. African Americans roamed through the upper part of King Street, from Warren to Cannon, smashing plate glass windows. A drug store was looted; a shoe store was robbed. Fence palings

were ripped from the ground, strewn about in the street. One jewelry store was smashed, its contents removed. “‘Kill them! Kill them all! Dis town is ours!’ white Charlestonians later remembered the blacks’ cry, and for several hours, no white dared to set foot on Charleston’s streets” (Hennessey 1985:105). Interestingly, the Charleston police force was also quite integrated at this time. Black men held 54 positions in the police department; the 101-man force contained 47 whites, “a racial distribution which did not please white Charlestonians.” Though Charleston had 20 different rifle clubs in the fall of 1876, “none interfered” as blacks mocked them on the streets, asking “where the rifle clubs were” as they roamed through the streets (Hennessey 1985:105). “Whites suffered far greater injury in the riot than did blacks,” writes Hennessey, “although one white and one black died” (1985:106).

Charleston had a second riot event on Wednesday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1875. Blacks again outnumbered whites in the encounter, and when the riot ended, one white person had been killed. Twelve whites and ten blacks were injured. Charleston “was certainly not the only southern city with a strong antebellum free black community and an enthusiastically political group of freedman during Reconstruction,” writes Hennessey. “Yet Charleston County blacks were unique in their determination and ability to release their anger through violence” (1985:111). Mobile and New Orleans also experienced Reconstruction riots, and both cities had “sizable and talented antebellum free black communities.” But “blacks were always the victims in these outbreaks,” notes Hennessey, and the “two chief differences” were demographic and cultural:

The proportion of blacks in Charleston and the lowcountry was quite high, as high as seventy-three percent in Charleston County, while in both New Orleans and Mobile, whites were in the majority. Since the colonial period, lowcountry blacks in and around Charleston had earned a reputation for militancy and violence, with the Stono Rebellion in 1739 and the Vesey Conspiracy of 1822 being the two most famous examples. The riots of 1876 only continued the aggressive determination by the region’s blacks to stand up for themselves. (Hennessey 1985:112).

Black folks in South Carolina “consistently put whites on notice that they were willing to defend their newly gained rights and freedom,” and indeed African-American resistance to white violence will play a critical role in determining the form a riot takes, in addition to the variable of whether ‘the State’ offers its protection (either state or federal).

Located 12 miles south of Charleston, Cainhoy was a small town that regularly hosted political gatherings and other social events. On Monday, October 16, Republican W. J. McKinlay, addressed a rally, known by Democrats as a “joint discussion” because they hoped to entice black folks to attend their political gatherings. More than 500 were in attendance,

including 150 white Democrats sent up the Wando River from Charleston on a free boat ride to attend the event. The “great majority” of those in attendance were African American, however, and though an agreement between the parties was in place that those in attendance would come unarmed, a group of black Republicans hid a cache of weapons near the stage. When a group of young white men emerged from a “dilapidated shack to the left of the speaker’s stand” in the nearby woods having recovered the guns, fighting broke out. “Although the whites initiated the shooting, they now found themselves out of ammunition, outnumbered, and as rarely happened in Reconstruction, outgunned. Having retrieved their guns, the blacks rallied and began firing at the whites fleeing down the road to Cainhoy” writes Hennessey. Five men were killed and between fifteen and fifty wounded, some seriously (Hennessey 1985:108-09). One African American was killed and three suffered injuries; all were Democrats. The 18<sup>th</sup> United States infantry arrived on Thursday, October 19 and remained until after the November election.

### *Ellenton*

The trouble for Ousmus Kelly began on Saturday, September 15. White men had killed Peter Williams, an African American accused of beating Ms. Harley in her own home, the night before, and Kelly, also African American, expected violence. Columbus Roundtree, “an old yellow man” and member of the local republican club, sent word for Kelly, who had been out fox hunting. He needed to get to the club in Silverton. Kelly saddled his mule and rode over to Tom Riley’s store, where he met four other black men: Alick Williams, Josiah Foreman, and George and Gasper Bush. Together they rode toward Silverton, but they only got within three or four hundred yards. “So I then looked up the road and there was a vast quantity of white men coming down the road,” explained Kelly, a 34-year-old farmer. “I didn’t wait to see them all” (U.S. Congress 1877:93). The whites had been meeting up at the church ever since Friday evening, and when he returned home, his wife cautioned him to go to headquarters, that it was not safe for him there. Kelly was confronted by Willie Page and another white man named Ransom while hiding out at headquarters; they were looking for Gloster Holland, the trial justice. They had come to kill him. But Holland wasn’t in. ‘Mr. Page, I would like to know what you are going to do,’ asked Kelly, with a good deal of courage. ‘Ever since emancipation it has been shooting down niggers, one every once in a while and one every once in a while, and if you intend to kill us all, and the United States don’t protect us, you had better kill us all right in a



pile.’ There were 20 other black republicans at headquarters for this exchange, and Page “held his hand on his pistol the entire time” (U.S. Congress 1877:94).

Columbus Roundtree, a 33-year-old African American and republican voter, rushed on horseback down a branch running from his house to Rouse’s Bridge, four miles away. George Glover and George Williams rode along with him. “I got in about half a mile of the bridge and I heard horses running mightily, and it looked like a whole drove of them.” It was Sunday morning, around 10:00, and just as he crested the hill over the branch into the edge of the field, Roundtree saw a crowd of white men running down Abram Overstreet, Nelson Bush, and Joshua Hankerson. He saw Overstreet fall; saw Josh Hankerson, who “went right on into the pond”; saw Nelson, who “dodged behind a tree.” There were 20 white men shooting at them. Roundtree, Glover, and Williams had difficulty even in returning home. “The white folks had guarded the roads—had strong guards all along the roads, I suppose for five or six miles in this direction,” claimed Roundtree. They intended “to keep any colored ones from coming from Silverton to Rouse’s Bridge” (U.S. Congress 1877:128-29).

James Kelly heard gunshots fired down at Union bridge just before sunset Sunday night. “It was very large shot-guns that were fired,” he recalled. “And then I didn’t stay in the house that night.” Kelly stayed in the swamps all that night, but he survived. Monday morning, several black folks went down to Union bridge and found the rumor was true: Basil Bryant had been executed and left in the road, right at the foot of the bridge, until United States soldiers arrived on Tuesday morning. Kelly heard the beat of the drum approaching Rouse’s bridge. The whites had been attempting to surround the black folks, Kelly testified, but when “we heard the drum some of the colored ones whooped.” But the whites were undeterred; in fact, the sight of those damned Yankees only intensified their sense of frustration. They had already captured 40 or 50 African Americans—mostly those “scattered about in the swamps,” according to Kelly—and now 7 or 8 hundred were converging upon Rouse’s Bridge, eight miles from Ellenton Station (U.S. Congress 1877:107).

On Monday morning, September 17, George W. Bush rode up to the home of Millie Bush, 19, who lived with her husband Dave about a mile from Ellenton, between the two bridges, Rouse’s and Newman’s. Millie stood on her porch when George approached to ask where her husband was. She said she didn’t know, that they had him off in the swamps. “He then pulled out this dead-list and says, ‘Dave Bush and Daniel Ronse and Aleck Williams,’ and he

called several more names.” Millie later discovered what happened to Dave Bush, 20 years old: “My husband was shot through the head with one of these cartridges, and the ball taken out of one of his eye-balls after they shot him in the forehead and under the ear, and his hand was badly bruised and his neck was broken with a gun.” Senator Merrimon asked why they killed him. Because he was a republican man, and they “said they were going to kill the damn republicans.” But why didn’t they kill *all* of the black men in town then, Merrimon followed. “They didn’t get a chance; the soldiers come up in town,” she said, and as for those others who were turned loose, Millie explained these men “had just picked a company that they wanted to kill out” because some of “them ‘clined to be leaders of the rest of the men” (U.S. Congress 1877:243-44). The congressional report labels the affair as part of the “Ellenton Assassinations,” rather than calling it a riot or massacre, as Hamburg is routinely referred in the document, and the testimony bears witness to the difference between this event and other similar incidents of racial violence.

On Thursday morning, September 20, Ed W. Bush was taken out from Anneke Jackson’s home and shot. ‘You are the two damned devils I am looking for,’ yelled Richard Anderson. He approached Jackson’s house with Doc Turner while two other white men, Alonzo Ashley and a Bill Woodward, stood glaring on from her iron gate. Ed W. Bush and Jackson’s son, Richard Thompson, were both carried out of the home, kicking for their lives. The men asked her son, ‘Dick, was you in that row on Sunday morning.’ He said no and they let him run off.’ Several men were on the dead-list for that morning: Ed W. Bush, John Bush, Walker Barnes, Daniel Mixon, and Ben Motts, a school teacher. “They is the damned rascals we are going to clean out today [sic],” Alonzo Ashley announced. Ed W. Bush was marched 30 yards from the front gate and shot down. “I was looking right at them,” Anneke Jackson recalled. “The first fire he dropped on his knees, and then they fired into him until they shot him six times.” Bill Woodward did the shooting (U.S. Congress 1877:287-88).

### *Instrumental White Violence*

After the Hamburg riot, Dock Adams would spend nights sleeping out in the woods. He dared not return to his home. He sent his wife to live with her mother in Augusta, Georgia, where there were men “sworn to kill me if I ever put my foot there.” So he couldn’t stay in Augusta, either. “Whenever I would go home and stay a night or two I would have to lay out in the woods,” he recalled (U.S. Congress 1877:46). He could not sleep in his home, fearing further white violence, and many other African Americans faced a similar situation. “Have any of the other colored

people of Hamburg been compelled to lie out in the woods,” asked one congressman. ‘O, yes, sir,’ Adams replied; “there has hardly been a time since that riot” when black folks felt safe to return home. “They may have probably run into their houses now and then since that time and prior to that time; but a man doesn’t sleep in his house; he *couldn’t* sleep in his house” (U.S. Congress 1877:47). Even the women “have got to laying out in the woods,” some with children, terrified of the whites. The instrumental nature of white violence goes well beyond won elections and local patronage for the Democratic Party; the dispossession of property is crippling for any African American, especially those with children, and the trauma remains, perhaps permanently. The impact can be measured by the number of republican voters who remained away from the polls on election day, and it can be measured by losses in property, when records have been kept, but the cumulative burden of white violence on the African-American community in the South during the years following Reconstruction is ultimately immeasurable.

White terrorism was ubiquitous, an ever-present threat, and in the absence of federal protection, black folks must have felt powerless. ‘Have you heard threats made to colored people since the Hamburg riot, or at any time during the summer,’ Congressman Cameron asked Dock Adams. ‘Every day,’ he replied. “‘By God! we will carry South Carolina now ; about the time we kill four or five hundred more we will scare the rest.’ You could hear them say, ‘This is only the beginning of it ... the white man has got to rule ; this is a white man’s government!’” (U.S. Congress 1877:47). And South Carolina was deemed more tolerant, at least when it came to political expression: “Well, sir, my first reason for leaving Georgia, it was because that the colored men were so oppressed over there in their opinion,” said Adams. “They could not exercise their political opinion as they wished, and I did not desire to be oppressed in that way, and moved to South Carolina on that account” (1877:48).

“Do the colored people feel safe in their lives or property down there?” asked Congressman Cameron. “No, sir; I couldn’t begin to tell you how bad it was,” replied Ousmus Kelly. “No man can explain how bad it is down there on account of their lives. Nobody is safe.” Cameron asked if African Americans “generally stay at their own houses” at night. “Yes, sir; they did until this riot commenced, and then they couldn’t live in their houses at all.” As with Dock Adams in Hamburg, African Americans in Ellenton slept in the woods for fear of being assassinated while asleep in their beds.

Governor Daniel Chamberlain asked President Grant to send federal troops for protection of black citizens during and after the Hamburg massacre (as noted in the epigraph to the previous section of the chapter). ‘The scene in Hamburg, as cruel, bloody-thirsty, wanton, unprovoked, and uncalled for as it was,’ wrote Grant in response, July 26, 1876, “is only a repetition of course which has been pursued in other Southern States within the last few years, notably in Mississippi and Louisiana. Mississippi is governed today by officials chosen through fraud and violence, such as would scarcely be accredited to savages, much less to a civilized and Christian people” (U.S. Congress 1876:6; Lemann 2006:173). Grant concurred that it was the “further duty of the Executive of the nation to give all needful aid, *when properly called on to do so*, to enable you to ins It was clear that, at least in South Carolina, Grant did not have any intention (1876:5). “I will give every aid for which I can *find law or constitutional power*,” he continued. “Government that cannot give protection to the life, property, and all guaranteed civil rights ... to the citizen is in so far a failure” (1876:6; emphasis added). But the federal government became increasingly reluctant to intervene in state affairs, particularly when it came to protecting the rights of the freed people in the South. In 1867 there had been one Union soldier for every 708 citizens in the former Confederate states; by 1876 the ratio was one soldier for every 3,160 confederates (Gable 2007:109). President Grant did use his authority to intervene on occasion, but it’s clear he grew tired of meddling in Southern political affairs as time wore on.

## STATES’ RIGHTS

Although federal troops were summoned to put down labor unrest during the railroad strike of 1877, among many other labor riots, “they were seldom deployed to quell racial violence against blacks throughout the South,” notes historian Kevin K. Gaines. “The inaction of new president, Rutherford B. Hayes, created a political vacuum, as violence and fraud ensured the Republican Party’s defeat throughout the South in 1878” (Gaines 1996:22). The full power of the federal government “would be used in a variety of antilabor actions” during the late 1870s and through the 1880s, “*but never to protect black lives and property in the South*. Indeed, legal and extralegal restraints on black labor and politics were extensive” (Gaines 1996:26; emphasis added). This must have been very troubling to Governor D. H. Chamberlain of South Carolina, who wrote a letter to President Grant, dated July 22, 1876. In this letter Chamberlain explained both the dire situation in South Carolina and his way of thinking regarding the duties of the

federal government in the protection of states against domestic violence: “And I trust you will permit me to add that I know no official duty more binding, in my judgment, on the Chief Executive of the United States than that of exercising the powers with which he is invested for the protection of the States against domestic violence, and for the protection of the individual citizen in the exercise of his political rights, whenever a proper call is made upon him,” Chamberlain wrote. “I understand that an American citizen has a right to vote *as he pleases*; to vote one ticket as freely and safely as another; to vote wrong as freely and safely as to vote right; and I know that whenever, upon whatsoever pretext, large bodies of citizens can be coerced by force or fear into absenting themselves from the polls, or voting in a way contrary to their judgment or inclination, the foundation of every man’s civil freedom is deeply, if not fatally, shaken (U.S. Congress 1876:5). President Grant returned his letter; though he wholeheartedly agreed that the rights of citizens must be protected, it was the duty of the state to provide that protection, in his opinion. This position proved costly for African Americans.

The United States federal government failed to protect Black citizens across the South during this period, even as it moved in earnest to protect the economic interests of an industrializing corporate class. “In the aftermath of 1877, cities retrained and expanded their police forces, while the militia and National Guard were professionalized and equipped with more modern weapons,” explains historian Eric Foner. “In the next quarter century, the Guard would be used in industrial disputes over 100 times. Meanwhile, the federal government constructed armories not in the South to protect black citizens, but in the major cities of the North, to ensure that troops would be on hand in subsequent labor difficulties.” President Grant remarked that during his administration, the entire Democratic Party and the reformatory wing of the Republican Party had argued it was ‘horrible’ to employ federal troops to ‘protect the lives of negroes. Now, however, there is no hesitation about exhausting the whole power of the government to suppress a strike on the slightest intimation that danger threatens.” As Foner notes, contemporaries denounced the “ironic juxtaposition of home rule for the South and armed intervention,” in the case of disputes between capitalist and laborers, for the North (1988:586).

Reconstruction was a period in which “Republicans controlled Southern politics, blacks enjoyed extensive political power, and the federal government accepted responsibility for protecting the fundamental rights of black citizens,” explains Foner, but it “came to an irrevocable end” with the inauguration of Rutherford B. Hayes as President and the famous

Compromise of 1877,' a back-room deal brokered between the two parties that gave the presidency to the Republican party in exchange for 'home rule' by Democrats in the South. The South was now free to settle all questions involving the rights and privileges of citizenship for its Black population: "Constrained only by the increasingly remote possibility of federal intervention," writes Foner, "the Redeemers moved in the final decades of the nineteenth century to put in place new systems of political, class, and race relations" (1988:587). Though Southern Redeemers were not entirely unified in their New South ideology, they shared a "commitment to dismantling the Reconstruction state, reducing the political power of blacks, and reshaping the South's legal system in the interests of labor control and racial subordination" (Foner 1988:588).

# **Chapter 3**

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## **The Specter of Negro Domination**

## **The Specter of Negro Domination: White Anxiety, Disciplinary Riots, and the Birth of Jim Crow, 1890 – 1913**

It was an uneasy landscape, the early twentieth-century South, a small-town, small-city world of ice companies and beauty parlors, soda fountains and gas stations. It was a world where people who went to church some days watched or participated in the torture of their neighbors on others. In the decades following 1890, many lynchings no longer occurred in places untouched by the technological advances of the larger world. Lynchers drove cars, spectators used cameras, out-of-town visitors arrived on specially chartered excursion trains, and the towns and counties in which these horrifying events happened had newspapers, telegraph offices, and even radio stations that announced times and locations of these upcoming violent spectacles.

- Graze Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness* (1998:201)

### **SEPARATE, BUT EQUAL**

For more than 20 years following the Civil War, no southern state had any legislation requiring separate accommodations by race on rail cars. This changed rapidly, beginning in 1887 in Florida. In 1888, Mississippi became the first state to adopt legislation that separated blacks and whites in railway stations. Texas adopted similar separate accommodations law in 1889, followed by Louisiana in 1890, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Georgia in 1891. Georgia's law was the first to provide for separate accommodations on streetcars, but as Woodward notes, though significant, these laws "were often only enactments of codes already in practice" (1971:212). White southerners "enacted one law after another to proscribe contact among black and whites," as schools, orphanages, hospitals and even cemeteries were segregated (Ayers 2007:136). During the peak years of railroad segregation, the white the white South embarked on a new quest—the disenfranchisement of black voters. As late as 1879, "the three foremost spokesmen of the South, Lamar of Mississippi, Hampton of South Carolina, and Stephens of Georgia, agreed in a public statement that the disfranchisement of the Negro was not only impossible was undesired" (Woodward 1971:321). The mechanisms for accomplishing African-American disenfranchisement while also bypassing the Constitution were "invented by Mississippi, a pioneer of the movement and the only state that resorted to it before the Populist revolt took the form of political rebellion." Other southern states followed Mississippi's lead, and soon new techniques were developed to strip black folks of their political rights; as Woodward notes, when it comes to legislative scheming, "there was a great deal of borrowing and interchange of ideas throughout the South" (Woodward 2002:83). The 'Mississippi Plan' of



1875 was followed by a ‘Second Mississippi Plan,’ inaugurated in 1890. Mississippi accomplished disenfranchisement at a constitutional convention in 1890 with the adoption of an ‘understanding clause.’ Ayers explains that any prospective voter must be able to either read a section of the state constitution or to “understand that section when it was read to him ‘or give a reasonable interpretation thereof.’ The idea, of course, was that illiterate whites could understand the constitution to the satisfaction of the white registrar while even a literate black man would find it difficult to persuade the official of his understanding” (2007:149). South Carolina followed Mississippi’s lead in 1895, followed by Louisiana in 1898 (Woodward 1971:321). That each of these three states were also the sites of the most intense racial collective violence during the Redemption era does not appear to be a coincidence.

From the beginning of the movement to disenfranchise African Americans, southerners knew that loopholes would have to be provided so that underprivileged whites could overcome the literacy requirement. Barriers like property and literacy qualifications for voting were erected, but Southern legislatures knew they would need to “cut certain loopholes in the barrier through which only white men could squeeze. The loopholes to appease (though not invariably accommodate) the underprivileged whites were the ‘understanding clause,’ the ‘grandfather clause,’ or the ‘good character clause” (Woodward 2002:84). “The first and most-common loophole was the ‘understanding clause,’ invented by the Mississippi convention” (Woodward 1971:332). In this cascade of events, Mississippi “set a precedent that was followed by all the Southern states save one, that of Alabama,” and passing these constitutional amendments without “ratification by popular vote,” the conventions “made ‘a wide departure” from what “had been ‘prevailing practice’ since 1829, except for a period during and immediately after the Civil War” (Woodward 1971:341).

The immense power of these legislative techniques was immediately evident. Between 1892 and 1902, “the average vote cast for Congressmen” declined 69 percent in Mississippi, 80 percent in Louisiana, and 34 percent in North Carolina (Woodward 1971:345). The effects in Mississippi were extraordinary:

Under the provisions of the new constitution of Mississippi 68,127 of the 110,000 white males over 21 were registered along with 8,615 of the 147,205 male Negroes over 21. Roughly one Negro in seventeen and two whites in three were therefore qualified to vote provided they paid their poll tax—and kept the receipt! By this means a potential electorate of 275,305 was reduced to a potential electorate of 76,742, and a Negro majority of 37,105 was converted into a white majority of 58,512. The actual number of votes in the heated election of 1892, contested by four parties, was only 52,809 (1971:344).

Mississippi's whites utilized these techniques of power to devastate an increasingly powerful black voice in state and municipal government. Similar effects were achieved in Louisiana. In 1896, there were 130,334 registered African-American voters in Louisiana; in 1904, there were 1,342. "Between these two dates the literacy, property, and poll-tax qualifications were adopted," writes Woodward. In 1896 African-Americans represented a majority of registered voters in 26 Louisiana parishes, but by 1900, there were *none* (Woodward 1971:85). The Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision "finally legitimated the doctrine of 'separate but equal,' which had been debated in the South for nearly twenty years." The court ruled that 'legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts,' a decision that "turned less on constitutional principles than on assumptions about the natural course of race relations, the reasonableness of segregation" (Ayers 2007:327). "By 1895, the United Daughters of the Confederacy had organized," writes Ayers," and by 1896, "three-quarters of the counties in the former Confederate states could claim 'camps' of the United Confederate Veterans" (Ayers 2007:334). Towns across the South began raising funds for the erection of Civil War monuments, with the "peak years" of construction occurring between 1885 and 1912 (Ayers 2007:335).

Frederick Washington died in February 1895, and seven months later, Booker T. Washington delivered his famous 'separate as the fingers yet one as the hand' speech at the Atlanta Exposition. "No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom that we must begin, not at the top. Nor should be permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities," Washington announced (Osofsky 1969:211). "The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly," he maintained: "progress in the enjoyment of all privileges that will come to use must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing" (Osofsky 1967:213). A decade later, W. E. B. Du Bois and other African-American intellectuals and professionals launched the Niagara Movement, the "institutional expression" of a very different vision for black Americans. Members of the Niagara Movement assembled for the first time in July 1905, in Buffalo, New York, and, in a defiant "Declaration of Principles," announced they "refuse to allow the impression to remain that the Negro-American assents to inferiority, is submissive under oppression and apologetic before insults." Du Bois's aims clearly diverged from Washington's 'cast down your bucket' philosophy epitomized by a mixture of

deference in social relations, manual labor in economic relations, and technical training in schooling (i.e., industrial education):

We will not be satisfied to take one jot or tittle less than our full manhood rights. We claim for ourselves every single right that belongs to a freeborn American, political, civil, and social; and until we get these rights we will never cease to protest and assail the ears of America. The battle we wage is not for ourselves alone, but for all true Americans. It is a fight for ideals, lest this, our common fatherland, false to its founding, become in truth the land of the Thief and the home of the Slave—a by-word and a hissing among the nations for its sounding pretensions and pitiful accomplishments. (cited in Orsofsky 1967:219)

The Niagara Movement demanded the right to vote—immediate suffrage without qualification for all African-American *men*—what they called ‘manhood suffrage’; freedom from discrimination in public accommodations like trains, hotels, and street cars; justice in the courts, including enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments; freedom to associate with whomever they pleased without interference, what they called “the most fundamental human privilege”; and education for black children, particularly an empowered federal government that will “step in and wipe out illiteracy in the South. Either the United States will destroy ignorance, or ignorance will destroy the United States,” the men declared (Orsofsky 1967:220).

The Spanish-American war that erupted in April 1898 engendered much discussion of national reconciliation between North and South. “The war against the Spanish, which so many black Americans thought might be a turning point in race relations in this country, in fact accelerated the decline, the loss of civility, the increase in bloodshed, the white arrogance,” writes Ayers. “The major effect of the war seems to have been to enlist the North as an even more active partner in the subjugation of black Americans” (Ayers 2007:333). In 1898, the United States “plunged into imperialistic adventures overseas under the leadership of the Republican party.” American began to shoulder the ‘White Man’s Burden,’ and U.S. conquests in both the Pacific and the Caribbean “suddenly brought under the jurisdiction of the United States some eight million people of the colored races, ‘a varied assortment of inferior races,’ as the *Nation* described them, ‘which, of course, could not be allowed to vote.’ Inevitably, this kind of thinking bled into white-black race relations back home, for, as the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* wrote, ‘If the stronger and cleverer race is free to impose its will upon new caught, sullen peoples on the other side of the globe, why not in South Carolina and Mississippi?’ (cited in Woodward 2002:72). American imperialism became a cultural force, sweeping the country at the very same time that the “doctrine of racism reached a crest of acceptability and popularity among respectable scholarly and intellectual circles.” Scholarly racism proliferated both in the

United States and internationally, as “biologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians, as well as journalists and novelists, gave support to the doctrine that races were distinct entities and that the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ or ‘Caucasian’ was the superior of them all,” writes Woodward. This kind of prominent “intellectual endorsement” of the racist theories commonly peddled by Southern politicians “facilitated acceptance of their views and policies” (Woodward 2002:74).

Woodward argues that the “intimacy of contact under slavery, especially that between the better type of both races, was succeeded by a harsh and rigid separation.” He cites W. E. B. Du Bois, who wrote that under slavery, “the two races sometimes ‘lived in the same home, shared in the family life, often attended the same church, and talked and conversed with each other,’ while under the caste system there was ‘little or no intellectual commerce’ between races” (cited in Woodward 1971:354). But increasingly in the New South, residential segregation patterned the structure of most emerging cities. “The newer a Southern city, the more likely it was to be consistently segregated by race,” explains historian Edward Ayers; “the faster a Southern city grew, the faster it became segregated. By the mid-1890s, the vast majority of blocks in Atlanta, Richmond, and Montgomery were either all-white or all-black, the pattern violated mainly by white widows, grocers, and unskilled laborers too poor to live elsewhere” (2007:67-8).

Everyday interracial social contact was increasingly codified during the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with black deference the keystone of subordination. Whites used naming rituals to “maintain the illusion of personal relationships where none existed.” Historian Edward Ayers explains that white “rituals of black naming conveyed various shades of deference, condescension, affection, and respect”: “Blacks called white men they did not know ‘mister,’ ‘cap’n,’ or ‘boss.’ Acquainted black men attached ‘Mr.’ to a white man’s first name; the first name of white women was accompanied by ‘Miss.’ Whites never addressed black men they did not know as ‘mister,’ but rather as ‘boy,’ ‘Jack,’ or ‘George’; black women were never called ‘Mrs.,’ but rather ‘aunt’ or their first name” (2007:132). Nor was respect extended in the press. “A black person, regardless of age or gender, was referred to in white newspaper accounts as simply a ‘negro,’ as in ‘two men and two women were killed, and four Negroes’” explains Ayers. Black men removed their hats for whites when interacting in public spaces; white men were not expected to do so when encountering black men—even in the privacy of their own home. In fact, whites “even segregated days of the week”: White people stayed away from

towns on Saturday afternoons, according to Mamie Garvin Fields, who recalled growing up in South Carolina as consumer culture swept across the South (Ayers 2007:132).

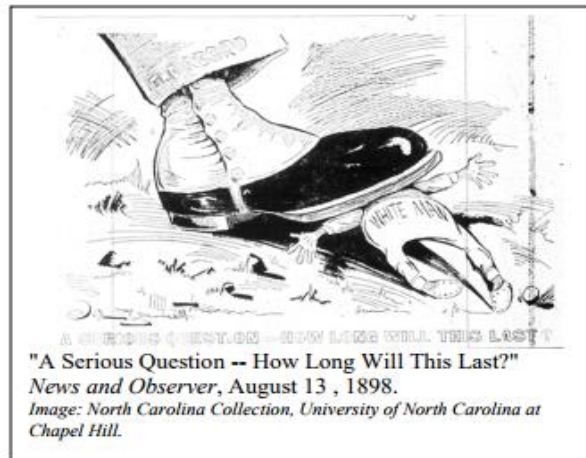
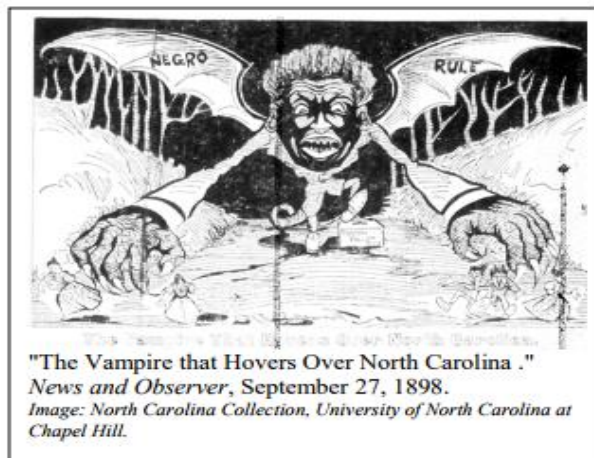
The final decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw racial animosity increase dramatically due to the convergence of myriad economic, cultural, and social forces. “From the viewpoint of 1900, the situation of 1890 appeared calm and peaceful,” argues Ayers. “Populism unheard of, fusion nowhere a statewide threat, tempers relatively low. The decade of the nineties had shattered the carefully attended illusions of white unity and black docility” (2007:305). Whites increasingly had to “jostle with black men over window seats, sidewalks, and circus bleachers,” and so it appeared “the races really were approaching something like equality” (Ayers 2007:300). *Social equality*, as it was known in the popular lexicon of the time, “was more chafing, more volatile” than even political equality, because at least with politics, elections passed. Social equality affected women and children as well, whereas issues of political equality concerned only men at the time, hence the decade was an extremely combustible one for black-white social relations.

#### ‘IF WE HAVE TO CHOKE THE CURRENT OF CAPE FEAR WITH CARCASSES’: WHITE SUPREMACY AND THE WILMINGTON MASSACRE OF 1898

Rebecca Felton advocated lynching African Americans accused of rape. A native of Georgia, Felton made a sensational speech in August 1897 in which she declared “if it needs lynching to protect women’s dearest possession from the ravening human beasts—then I say lynch; a thousand a week if necessary” (*Atlanta Journal*, August 12 1897; 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:97). Alexander Manly’s response to Felton would get him run out of Wilmington lucky to have his life. Published more than a year later—Wilmington’s *Morning Star* republished Rebecca Felton’s speech on August 18<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of 1898—Manly’s editorial was like lightening. “We suggest that the whites guard their women more closely, as Mrs. Felton says, thus giving no opportunity for the human fiend be he white or black. Poor white men are careless in the matter of protecting their women, especially on the farms,” Manly wrote. “They are careless of their conduct toward them, and our experience among poor white people in the country teaches us that the women of that race are not any more particular in the matter of clandestine meetings with colored men than are the white men with colored women.” Then Manly took his argument one step further, targeting women of the upper class: “Every Negro lynched is called a ‘big, burly, black brute,’ when in fact many of those who have thus been dealt

with had white men for their fathers, and were not only not 'black' and 'burly,' but were sufficiently attractive for white girls of culture and refinement to fall in love with them as is very well known to all." As if Alexander Manly could no longer find restraint, he dealt a final blow: "Mrs. Felton must begin at the fountain head if she wishes to purify the stream. Teach your men purity," he continues. "You set yourselves down as a lot of carping hypocrites in that you cry aloud for the virtue of your women while you seek to destroy the morality of ours. Don't think ever that your women will remain pure while you are debauching ours. You sow the seed—the harvest will come in due time" (*Daily Record*, August 18 1898; 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:98). Come November Alexander Manly's printing press would be in flames and he marked for death, white retribution for such incendiary remarks.

Disenfranchisement leaders in all states, such as Charles B. Aycock of North Carolina, Ben Tillman of South Carolina, and Hoke Smith of Georgia, "gave repeated assurances that no white man would be disfranchised" during the campaigning stage of the movement. White Southerners with considerable influence found "an opportunity to establish in power 'the intelligence and wealth of the South,' which would, of course, 'govern in the interests of all classes'" (Woodward 1971:330). State conventions "borrowed freely from each other, and as inventions multiplied there was a tendency for franchise provisions and especially 'loophole' clauses to become more numerous and complex." Thus, as C. Vann Woodward explains, Josephus Daniels [editor of *XX* in North Carolina] actually travelled to Louisiana to "study the workings of the recently adopted plan of that state. He reported that 'the educational requirements softened by the Mississippi 'understanding clause,' the Louisiana 'grandfather clause,' and the poll tax receipt 'will do the work'" (Woodward 1971:335). Daniels also used his newspaper to stoke white anxiety and racial resentment. Cartoons became especially powerful tools to manufacture resentment, especially in influencing whites who were illiterate:



Source: *Politics of a Massacre: Discovering Wilmington 1898*, East Carolina University

Both images express the fear of ‘negro domination,’ white anxiety brewing with every new gain in power and public visibility of black folks, whether in positions of economic significance or political influence.

Hundreds of armed men marched in red shirts during staged ‘White Supremacy Jubilee’s,’ hosted by Aycock’s campaign managers in 1898. “Ben Tillman came up from South Carolina to lend a hand,” writes Woodward, “and sympathizers from Richmond told of 50,000 rounds of ammunition and a carload of firearms shipped to North Carolina a few days before the election of 1898” (Woodward 1971:350). The legislative reforms enacted by the Populist movement in North Carolina were at the root of the violence that erupted in Wilmington in November 1898. In addition to these staged political rallies, featuring race-baiting propaganda mixed with rituals of white solidarity, were enhanced by a white Democratic press that had throughout the year “embarked upon a coordinated campaign” to attack fusion and rid “all blacks and their allies” from government: “Black speakers were misrepresented, black ‘outrages’ fabricated, black assertion exaggerated. Things that had nothing to do with politics—black bicyclists refusing the right of way to white women pedestrians, black men resisting arrest for drunkenness, a black man crowding a white man to get a window seat on a train—were portrayed as partisan political acts,” writes Ayers. “Such exasperating occurrences would not happen but for the fact that the negro party is in power in North Carolina, and that there are negro magistrates and other negro officials in office, which emboldens bad negroes to display their evil, impudent, mean natures,” charged one white newspaper. Anxiety grew among whites

during the weeks leading up to the November election; black demands for political and civil equality “had begun to spin out of control,” according to some whites (Ayers 2007:300).

The year before the riot, three positions on the ten-member Board of Alderman were black men—and this board was responsible for electing the mayor. An African American was also a “member of the powerful five-constituent Board of Audit and Finance,” in addition to other public jobs, such as “justice of the peace, deputy clerk of the superior court, and even the coroner (a barber by trade).” African Americans were also far more visible in civil service, with two black fire departments, an “all-black health board,” black policemen, black mail carriers, and even a black mail clerk (Prather 1984:22). The black community threatened the delicate balance of power in Wilmington because increased political representation posed a threat to the system of white supremacy. Political visibility was perhaps the most critical factor in motivating the violence, but a second factor, upward economic mobility, was also highly significant. “Blacks dominated the restaurant business,” writes historian H. Leon Prather in *We Have Taken a City*—only one of eleven restaurants in Wilmington was owned by whites in 1897—and enjoyed an “almost complete monopoly” in the hair industry, as 20 of 22 barbers listed in the city directory were African American (1984:24). Black labor was posing an increasing threat, and political power was the only way to prevent further “negro dominance.” But this, too, posed a problem, especially in Wilmington where “Negroes constituted a substantial portion of the population” (or even exceeded the number of whites). As Prather notes, “the problem had *always been* the maintenance of political control by the white minority (1984:94).

Thalien Hall was packed to capacity, the patrons anxiously awaiting the oratory prowess of the renowned Arthur Moore Waddell. It was October 24, 1898. “We maintained it against overwhelming armies of men of our race,” this white man’s government, Waddell declared; “shall we surrender it to a ragged rabble of negroes led by a handful of white cowards,” he asked. “No! A thousand times no! Let them understand once and for all that we will have no more of the intolerable conditions under which we live. We are resolved to change them, if we have to choke the current of the Cape Fear with carcasses.” The time for patience and practicality had passed, the “extremest limit of forbearance” had been reached. “Negro domination shall henceforth be only a shameful memory to us and an everlasting warning to those who shall ever again seek to revive it,” Waddell thundered. “To this declaration we are irrevocably committed



and true men everywhere will hail it with a hearty Amen!” (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Report 2006:80). The audience roared in approval, the rafters shaken by the stomping of feet.

The conspiracy had taken considerable time to develop, but the white citizens of Wilmington were ready. They had “prepared quietly but effectively for the day when action would be necessary,” according to Thomas Clawson, editor of the *Wilmington Messenger*. The ‘Secret Nine,’ a group composed of “well known and visible leaders” of the democrats—including Hugh McRae, William A. Johnson, Walter L. Parsley, J. Allan Taylor, L. B. Sasser, Pierre B. Manning, Hardy L. Fennell, William Gilchrist, and Edward S. Lathrop—began meeting regularly at least six months prior to the November 1898 election. These men were actively planning to overthrow the city’s government. A second group, called ‘Group Six’ by local historian Harry Hayden, also met regularly, including William L. Smith, “a prominent Wilmington leader,” Colonel Walker Taylor, Henry G. Fennell, Thomas D. Meares, John Beery, and William F. Robertson. “These two groups of men shared multiple business and family connections,” writes LaRae Umfleet, principle researcher for the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission. The groups “worked with Democratic Party leaders to fuel the campaign, particularly in organizing the citizens of the city into proactive units ready for whatever unrest might arise from their plans” (2006:76-7). A “handful of closely connected men” pulled these organizations together, including the White Government Union and the Red Shirts—Ben Tillman’s boys from South Carolina, also known as Rough Riders, who played an influential role in preventing republican power during the 1876 campaign that ‘redeemed’ the state from the threat of ‘Negro domination.’

John D. Bellamy, democratic candidate for North Carolina’s seat in the Sixth Congressional District, railed against mismanaged government in Wilmington during the campaign season that fall of 1898—and particularly African Americans holding positions of power. Bellamy subsequently testified regarding his disdain for the structure of local government in Wilmington prior to the riot. Although white persons “owned 97 per cent of the property and paid that much of the taxes of the city,” he noted “that three or four of the board of alderman were negroes; that forty of the magistrates were negroes; that nearly all of the deputy sheriffs in the county were negroes; that the register of deeds of the county was a negro; that every health officer of the city, a very important position, was held by negroes; that one of the three county commissioners was a negro.” The end result was that a “horrible state of misgovernment had

been brought about” in Wilmington,” and worse, “night after night burglaries and robberies took place in town,” he said; “murders and crimes of all characters were of constant occurrence” because the “negroes showed an utter disrespect and defiance of the law.” Democrats complained bitterly about this “demoralization” that forced the white people of the city to order “several thousand Winchester rifles”; if conflict did come, and a “race riot ensued, a very fatal result would come to the negroes,” according to Bellamy (U.S. Congress 1899:244).

The White Government Union was committed to “reestablish[ing] in North Carolina the supremacy of the white race” (U.S. Congress 1899:203); any white man “willing to use every practicable and honorable means to restore white supremacy” was encouraged to enlist, according to the organization’s constitution (U.S. Congress 1899:204). The WGO performed several roles in service of the Democratic Party, none more important than to “arrange and organize for effective party work at the polls on the day of election” (U.S. Congress 1899:204). Each township in the state had a union, and each union had four different committees. It had a Committee on Campaign Literature, whose purpose was to ensure all white men received democratic propaganda; a Committee on Campaign Registration, which aimed to ensure that white men throughout the state registered to vote the democratic ticket; a Committee on Speakers, which coordinated democratic events and speeches for party recruitment; and a Committee on Challenges and Polls, whose duty was to attend the polls on election day, challenge illegal voters, and see to it “that the Democratic vote is fully polled—that no injustice is done” (56<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1899:205; 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:66). By the middle of August 1898, Wilmington “had a WGU in every ward, its members proudly displaying” their large White Government Union campaign buttons (see Figure 1 right).

We intend to carry the election “at all hazards and by any means necessary,” howled Red Shirt leader Mike Dowling. The Democratic Party “would succeed [even] if they had to shoot every negro in the city” (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:83-84). It was 2 or 3 o’clock in the morning the Saturday before the election, “the town full of Red Shirts, a large number of whom was mounted on horses,” recalled John P. Cameron, a 36-year-old republican from Rockingham Township. The Red Shirts were “riding up and down the streets in different directions, hollering and cursing. I heard in different portions of the town pistol shots, and at one time I heard a regular volley of shots in the direction of the depot. There must have been as many as one hundred shots fired in the space at least of five minutes” (U.S. Congress 1899:131). Red

Shirt brigades paraded through town and countryside, white men mounted on horseback with rifles, pistols, and other tools of intimidation. Especially in the southeastern part of North Carolina, the Red Shirts “rode day and night to intimidate black voters and to bully white Populists and Republicans into voting for the Democratic Party.” They developed “carefully orchestrated displays” of democratic militancy, according to the *1898 Wilmington Race Riot Report*, “used at intervals both to stir up white sentiments and to oppress black or Republican voters” (2006:68). On November 2, 1898 in Wilmington, Dowling led the Red Shirts led a ‘White Man’s Rally’ that featured a barbeque: “At dusk, flaming barrels of tar spread brightly colored plumes of smoke across the city, creating a carnival atmosphere,” writes Prather (1998:28) in a ‘Centennial Essay’ on the riot. The Wilmington Red Shirts, the New Hanover County Horsemen, and the Rough Riders, a group of white veterans of the Spanish-American War, paraded downtown. The rituals of violence had begun.

Red Shirt rallies often coincided with events sponsored by the White Government Unions, and after these events, instilling terror became the objective. Armed raiders tore through black communities, hallooing and firing warning shots into the crisp night air. Whiskey was freely distributed during parades to fire up the crew, making them “fiercer and more terrorizing in their conduct,” explained Dowling (2006:84). Cameron describes their activity: “I know that certain acts of lawlessness was committed as different times and for more than twenty days before the election in certain sections of Richmond County, such as whipping of negroes in the nighttime in Stewartsville, Laurelhill, and Williamsons townships.” John M. Smith, the sheriff of Richmond County, was “notified by letters from different parties” that “certain colored men had been whitecapped and whipped at night” in those three townships. J. R. Melton, Wilmington’s chief of police, reported receiving threatening letters, ostensibly from Red Shirts; there were also “little pamphlets, with crossbones and skulls, notifying them if there was any trouble with the negroes they would get killed” (U.S. Congress 1899:361).

Turner Covington, a republican minister who lived in Richmond County, describes Red Shirts parading through Philadelphia the night before the election: “on Monday night between 10 and 11 o’clock there [sic] passed through, between Sam Fletcher’s house and the church. The wagon turned and came back this way, and when they got back against Sam Fletcher’s house they said, ‘Hello, Sam Fletcher; poke your head you, you damned black son of a bitch, and then they began to shoot.” Covington testified that these Red Shirts shot into his home that evening as

well, along with the homes of two other African Americans: Wilson Moorman and Coma Wall. “I heard a white man say that they was going to rule this country if they had to kill all of the damn negroes from knee high up,” he recalled (U.S. Congress 1899:100). The White Government Union was also active the night before the election. A meeting was held at the courthouse in Wilmington, where 150 men were chosen “to attend polls in their wards and precincts during the election” (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Report 2006:83).

Members of the ‘Secret Nine’ established a ‘Vigilance Committee’ or ‘Citizen’s Patrol’ led by Colonel Roger Moore (a former Confederate cavalry officer) in an effort to reign the Red Shirts and White Government Unions under their control. Each of Wilmington’s five wards had a designated captain, following military chain of command structures, and each captain “selected a lieutenant to command individual blocks.” Lieutenants provided daily reports to ward captains on “the number of armed men they represented and the numbers of women, children, and individuals that would need protection.” Orders were given to “organize the men of each block for regular patrols,” such that it appeared Wilmington ‘might have been preparing for a siege instead of an election,’ noted one visitor to the city. Because of the nightly patrols, the city was ‘like an armed camp,’ wrote Democratic Party leader Thomas Strange (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Report 2006:87-8). The specter of black violence created an uneasiness within the city’s Black community.

Alfred Moore Waddell could no longer remain silent. A descendent of the “genuine aristocracy,” Waddell was always immaculately dressed. He had a “well-kept beard” of silver and gray, was “calm in temper, and mild mannered,” writes historian H. Leon Prather. Yet a virulent hatred lay hidden behind his “cold gray eyes” (Prather 1984:88). Waddell, a former Confederate lieutenant colonel and congressman (1871-1879), told members of the Democratic Party, an anti-black party at the time, he felt compelled to speak against “negro domination.” Several nights before the election, on November 7, the provocateur “told a madly cheering horde in the Opera House: ‘You are Anglo-Saxons. You are armed and prepared, and you will do your duty. Be ready at a moment’s notice. Go to the polls tomorrow, and if you find the Negro out voting, tell him to leave the polls and if he refuses kill him, shoot him down in his tracks. We shall win tomorrow if we have to do it with guns” (*Wilmington Messenger*, Nov 8 1898; 1898 Wilmington Riot Commission 2006:92). Waddell would soon be rewarded with an appointment

as Wilmington's mayor. But first he would lead a white supremacist revolt that culminated in what may be the only successful coup d'état in United States history.

Guns were pouring into North Carolina, at least according to several papers, which advocated for the purchase of additional weaponry to protect the white citizens. "Wilmington's editors simultaneously ran articles reporting that everyone in the city, black and white, was armed," and several of the city's white businessmen acted, purchasing a rapid-fire gun at the cost of \$1,200. So on November 1, 1898, a small ceremony was held on a boat docked just off shore. Members of a gun squad assembled several African American community leaders and "demonstrated the gun's ability" (1898 Wilmington RRC 2006:92). No mention is made of the kind of impression this made on the 'black leaders,' nor if these leaders spread word of the weapon's prowess to others in Wilmington's black community. But Chief of Police Felton did estimate that by the time of the election there were between 2,000 and 3,000 firearms in the city. "Due to indications that blacks were arming themselves, local Wilmington leaders moved to determine the extent of weapons stockpiles in the black community," explains Umfleet. Two detectives, one white and one African American, were hired at the bequest of John Kenly, president of the Atlantic Coastal Railroad. Apparently, the detectives informed the democratic leaders who hired them, African Americans 'were doing practically nothing' in terms of arming for violence (2006:93). But the Red Shirts had been arming—and parading, with those arms displayed as the clap of horse hooves brought its own horror—in anticipation of the election. "For several days before the election they were on every corner of the city," recalled J. R. Melton, a populist who fled Wilmington for Magnolia, North Carolina after the riot. Shotguns and rifles "in the hands of men on every corner of the central part of the city, from about 8 o'clock at night until daylight in the morning," Melton said, "and the Republicans were generally excited and terrorized" (U.S. Congress 1899:360). Many said they were not going to vote.

The polls opened at 7:00 am on November 8, 1898, a "bright and clear" morning that contrasted with the tense anticipation that cast over the city, according to the *Raleigh News and Observer* (November 8 1898; 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:107). White voters took the polls in record number, and white enforcers manned posts at strategic locations. "Roving bands of armed men intimidated blacks and Republicans while others escorted less energetic Democrats to the polls to cast ballots under the watchful scrutiny of the White Government Unions," writes Umfleet (2006:108). Additional tactics involved disrupting the

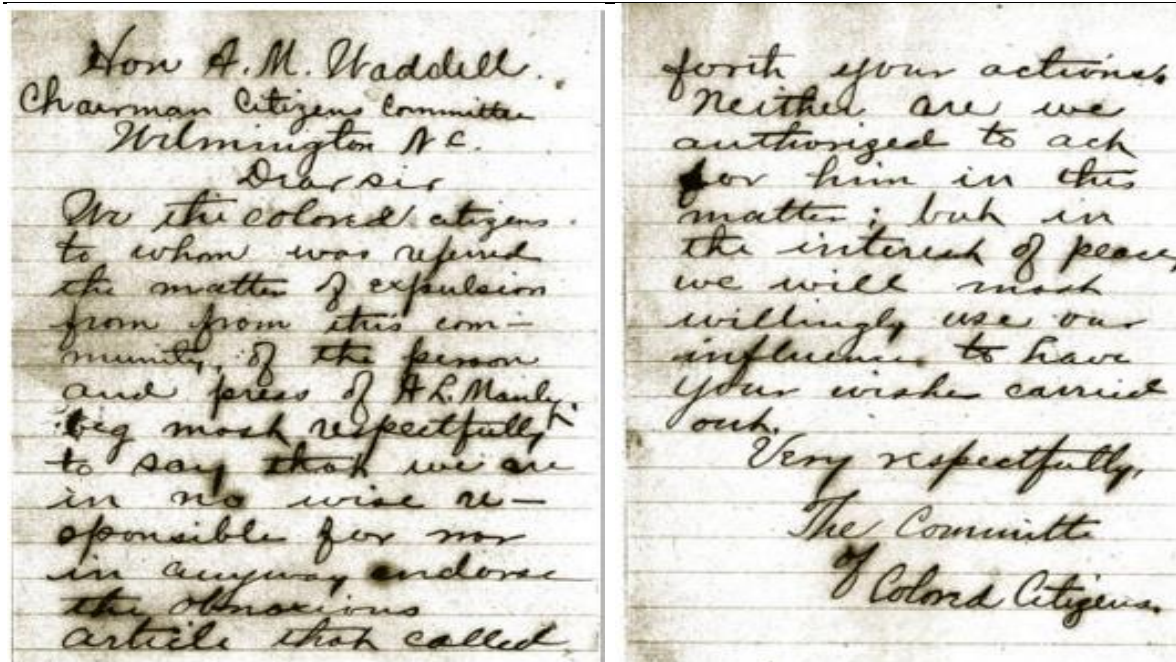
republican tally, either by removing ballots from the box or obstructing election officials as they counted votes; further democratic strategy included voter fraud, schemes in which whites vote for the democratic candidate in multiple city wards. Though the threat of violence was ever present against African Americans, “[m]any of Wilmington’s armed residents were prepared for retaliation from blacks that never came” (2006:108). Rumors of black insurrection continued, however, and the following night ‘an army of white citizens mobilized in the old field back of Tenth Street,’ according to the Reverend J. Allen Kirk, African American and minister of Central Baptist Church. They were “waiting for signals from sentinels” (U.S. Congress 1899:363; 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:111).

Hugh McRae of the Secret Nine posted an advertisement in the *Wilmington Messenger* on Wednesday morning, November 9, calling for a mass meeting of white citizens at the New Hanover County Courthouse. More than 400 men attended, including many of the city’s business leaders. Alfred Moore Waddell was called to the front of the room. He began to read from a prepared statement. It was called the “White Declaration of Independence.” The packed courthouse erupted with applause, and a debate involving resolutions ensued. Eventually, a committee of men settled on a proposal that would force the resignation of the mayor and chief of police. Later a ‘Committee of Twenty-Five,’ nominated at the mass meeting, “drew up a list of men they perceived as leaders and representatives of the African American community.” Called the ‘Committee of Colored Citizens,’ these men were ministers, attorneys, politicians, businessmen, and laborers; they were called to the Merchants’ Room in the Seaboard Air Line building on Front Street “to consider a matter of grave consequence to the negroes of Wilmington,” according to the summons issued by the whites. Waddell sat across from these representatives of the African-American community, along with several other representatives from the Committee of Twenty-Five, and presented their resolutions. The black leaders had until 7:30 am the following morning to report back to Waddell as to whether the demands were met.

On the morning of November 10, 1898, Waddell assembled a crowd of over five hundred white men, “including large numbers of professionals and clergy,” in front of the Wilmington Light Infantry building (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:123). Waddell announced he had not received a response from the Committee of Colored Citizens regarding the resolutions passed in the *White Declaration of Independence* by the Committee of Twenty Five, an organization composed of Wilmington’s white economic elites. The CCC tried to submit their

response to Waddell, but the courier was confronted by an armed group of white men. Armand Scott was forced to mail their response regarding “the matter of expulsion” instead; whether it would have deterred the violence is not clear. Regardless, their letter did not arrive in time:

### Committee of Colored Citizens Respond to the Committee of Twenty-Five



Source: *Politics of a Massacre*, East Carolina University; 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Report

Repetition of the word “from” halfway down the left page indicates the haste in which this letter was written; nevertheless, the committee begged “most respectfully” for Waddell to reconsider his ultimatum. Their plea was ignored.

Waddell assembled his men behind him in “columns of four for the length of two city blocks,” and with him at the front were other members of the Committee of Twenty-Five, business leaders, and several Red Shirts. The mob marched east through a more affluent neighborhood on Market Street; white residents watched from their porches “with mixed emotions” as husbands and sons joined the procession. The men turned onto Seventh Street, and by the time the crowd passed Orange Street, a predominantly African-American neighborhood, more than 1,000 white residents were participating, perhaps as many as 1,500, according to Chief of Police John R. Melton (56<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1899:364; 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:126). Black residents peered through windows as “the white paramilitary organization sent out pickets, or guards, along the streets in the southern section of town,” writes

Umfleet. Another guard ran a patrol on Church Street. The perimeter was now secured, and Waddell knocked on the door of Alexander Manly's *Daily Record*, a Winchester rifle at his side.

William Watson and Dan Rowan were among the first to rush the building. Manly never answered—he had skipped town—but that wasn't going to prevent the men from indulging in violent retribution. Office furniture was hacked into splintered shards. Loud cheers roared outside as the printing press was demolished. Items were tossed outside to the crowd, including a drawing of Manly and a sign, 'The Record Publishing Company,' and destroyed in the street, rituals of violence binding the white community in vengeance against Black Wilmington. Watson and Rowan found kerosene stored in a closet; it had been intended for the kerosene lamps hanging throughout the building. "The person who struck the match was never named," according to the Wilmington riot commission, but Watson and Rowan began spreading the kerosene. The fire spread rapidly through the two-story frame building, even spreading to the shingles of nearby houses. An "all-black fire crew" was halted at Sixth and Castle, prevented from reaching the scene, at least temporarily. Fire Chief Charles Schnibben wanted to be "certain that the building was destroyed beyond repair" before allowing them to proceed. White revelers later recalled the fierce courage displayed by these African American firefighters who, "under the watchful eyes of hundreds of armed antagonistic men," managed to extinguish the flames (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:127-9). The crowd swelled to as many as 2,000.

After Manly's *Daily Record* was mostly incinerated, groups of white men descended upon Brooklyn, an African-American neighborhood in the northern section of Wilmington. "They seemed to spread out in small squads all over the city. In crowds of fifteen and twenty and thirty; all through the central part of the city [sic]" recalled chief of police Melton. "Some men boarded a city streetcar trolley, travelling south on Sixth Street. When the streetcar turned west onto Castle Street, several whites fired their rifles into homes and businesses of African Americans. Black laborers were initially prevented from returning from the waterfront industrial yards to their homes in Brooklyn by "white armed patrols who told them to turn back." Things changed outside Brunje's Saloon, located at the corner of Fourth and Harnett streets in a racially mixed neighborhood on the outskirts of the black section of Wilmington. A group of African Americans were gathered on the corner when a streetcar "loaded with men direct from burning the *Record*" stopped. Words were exchanged between parties, and though violence was temporarily avoided, the group of black men took a position opposite Brunje's Saloon, in front of



W. A. Walker's store, while the group of white men congregated between St. Matthew's English Lutheran Church and Brunje's. Both sides would later claim that the other fired first, but as the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission notes, there are "conflicting viewpoints" in the historical evidence (2006:134). After those opening shots, the whites wasted no time cracking their pistols and firing their rifles as the black men near Walker's store scattered around the corner, fleeing west onto Harnett Street. Four black men were killed at the scene—John Townsend (or Townsell), Charles Lindsay (also known as Silas Brown), William Mouzon, and John L. Gregory—and three more were injured. The riot alarm rang out in the city (2006:136).

George Morton, a Commander in the Navy reserves, gathered his men, heavily armed with "Lee magazine rifles and a Hotchkiss rapid-firing gun," at the corner of Third and Princess streets (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:137). The Hotchkiss gun "could fire 80 to 100 shots per minute," notes Umfleet, "with a range of five miles." It had arrived in Wilmington only two days before the riot, and Morton's men "wheeled this weapon through town, aiming it at crowds to coerce groups into dispersing" (2006:145). The Red Shirts had gathered outside the city limits in Dry Pond, and once they received word that the violence had begun, they rushed toward Brooklyn. The Wilmington Light Infantry also marched into the city after receiving mobilization orders from Walker Taylor. Captain James led the unit down Market Street to Third, where they stopped at James Woolvin's funeral parlor at 105 North Third, where they "waited for the Naval Reserves to join their process" (WRRC 2006:142). Several of Wilmington businessmen purchased a "rapid-firing Colt gun," and the 'machine gun squad,' a part of the WLI, ushered the weapon into use during the riot. A Colt automatic rapid-fire 6 mm, capable of firing 420 .23 caliber bullets per minute, "the gun was mounted on a two-horse drawn wagon furnished by Orrell's Livery Stables" (U.S. Congress 1899:344; WRRC 2006:144).

Captain William R. Kenan and First Lieutenant Charles H. White led the machine gun squad as they hauled the Colt across the Fourth Street Bridge into Brooklyn. "The Gatling gun, drawn on a truck by two fine horses," was accompanied in the procession by a wagon loaded with two "one-pound Hotchkiss cannons" commanded by Captain Henry McIlhenny (Prather 1998:33). Roger B. Moore, a Confederate officer and Ku Klux Klan member, joined in the assault, mounted on horseback and wield a sword. As the troops passed through the intersection at Sixth and Brunswick streets they were fired upon as they approached the "north side of the

Sixth Street bridge. The gunners were armed with rifles, and they returned fire, killing as many as 25 black men at the intersection” (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:144).

On Harnett Street a shootout erupted and William Mayo, a white resident of the street, was seriously wounded by a stray .44 caliber Winchester bullet; it entered “through his life side and both lungs before exiting his body” (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:140). In retaliation, “whites fired in unison” on a group of black men standing at the intersection of Harnett and Fourth streets. At least five more African Americans were killed in this assault. White men “began to avenge Mayo as they aimed for any blacks that came into sight,” and by afternoon, “after some simple investigation and finger pointing, it was decided that Daniel Wright” was the culprit responsible. Wright’s house was soon surrounded by angry whites who later claimed that Wright had fired upon them from the attic. The men applied a torch to Wright’s home, and as he tried to escape from the burning structure, he was captured and marched into the street. ‘Hang him!’ yelled a person in the crowd (2006:141). Someone bludgeoned his head with a gas pipe, but still Wright got to his feet. ‘String him up to a lamp post,’ yelled one of the whites. A man from the Citizen’s Guard insisted that Wright be given the chance to “run the gauntlet,” so the white men turned him loose: “‘Run, nigger, run!’ When he had gotten fifty feet or so, Wright fell in a hail of at least forty rounds. ‘He was riddled with a pint of bullets, like a pigeon thrown from a trap,’” according to one observer (Prather 1998:34). Daniel Wright was left bleeding in the street with 13 gunshot wounds; he miraculously survived until the next morning, where he died at the city hospital.

Red Shirts and Rough Riders invaded black neighborhoods in Brooklyn, intending to ‘hunt niggers,’ as one participant declared, or to ‘kill every nigger in sight,’ as another white riot participant promised. Bands of whites spread out from Fourth and Harnett streets. The killing was indiscriminate: “One witness testified that he had seen six black men shot down near the Cape Fear Lumber Company, their bodies buried hurriedly in a nearby ditch. Another described the killing of nine African Americans by a lone white marksman who reputedly set fire to their shanty in Brooklyn and picked them off one by one as they fled the flames. Still another witness told of the murder of an innocent deaf black man, shot by the mob because he failed to obey a command to halt that he had never heard (Prather 1998:34-5; see also Prather 1984:127).

The total number of deaths remains uncertain. And in the end, this is part of white supremacy too, part of the point: Black folks mattered so little to white officials that those

missing were never accurately accounted for after the violence. Confronted with the intense reality that accompanies such a public display of violent hatred, black residents wondered “whether they should abandon Wilmington, sacrificing their homes and businesses in exchange for the safety of their families.” An African-American minister in Raleigh urged one black man to ‘run away from his little property or any other accumulation which represents thirty-five years of sweat and toil and exposure unless forced by the lawless.’ “Many of the most prominent and affluent blacks fled Wilmington,” writes Ayers (2007:302). What happens to the structure of a community when its most successful and prominent citizens flee? What is to come of those who remain behind—either because they do not possess the means to escape or because they feel a particular attachment for the place? “Persisting even today are legends of the mouth of the Cape Fear clotted with black bodies; these stories probably echo the oft-quoted vow of Alfred Waddell to ‘choke the Cape Fear River with carcasses’ if necessary,” explains Prather. “It is unlikely that we will ever know exactly how many black citizens died in the violence in 1898” (1998:35).

#### *Instrumental White Violence*

The Democratic Party had control of the state legislature in North Carolina, 1898, but control of Wilmington remained with the Republican Party, and the next election was not for another year. The Committee of Twenty-Five went about achieving their objectives: Mayor Silas P. Wright and his administration resigned; Chief of Police Melton agreed to resign; and the entire Board of Alderman resigned, one by one, while Waddell’s committee “voted to approve the entry of a new member to the board so that the old board was phased out into the new.” Silas Wright was replaced as mayor by Alfred Moore Waddell, who was “unanimously elected” by the new Board of Alderman. Wilmington’s “political elite staged a coup d’etat to retake the city’s offices,” notes the Wilmington Race Riot Commission (2006:154). And it appears the coup was undertaken as one might imagine; according to Melton, armed guards lined the corridors of city hall. Between 100 and 200 stood watch as he exited the building, and after he resigned, “a new chief was instantly sworn in” (2006:155). The seizure of political power was only the beginning.

Wilmington’s white elites who coordinated the coup d’etat—members of the Secret Nine, the Merchants’ Association, the Committee of Twenty-Five, and the White Government’s Union, among others—also established a “systematic program of banishment for black and white Republicans,” explains Umfleet. “Many of those targeted for banishment were perceived as a threat by the leaders of the white community.” Black members of the Committee of Colored

Citizens were located and arrested during the riot; others were intimidated and forced to leave in the days following the violence. The Wilmington Light Infantry also “cooperated with the banishment campaign by detailing squads to arrest men named by the Secret Nine” (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:155). Those African Americans who were arrested spent the night locked up in jail, but come morning, they were “marched under guard by Morton’s Naval Reserves to the train station.” The *News and Observer* reported that these men were provided with one-way train tickets to Richmond and warned about returning.

African American business and political leaders were targeted for banishment during and after the violence unfolded in Wilmington. Thomas C. Miller, Ari Bryant, Robert B. Pickens, and Salem J. Bell were arrested for ‘using language calculated to incite the negroes.’ “These men were also leading businessmen, with Bell and Pickens operating a fish and oyster business, Bryant a butcher shop, and Miller as a money lender and real estate developer,” Umfleet explains. Thomas Miller’s case is particularly illuminating. Miller, a “wealthy man by Wilmington standards, had worked himself up from slavery to become a financial giant who regularly bought and sold land, loaned money, and entered into mortgages with both blacks and whites,” explains the commission (2006:162). Miller was forced from his home following a shootout with white democrats. It turns out that banishment did not end the harassment, either: Police Chief Melton, *Daily Record* editor Alexander Manly, entrepreneur and real estate agent Thomas Miller, republican Robert Bunting, and local butcher Ari Bryant, “among others, were tracked as various modes of transport moved them further northward.” Telegrams were sent ahead of each man, “informing residents of the impending arrivals and forwarding requests to continue to push the men along,” which did indeed take place: “The men were pushed further north from Manchester, Virginia on the fifteenth” (2006:166).

White violence and the subsequent banishment campaign orchestrated by members of the Democratic Party—Wilmington’s economic elite—proved to be so successful that this event may be the *most* instrumental of all white-initiated riot events. While “only a small number of prominent white and black leaders were made to leave the city by force,” a much larger number of refugees, “perhaps in the thousands, left in the days and weeks following the riot to make their homes elsewhere.” Umfleet explains the significance of the ‘banishment campaign,’ which enabled white leaders to “extend their influence into the core of the African American community and remove those men deemed too dangerous to keep in the city because of the

political or economic challenges they posed for whites. Those men banished by force were labeled for life by the ordeal, and, even if they tried to move beyond banishment, North Carolina Democrats with far reaching resources continually plagued their existence” (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:170). A “crowd of at least 500 men, women, and children were on the road and in the woods beyond Smith’s Creek Bridge,” reported the *Wilmington Messenger* (November 11 1898). Roads “were lined with them, some carrying their bedding on their heads and whatever effects could be carried,” reported the *Caucasian* (November 17 1898; cited in Prather 1998:36). This exodus “continued into December,” according to Wilmington Race Riot Commission. Newspapers reported that more than a thousand black residents had abandoned the city since the violence; white landlords in Brooklyn “saw an immediate drop in revenue” as tenants fled north, particularly Pennsylvania and New York (2006:205).

In 1897 Wilmington’s core was “dominated by whites in a triangular pattern beginning with Ninth at Market and working outward to Second at Dawson and Campbell.” On the outskirts of this triangle were “transition streets” where African Americans accounted for nearly half the population before neighborhoods shifted, becoming predominantly black. South Sixth Street, between Ann and Castle, was one such transition neighborhood, as was Castle Street to Third Street. The riot erupted along North Fourth Street, which had more white families than black families, but the cross streets were either transition streets or predominantly African American. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, significant ownership changes had occurred across the Wilmington landscape. Hayumi Higuchi studied changes in residential patterns using city directories from 1897, 1902, and 1905, and her findings demonstrate an “outflow” of the city’s black residents from the city’s center: By 1905 “the predominantly white sections of town had spread out and the transition blocks between the black and white sections were pushed further toward the perimeters of town. The small grouping of integrated neighborhoods along North Fourth and Princess near Market had disappeared. The large number of blocks containing both black and white residents along Sixth and Castle Streets also disappeared with the concentrations trending toward a white majority” (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:248). Wilmington became increasingly segregated in the years following the riot, and as the 1900 census reflects, the city’s African-American population dipped by more than 900 people during the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Whites outnumbered blacks in Wilmington for the first time since the Civil War (2006:233).

The mass exodus of African Americans from Wilmington is evident in the 1900 city directory, which contained occupational listings for 2,497 African American workers, “almost 1,000 fewer than the 1897 directory.” Black businesses were significantly impacted by the violence, as economist Tod Hamilton’s work indicates. There were 102 businesses operated by African Americans in 1897, including grocery stores, restaurants, butcher shops, shoe shops, and barber shops; by 1900 that number was reduced to 78, a “significant decline in the number of black-owned businesses.” The layout of business districts also transitioned abruptly:

In 1897, most addresses for black-owned businesses were in the primary business district along South Front, North Second, Market, and Prince Streets. By 1900, the orientation of black businesses had changed. Not only were the businesses different, but many were also relocated. The greatest number of businesses were in the traditionally African American neighborhood of Brooklyn along North Front Street. Although some businesses remained in areas popular in the 1897 directory, the overall numbers were significantly lower. For example, in 1897, there were 76 black businesses located along [?] street in the city’s central business district. By 1900, the number was down to 33. (1898 WRRC 2006:232)

African-American laborers were those “most affected by the white supremacy campaign’s promises of jobs for white workers.” Skilled workers suffered the most losses in the years following the riot.

There was also the issue of black voting to be addressed, and it was, when on February 21, 1899 North Carolina’s General Assembly ratified the suffrage amendment to the state constitution. In the 1898 Supreme Court case *Williams v. Mississippi*, the court sanctioned a state’s right to use literacy tests to qualify for the right to vote, and the North Carolina amendment relied upon this precedent in disenfranchising African Americans. Following the passage of this legislation, potential voters were now required to pass a literacy test *and* pay a poll tax; to prevent illiterate whites from also being disenfranchised, a grandfather clause was included, which asserted that no male resident entitled to vote prior to January 1, 1867 “and no lineal descendent of such person, shall be denied the right to register to vote at any election in this State by reason of his failure to pass the education qualification” (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:209). Since all white men were eligible to vote in North Carolina before 1867—and importantly, since all black men were not permitted to vote in the state prior to that time—their sons and grandsons would also be eligible. If the literacy qualification failed, the property tax qualification was an additional burden to prevent African Americans from voting in North Carolina following the passage of the amendment to the state’s constitution.

Life was “changed irrevocably” for African Americans who continued to live in Wilmington after the riot, not only due to the “loss of a political voice in city government,” and second, due to the “concerted effort to downgrade black employment prospects.” Municipal jobs were “patronage positions, given to political supporters,” and after the coup, these positions were delivered to white workers. Many African Americans who had previously relied on the city for their income were now without work (2006:192). The democrats in the state legislature moved quickly to pass the “first measures to legislate segregation” in North Carolina, first by segregating train compartments in 1899. The North Carolina state legislature passed a series of ‘separate but equal’ measures, codifying practically every social interaction between African Americans and whites. Jim Crow laws were established regulating interaction on public transportation, but also in the courts. In Wilmington, a judge ruled in 1903 that blacks and whites must use separate bibles when sworn into the court room (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:208). And African Americans lost their voting majority: in 1890 the black population was larger than the white population by 2,593 residents; by 1900, “whites represented a small majority that was destined to grow steadily,” writes Prather. “Wilmington’s black heyday had ended” (1998:38). As Timothy B. Tyson and David S. Cecelski note in their introduction to *Democracy Betrayed*, a collection of essays about the riot, the “racial caste system nailed into place at the turn of the century would take many years and cost many lives to overturn” (1998:9).

## SEGREGATION

Southern railroads transformed social relations, disrupting previously isolated regions, oftentimes suddenly and with enduring effects. These trains carried other changes to town after the tracks sprang up, most notably an “expanding culture of consumption that multiplied sites in which racial difference could break down” (Hale 1998:136). Toward the end of the 1890s, economic and cultural developments interacted in such a way so that racial hatred became more pronounced *and* socially acceptable. As Woodward notes, the South became “the perfect cultural seedbed for aggression against the minority race” because economic and political “frustrations had pyramided to a climax of social tensions.” The “long cyclical depression” of the 1890s was “an acute period of suffering that had only intensified the distress of the much longer agricultural depression.” Hopes for reform had “met with cruel disappointments.” Facing continued economic hardship, combined with the cultural failure of reform, meant “there had to be a

scapegoat” to direct animosity: “And all along the line signals were going up to indicate that the Negro was an approved object of aggression. These ‘permissions-to-hate’ came from sources that had formerly denied such permission. They came from the federal courts in numerous opinions, from Northern liberals eager to conciliate the South, from Southern conservatives who had abandoned their race policy of moderation” (Woodward:2002:81-2).

Throughout the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Southern railroad cars were “spaces of racial conflict” (Hale 1998:127). Railroads made previously anonymous spaces more public, and increased consumption in burgeoning market spaces opened new opportunities for interactions between races. Segregation was a system of spatial relations where “‘Colored’ inferior cars meant ‘colored’ inferior people” (Hale 1998:130). It was not so much that “whites feared ‘racial pollution’ than that the visible dress and deportment of these travelers belied any notion of southern blacks’ racial inferiority” (Hale 1998:128). White anxiety stemming from the anonymity of racial interaction in public places of consumption led to the production of a new “standardized racial order.” Systematic racial separation in public accommodations provided “the answer to the problem of consumption in the South” (Hale 1998:169). And in the New South cities, street cars rather than railroads provided the staging ground for interracial conflict. In Atlanta, signs posted to cars read ‘White people will seat from the front of the car toward the back and colored people from the rear toward the front.’ Yet, as Hale notes, no actual boundary existed; there were not “colored curtains” or any other symbols for demarcating racial separation aboard transportation. “The color line is drawn, but neither race knows just where it is,” observed Ray Stannard Baker, a white journalist [who...]. “Indeed, it can hardly be definitely drawn in many relationships, because it is constantly changing. This uncertainty is a fertile source of friction and bitterness” (as cited in Hale 1998:134).

Jim Crow facilities in Atlanta and throughout the South were substandard, but perhaps the system’s more invidious consequences were its effects on black’s attempts at social advancement. Social relations in the increasingly segregated system of public interaction was characterized by “white intolerance of interracial contact” (Gaines 1996:59). Blacks and whites were forbidden to meet publicly as equals, and this structure *particularly* applied to black men and white women. Delinquent black sexuality was predominantly featured in southern newspapers and magazines. And this cultural attack upon African Americans was highly effective; indeed, fear of black criminality was “[c]entral to the justification of lynching as a



deterrent to rape” and the “maintenance of the Jim Crow order” (Gaines 1996:59). Kevin Gaines argues that, ultimately, the term *social equality* “was a sexualized diversion from and justification for political and social inequality, a slogan mobilized frequently, but most effectively at election time, herding white workers into the Democratic Party with appeals for the disfranchisement of blacks” (1996:59).

Historian August Meier writes that the “hostility of white organized labor was a leading factor” in the decline of African Americans working in the skilled trades in the South after 1890. “Unquestionably, there was increasing prejudice toward Negroes throughout the country. Even many abolitionists had been paternalistic rather than equalitarian in regard to Negroes, and it was not too difficult for men of this stripe to become easily disillusioned with the ‘lack of progress’ of the freedmen or the ‘follies’ of the Reconstruction government (Meier 1968:21). Advocates of disenfranchisement faced “stout resistance,” thus champions of the movement “resorted to an intensive propaganda of white supremacy, Negrophobia, and race chauvinism.” Campaigns such as these “preceded and accompanied disfranchisement in each state” (Woodward 2002:85). But these campaigns also directly contributed to violence, first in North Carolina prior to the Wilmington Massacre of 1898, and then in Georgia with the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “the structure of segregation and discrimination was extended” by the increasing adoption of Jim Crow legislation. “Up to 1900 *the only law of this type* adopted by the majority of Southern states was that applying to passengers aboard trains,” notes Woodward. “And South Carolina did not adopt that until 1898, North Carolina in 1899, and Virginia, the last, in 1900. Jim Crow legislation tended to appear “in waves of popularity” (Woodward 2002:97), and unlike earlier feudal laws, Jim Crow laws “did not assign the subordinate group a fixed status in society”; instead, they were “constantly pushing the Negro further down” (2002:108).

At the turn of the century African American men were “systematically and automatically excluded from many new categories of work emerging at the turn of the century” (Ayers 2007:429). Economic inequality was widening, extending pre-existing inequities: “The more advanced and technologically oriented a job, the less likely that a black man would be permitted to learn the skill,” writes historian Edward Ayers. “Even as increasing numbers of blacks worked for wages off the farm, the proportion of blacks in each non-farm job category declined. Most ominously, younger black men and women were the most discriminated against, falling farther

behind their white contemporaries in the early twentieth century than their parents had been in the 1880s” (2007:429). Yet during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “black wealth and landholding” made tremendous gains, “with black landholding reaching its all-time peak in 1910.” Thus, while a vast distance separated blacks from whites in terms of income, land ownership, and wealth, “blacks narrowed the gap” in first decade of the new century (Ayers 2007:430). The rise of a black middle class in the South made social relations particularly prickly, for it was no longer possible to guarantee African American inferiority based upon appearance and mannerisms alone. As consumer culture swept across the South, and as certain blacks benefited from the economic structures of racial segregation, whites (especially poor whites) might encounter black folks who were dressed in finer clothes. They might encounter black folks who could speak in a more refined manner. They might encounter black families who had enough disposable income to enjoy dinner at a restaurant, or perhaps a young black couple enjoying a show at the theater. African Americans, therefore, “might or might not appear inferior and servile,” so in these public spaces, “where cross-racial contact had a tendency to be both anonymous and visible, whites forced blacks to ‘occupy a position of inferiority and servility’” (Hale 1998:135). Segregation became a useful tool in ordering (i.e., structuring) the New South, especially in a developing social order “in which people increasingly moved beyond the local and thus known.” And the new social order was maintained through “spatially grounded signifiers of black difference and white belonging. With the color line, whites literalized the metaphor of keeping blacks ‘in their place’” (Hale 1998:136).

White racism intensified during the two decades saddling the 20<sup>th</sup> century and anti-black imagery abounded in the production of culture, particularly in the fields of history, advertising and fiction, and even science. “The construction of ‘History’ in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—the presentation of scholarly authority as factual and accurate representations of the past—was “the first battlefield in the creation of modern southern whiteness,” according to historian Grace Elizabeth Hale. History “became not only a time but a cultural space in which to craft a new southern order. The segregation of time – the whiteness of Civil War valor, the blackness of Reconstruction – paralleled and founded and deepened the segregation of space, providing the foundations of the southern future” (Hale 1998:50). Confederate sympathy penetrated “the professional practice of history” (Hale 1998:65) as academic and amateur historians filled texts with “praise for slave-like behavior and the ex-slaves.” Histories of slavery “poured forth in the

years between the 1890s and the 1918 publication of Ulrich B. Phillips's *American Negro Slavery*" (Hale 1998:61). These narratives "praised a romanticized past of racial 'integration.' And the more perfect this past became, the more free of racial and class conflict, the more plantation narratives helped destroy the possibility of an integrated future" (Hale 1998:65).

Minstrelsy was a form of white entertainment that peddled images mocking African Americans as ignorant, lazy, and happily subordinate. Mass-produced photographs and illustrations circulated widely in the 1890s and early 1900s designed in support of white efforts to maintain control of black labor in southern agriculture. Denigrating Black stereotypes were repurposed through imagery as advertisements used to sell consumer goods. Minstrel images and narratives "encompassed a range of racist perceptions that laid the intellectual and emotional foundation for the assumption by social scientists, clergy, and jurists that African Americans were biologically inferior, disorderly, appetitive at the expense of reason, and, finally, unassimilable" (Gaines 1996:70). Black Americans continuously tried to refute and attack such "negrophobic caricatures"—so widespread they were found not only in literature, newspapers, and magazines, but also in advertisements, trade cards, and even toys—but many "struggled against the self-loathing of a narrowly racialized identity" (Gaines 1996:68).

But the struggle against white propaganda became even more challenging with the rise of eugenics and racial essentialism. Scientific studies in genetics and heredity "served as secular rearticulations of Calvinist notions of original sin and predestination," thus scientific racism interacts with popular racism to structure the culture of white supremacy, in both the South and the North. The image of the *criminal urban black dandy* was repurposed to demonize African American migration, particularly black men seeking to leave plantation work behind for the better opportunities to be found in the burgeoning New South cities. The black dandy was dapper in appearance, a "slick, licentious" deviant with criminal intent. As black workers continued leaving for urban areas, "sensationalized journalistic accounts of crime, vice, and vagrancy associated black mobility with racial morbidity" (Gaines 1996:80). The black dandy contributed to the cultural development of what Kevin Gaines calls "alarmist views of black migration" (1996:88). Blacks "belonged in the rural South, not in cities," where they would fare badly under the demands of "an advanced urban industrial civilization" (Gaines 1996:89).

*McClure's*, a monthly magazine popular around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, featured a series of articles in 1904 written by Thomas Nelson Page, who defended the practice of lynching.

Page argued lynching was “a useful defense against rape” in this series of articles; he “concurred with the view that Reconstruction was a ‘national blunder’ and that blacks lacked the maturity and intelligence necessary for responsible citizenship,” which, as Kevin Gaines points out, was an idea “given national prominence” by none other than Booker T. Washington in his autobiography *Up From Slavery*. “Popular racism was made respectable” by men like Page, Washington, and “countless others,” including the many “race-baiting politicians” of the era. Black men were often “portrayed as sexual predators needing to be controlled at all costs,” a fabricated anxiety swelled by the transmission of “fearful images of sexual racism to white middle-class readers nationwide.” The development in white culture to associate black men with criminals, and sexual criminals more specifically, was at the time known colloquially as ‘the Negro problem.’ This racist perception “was so pervasive in American society—a sentiment shared by both southern extremists and ‘moderates’—that black spokespersons were obliged to enter this debate on these disadvantageous terms” (Gaines 1996:58).

The image of the ‘Old Negro’ was juxtaposed culturally with a striking new image, one that would saturate popular culture and stoke white anxiety. The *black beast rapist* proved to be a most powerful symbol, not only because it effectively functioned to justify lynching and other forms of white violence, but because it provided a rationale for further segregation measures, a log for patterning and secluding public places of consumption—where white women might interact with black men. The “myth of the black male rapist” was at the core of the “white supremacist mindset that mandated segregation, disfranchisement, and lynching as safeguards against ‘social equality,’ the white South’s hysterical coded term for the miscegenation taboo” (Gaines 1996:12-13). Mass media played an increasingly prominent role in the distribution of racist cultural products, materials that undoubtedly helped exacerbate existing racial tensions while promoting White Supremacy. Thomas Dixon’s trilogy on racial conflict began with *The Leopard’s Spots: A Romance on the White Man’s Burden* (1902). *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905) appeared as a play and “later on the screen”—in D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*, which sent cultural shockwaves rippling throughout the nation as it lit up movie theaters nationwide. Dixon’s trilogy was capped with *The Traitor: A Story of the Fall of the Invisible Empire* (1907). During this period, other publications with titles like *The Negro a Beast* (written by Charles Carroll and published in 1900) and *The Negro, A Menace to*

*American Civilization* (written by Robert W. Shufeldt and published in 1907). It was during these years that W. E. B. Du Bois and other Black intellectuals launched the Niagara Movement.

Significant economic, social, and cultural forces converged in Atlanta, Georgia in the months preceding the outbreak of the 1906 ‘race riot.’ One publication dubbed the event ‘An American Kishinev,’ connecting the violence with the location of an anti-Jewish riot where, on East Sunday 1903, Jewish people were hunted and “slaughtered like sheep” (*NYT*, April 28, 1903), in what was then Russia (today, Kishinev, or Chişinău, is the capital and largest city of the Republic of Moldova). The Atlanta riot of 1906 “was the culmination of a series of antiblack incidents, including the racist gubernatorial campaign, the staging of Dixon’s *Clansman*, and the so-called Brownsville Affray,” writes historian Kevin Gaines (1996:51). Atlanta’s press stoked the ambers of collective resentment, and in the process, these publications laid the public ideological foundation for white supremacy. The two major newspapers Grady, Howell, Smith, and Gray controlled—the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Journal*—“provided these elite white ‘bosses’ with the power bases to dominate Atlanta’s and Georgia’s political and economic structures” (Mixon 2005:17). Most white folks believed that African Americans had over-extended social boundaries in seeking full citizenship and equal rights; the “racial status quo was being subverted by black attempts to determine the rules of the workplace,” claims Mixon. “Blacks were seeking to define their working conditions, wages, employers, and hours of work” (2005:11). Atlanta was also home to several black institutions of higher education: Atlanta, Clark, Spelman, Morris Brown, and Morehouse. These institutions attracted ambitious black folks from throughout the South who, in turn, helped build African American neighborhoods in the Third and Fourth Wards like Summerhill, Pittsburg, Mechanicsville, and Beaverslide (Mixon 2005). African Americans advancing in society, whether in education, labor, or political representation, posed significant challenges to white supremacy, to the Southern racial caste system. Another serious problem was supposed black criminality. In the two months preceding the Atlanta riot, “twelve white women have been assaulted,” reports *The New York Times*; in each case, the newspapers “made attacks on the negroes and recommended violent measures. Public feeling has run so high that the reorganization of the old Ku Klux Klans, which in reconstruction days beat and shot negroes, was seriously urged” (*NYT* September 24 1906).

## DISENFRAANCHISEMENT AND THE ATLANTA RACE RIOT 1906: FEARS OF 'NEGRO DOMINATION' FUEL WHITE ANXIETY:

At the heart of Atlanta's center city was Five Points. A junction for the city's 12 railroads and its streetcar lines, it was also the intersection of the city's busiest streets: Edgewood Avenue, Peachtree Street, Marietta Street, and Decatur Street. In the Five Points stood several of Atlanta's hotels and skyscrapers. Down Peachtree were the office buildings, the firms of Atlanta's "wealthiest and most powerful business leaders." Down Decatur Street smoke emanated from manufacturing firms and spilled from unlicensed saloons; the whole street stunk from the 'odors of mullet, of week-old beer, of corn and rye whiskey, of frying grease,' according to one journalist (Goldshalk 2005:27-8). Decatur was known for its jook joints, dance halls, and dives—intimate spaces where African Americans socialized free from white surveillance. Many of these clubs, located in the basements of storefronts and saloons, included private rooms where blacks could "shared old and new cultural forms, the blues and ragtime music and dance routines," and it was in these spaces where African Americans could more easily "resist white efforts to regulate their bodies, labor, and place in Atlanta" (Mixon 2005:43). At the Star, blacks and whites enjoyed burlesque shows and tawdry comedy acts, the kind of "intimate, unregulated contacts between white men and black men" that generated tension (Goldshalk 2005:29). "Black and white residents repeatedly commented that they were confronting a transitional moment in which established hierarchies and moral boundaries were losing their hold," writes historian David Fort Goldshalk in *Veiled Visions*. "All that had once appeared solid now seemed to be melting away as capitalism and the railroad's transportation networks created new economic inequalities and undermined cultural and social sureties (2005:32).

In Atlanta, between 1890 and 1910, the city's population more than doubled, nearly 155,000 residents; during the same period, the African-American population tripled, from 16,300 to 51,900, while the white population soared from 37,416 to 102,861 (Goldshalk 2005; Mixon 2005). Atlanta's "most respected black families" lived in the Fourth Ward, along Auburn and Houston streets, east of the center city, while its working-class residents lived in Dark Town, located east of the central business district, and Pittsburg, on the outskirts of the city to the southwest. A third of the city's residents lacked access to running water and bathrooms; unemployment (and underemployment) "led many black men either to hustle for day jobs on

downtown street corners or to leave their wives and children for extended periods in search of employment in other locales”(Godshalk 2005:20-1).

NEGRO ATTEMPTS TO ASSAULT MRS. MARY CHAFIN NEAR SUGAR CREEK BRIDGE, proclaimed *The Atlanta Journal* with a prominent 4-line title splashed across the front page of its evening extra. TWO ASSAULTS was the title splashed across the *Atlanta Evening News*, in font even larger than that used in the *Journal*, which had already carried an editorial earlier in the day “decrying the dives and blaming them outright for the violence”: ‘It has been an established fact that the negro clubs and restaurants which have been only disguised dives of the worst class, have fostered and engendered criminals of the lowest species’” (Burns 2009:115). Newsboys peddled their papers by Terminal Station at the corner of Peachtree Street, yelling ‘extra!’ as rumors of violence began traveling downtown. By 9:30 each paper had released a second extra edition. *The Atlanta Journal* ran a three-line title across its front page: ANGRY CITIZENS IN PURSUIT OF BLACK BRUTE WHO ATTEMPTED ASSAULT ON MRS. CHAPIN / RESCUED FROM FIEND BY PASSING NEIGHBOR. The more taciturn *Atlanta Evening News*, again with larger font, announced THIRD ASSAULT.

“The muggy air was heavy with the smell of fried mullet, a staple at the bars and lunchrooms,” writes journalist Rebecca Burns in *Rage in the Gate City* (2009:116). Thousands of whites had packed into the Five Points that Saturday night, enjoying whiskey that sold for a “nickel a glass or fifty cents per quart” and the “open-air stalls offering cheap meals” that lined the alleyways (Godshalk 2005:29). The Decatur Street saloons and billiard halls began to clear, and rumors of violence spread downtown as the newsboys announced another assault. Some white business owners even encouraged their black employees to cut off work early, head home and avoid harm; others were planning to participate: ‘We are going to kill all the niggers tonight,’ one African American remembered” (Godshalk 2005:85). Sometime before 9:00 p.m., a white man “mounted a box on Marietta Street, near the Post Office.” He waved his fist in the air violently, his hand clenched around a newspaper extra. ‘Four assaults by negroes on white women,’ the man proclaimed. ‘Are we Southern white men going to stand for this?’ ‘No!’ yelled the crowd in response. ‘Kill the negroes and our women will be safe,’ screamed a voice from the mob with great anticipation. ‘Kill the negroes.’ It “was taken up by others, and soon the cry was running along the crowded streets” (*The New York Times* September 24 1906; see also Goldshalk 2005:88). Mayor James Woodward, who had served Atlanta since 1896 in city positions such as

alderman and city councilman prior to being elected mayor, mounted a car platform at Peachtree and Marietta Streets. Woodward pled with the mob to cease its depredations:

For God's sake, men, go to your homes quietly and leave this matter in the hands of the law. I promise you that every negro will receive justice, and the guilty shall not escape. I beseech you not to cause this blot on the fair name of our most beautiful city. What you may do in a few minutes of recklessness will take Atlanta many years to recover from. I implore you to leave this matter in the hands of the law, and save the bloodshed that is sure to follow if you allow yourselves to be governed by these reports [i.e., black assaults on white women], which are certainly exaggerated. (Bauerlein 2001:147)

Fire engines roared through the street, attempting to drench and disperse the marauding whites. James English, president of the Fourth National Bank, rang the fire bell ten times, summoning to duty every police officer in the city.

Atlanta's streetcars provided the convenient targets, their trolley stops staging grounds for anti-black violence. In fact, according to an account in *The New York Times*, the "mobs would watch, and when a negro was seen inside a car, he would be captured and either killed or badly beaten." Journalists stood at the windows of *The Atlanta Constitution* as two African American men were captured from the trolley car and shot in the street. "The Forsyth Street tragedy was repeated on the Georgia Avenue and the Forest Avenue cars, which go into the negro quarters of Atlanta" (September 23 1906). On Marietta Street, two black men were seated behind two white women, "unaware of their danger until the mob swooped down upon them and dragged them from their seats." The men were thrown from the trolley car into the crowd swarming all around: "One was quickly killed with a knife in the hands of a white man; the other was thrown down and beaten, kicked, and trampled till he was dead." In another incident, a trolley car "half filled with negroes approached from an outside run." The mob pounced upon the car; though the passengers fought with a fierce resistance against white brutality, three African Americans were killed, their bodies left "dead on the floor when the car was permitted to move on." Two more African Americans "were seriously beaten and unconscious" (September 24 1906). Another trolley car carrying six African-American women and four black men was attacked as it passed a stop along Peachtree and Marietta streets. Mob members "repeatedly screamed, 'Take them off! Take them off!'" as the conductor tried to speed past. "Before he could, a crowd member pulled the trolley from its guide wires," writes Godshalk. Whites used clubs to shatter the windows, "assaulting the black women and pulling other passengers through the windows." Most of the other passengers scattered quickly to get away, but one passenger was



not so fortunate; he was chased down an alley to the “side entrance of a barbershop,” where he was bludgeoned to death (Godshalk 2005:91)

One black man was spotted at the corner of Marietta and Forsyth streets. ‘There goes one! Shoot that nigger!’ The man “darts along the side of the Austell Building and shoots toward the shadowy Forsyth Street viaduct,” writes Marc Bauerlein in *Negrophobia* (2001:155). Rather than scurry down the bank toward the railroad tracks, where he might have managed to escape, he raced across the steel bridge, bloodthirsty whites a hundred yards behind. The editorial rooms of *The Atlanta Constitution* looked down on that bridge, and reporters watched the man run in terror, chased by white savages in the city meant to epitomize the ‘New South.’ “Several bullets were fired at him, but they went wild,” reports the correspondent. “Then from the southern side of the bridge came the cries of several white men. ‘Stop shooting and we’ll stop him,’ they said. ‘We’ll kill the black. He’ll get away if you don’t stop shooting, and let us at him.’” The men on the northern side of the bridge ceased: ‘We’ve stopped shooting. Stop the nigger.’ The man reached the other side, gasping for air, his attention drawn to his pursuers on the bridge. And then, from behind the last iron beam, a white man stepped from the shadow. A heavy club crashes down on the man’s skull. “The sound of the contact could be heard for a block,” reported *The Times*. “The black man dropped and the mob was soon on him. The body was kicked and dragged away for a few yards.” Several whites stood directly over the body, cursing the black man as they “poured the contents of their revolvers” into his body (September 24 1906). Already onto the next victim, the group of whites move back to Marietta Street, towards Five Points.

Thousands scattered the streets outside the Kimball House, a seven-story hotel rebuilt with stone and brick in 1885, after a fire decimated the original building two years prior. White men ordered drinks and smoked cigars in the hotel bar as the sound of billiards spread from an adjoining room. Union Depot, the city’s second train station, had been supplanted by Terminal Station, a larger railway hub that opened in 1905. Whites swarmed those crowded streets at Five Points, eager for violence. ‘To Decatur Street!’ roared a voice from the crowd. ‘Let’s clean the black devils out—Teach them a lesson! (*Atlanta Journal* September 22, 1906; Bauerlein 2001:153). Whenever a black man was seen in public, “he was immediately the target for bullets, knives, sticks, stones, and any other weapon that was obtainable,” according to a correspondent for *The New York Times*. African Americans “scattered from the streets, going to their homes by back alleys, or they flocked to Decatur Street, the home of the tougher element,” for protection

(September 23 1906). A band marched down Decatur toward Central Avenue, the beginning of “a line-up of dives,” where they charged a group of African Americans who were lingering outside a saloon, clubs raised and blades ready. Black men tore off down Central toward the railroad station, “with shrieking whites in pursuit, ‘delighted at the rout of the blacks” (Bauerlein 2001:153).

A group of whites marched up Marietta to a barbershop located directly across the street from the post office. Black barbers and bootblacks continued to serve their white clientele, but a white mob interrupted their work, shattering the windows with heavy clubs and pushing their way into the establishment. ‘Get ‘em, get ‘em all,’ they yelled, firing their revolvers. The two African-American barbers working at their chairs “made no effort to resist.” One man froze, both hands raised, trembling. A brick hit him in the face, and as his body fell, bullets splayed across the room. The whites descended upon them, kicking their bodies about the floor in the barbershop before dragging them into the street, according to *The Times*. Clothing was stripped from their lifeless bodies, with “many of the crowd taking rags home as souvenirs or waving them above their heads to incite further riot” (September 24 1906). Whites also mutilated the faces of both barbers before dragging them to the base of a monument erected in the honor of Henry W. Grady, the “New South spokesperson who had argued in the 1870s and 1880s that racial conflict no longer threatened the South” (Godshalk 2005:93). One rioter noticed a black man attempting to creep through the shadows undetected. He was knocked to the ground and several shots were fired until men in the crowd cried for them to cease fire. “‘Beat ‘em up, beat ‘em up, you’ll kill good white men by shooting [sic],’ they cried. By way of reply the mob began beating the body of the negro, who was already far beyond any possibility of struggle or pain. Satisfied that he was dead, the rioters threw his body by the side of those of the two negro barbers, and left them there, where they were this morning, below the Grady statue” (New York Times September 24 1906).

Mayor Woodward “rode from point to point begging mobs to disperse and not to disgrace Atlanta. ‘Oh, go home yourself, Jim,’ the rioters cried to the Mayor. ‘We are after niggers.’” Joseph M. Terrell, Georgia’s democratic governor, wasn’t alerted to the violence until after 11:00 p.m. when he was reached at home by telephone. Terrell ordered “eight local infantry companies at once,” according to *The New York Times*, and by 2:00 a.m. the “first squad of militia appeared on the streets” (September 24 1906). Several different mobs prowled the

downtown streets, with reports estimating between 10,000 and 15,000 white men (and boys) participated in the carnival of violence. Five Points is flooded with bystanders leaning “upon the stone bases of the English-American Building, the Empire Building, and the Century Building.” Young white men rush the hardware stores and pawnshops, clearing their inventory of pistols, rifles, and ammunition; one store “reports sales of \$16,000” while another, Anderson Hardware Co. at the corner of Peachtree Street and Edgewood Avenue, practically liquidates its “entire stock of four hundred pistols and one hundred rifles” (Bauerlein 2001:153).

An 11:30 p.m. passenger train was set to depart Union Depot. “Porters and brakemen mill around the car doors, peering at the crowds filing in and out of Wall Street,” writes Bauerlein. More than a hundred whites rushed the train, “shoving aside white train workers holding them back,” according to the *Atlanta Constitution*. Two African-American porters fled into a waiting car, locking the doors behind them; the rioters “heave rocks and heckle the porters.” One white man walked from car to car, “smashing a window at each step.” It did not take long before the train cars were full of maddened whites hunting black rail workers. Several were dragged through shards of glass to the platform where they were beaten. One man fell to his knees and began praying for mercy: ‘In answer a blow was given which felled the negro, and as his limp and apparently lifeless body lay on the platform, it was subjected to the usual formula of kicking and beating, while several shots were poured into the lifeless form.’ After terrorizing any black men and women they could find in Union Depot, the white mob stormed west down the tracks toward Terminal Station (Bauerlein 2001:162).

A mob roamed down Madison Street, the crowd moving ‘as some swollen river,’ and black-owned establishment was wrecked. A restaurant was sacked and destroyed; the Pearson Hardware store was looted of all its firearms and ammunition. Milton Brown, an African-American coal company employee, was battered with two-by-fours. The white men made sure to back away the eager crowd, anxiously awaiting brutality. ‘After clearing the crowd, those who were armed began to fire upon him and he was literally torn to pieces,’ reported the *Atlanta Journal*. Sometime around midnight, Evelyn Witherspoon awoke. She “could feel tension in the room,” recalled the ten-year-old white girl, 75 years after the riot. Her mother and sister were “kneeling in the front of the window looking out into the street” from their home downtown. Witherspoon crept toward the window and knelt down between them. “I saw a man strung up to

the light pole,” she said. “Men and boys on the street below were shooting at him till they riddled his body with bullets. I will never forget it as long as I live” (Bauerlein 2001:172).

John Slaton, a prominent member of the Georgia legislature and Atlanta resident, privately admitted that ‘practically nothing was done to stop the mob’ by police officers who “generally refused to use their weapons against white mob members,” many of whom were either challenging or blatantly ignoring their authority (Godshalk 2005:96). The emergency room at Grady Hospital was overflowing with riot victims, as doctors worked to bandage clubbed heads, knife lacerations and pistol wounds. The fire bell rang out fifteen alarms—the riot call summoning state militia. Troops from the Fifth Georgia Infantry, accompanied by members of the Governor’s Horse Guard, march into Atlanta’s center. It was 3:00 a.m. when Colonel Anderson launched his command post in the Elkin Watson Drug Company, located at 26 Peachtree Street. An infantry unit boarded a trolley car to “conduct a nonstop tour of the business district,” while others guarded the city’s water supply (Bauerlein 2001:174). Police patrol wagons were converted into ambulances, transporting African American victims to Grady for emergency care. Black men and women treated only for minor injuries pleaded “to remain inside until daylight” (Bauerlein 2001:170).

### *Second Day*

Local militia companies patrolled the streets as the sun rose over Atlanta on Sunday morning, September 23, 1906. Survivors “whisked black corpses off the streets to ensure proper burials for the victims,” and those who hid scurried to find shelter, to get back home. “Empty carriages and the corpses of horses littered the streets,” writes Godshalk. “The interiors of barbershops, restaurants, and hotel lobbies ‘bore pools of blood,’ while traces of ‘brains were still to be found in places sheltered from the rain’” (2005:99). African Americans kept their distance from Five Points and many establishments were forced to open without the help of their black employees. The church bells sounded for Sunday service that morning, but “no one in Atlanta believe for a moment that the hatred and lust for blood had been appeased,” Walter White, future head of the NAACP, wrote in his autobiography. “Like skulls on a cannibal’s hut, the hats and caps of victims” had been “hung on the iron hooks of telegraph poles. None could tell whether each had represented a dead Negro,” he recalled. “But we knew that some of those who had worn the hats would never again wear any” (White [1948]1995:10).

*The New York Times* reported that throughout the day, “hundreds of negroes have been fleeing” Atlanta: “By train and wagon and on foot they have hurried away, fearing trouble in the immediate future. They are also smuggling their dead into the country and giving them private internment, being afraid to take the bodies openly through the city” (NYT September 24 1906). Meanwhile, Atlanta’s police force and Georgia state troops were busy harassing black residents, searching them for weapons in door-to-door sweeps. “While public officials were disarming African Americans and securing white neighborhoods, white Atlantans were allowed to form vigilante groups throughout the city” (Godshalk 2005:100). Late in the afternoon, White’s father came to their home with troubling news: “plans had been perfected for a mob to form on Peachtree Street just after nightfall to march down Houston Street, to what the white people called ‘Darktown,’ three blocks or so below our house, to ‘clean out the niggers.’” White’s father, a postal carrier, and his mother made sure they turned their lights out early, “as did all our neighbors,” he notes. “No one removed his clothes or thought of sleep” (White 1995:10).

Zeb Long arrived at the East Point jail on Sunday evening, having been arrested for disorderly conduct, “incendiary talk about the way white people were treating negroes,” and vigorously resisting arrest. He carried a rifle, two pistols, and “plenty of cartridges,” according to a correspondent reporting for *The New York Times*. Zeb was a “gigantic man,” weighing over two hundred pounds, and he had threatened to kill the town marshal. Whites could not tolerate such a violation of the social order. “Darkness falls, and from the town square one hundred men proceed to the holding cell, quiet and deliberate,” writes Bauerlein. “They pry open the wooden door and discover the prisoner on his knees.” A rope is placed around his neck. Then these white men led him “a half mile away to a stand of Georgia pines” (2001:184). Zeb Long “begged for his life,” according to *The Times*, “but he was promptly swung to the tree and left to choke to death” (September 25 1906; Godshalk 2005:100). He was 30 years old. As they walked from the scene, several in the lynch party “glanced back to see the giant frame of the big, black negro swinging and swinging as he strangled to death, kicking and gasping for breath as the rope tightened about his neck” (September 23 1906; Bauerlein 2001:184).

Were it not for the courage of a Mrs. F. S. Cox, a white woman, another black man would have been lynched that Sunday in 1906. Walter Hicus was “chased by a mob on suspicion of having been implicated in the assault on Mrs. Arnold,” a white woman (one black man had already been killed for her alleged assault). “There were a hundred whites in the party, and the

negro was hard pressed, when Mrs. Cox called to him to come into her home. He rushed in and Mrs. Cox shut the door on him and faced the mob,” reports *The Times*. “She told the men that they could not have the negro without breaking into her house. ‘This man has worked for me a number of years,’ she said. ‘He may be guilty, but he ought to have a chance for his life, and not be put to death on suspicion. You can’t have him, but if you will telephone for officers they can take him to jail’” (September 25 1906).

By Sunday evening African Americans must have realized they were going to have to defend themselves. “Apprehension was tangible,” White remembered (1995:10). First in Dark Town, then in Brownsville, residents banded together to defend their lives and property, “repulsing massive white assaults against two of their own neighborhoods” (Goldshalk 2005:102). Around midnight the “natural quiet was broken by a roar that grew steadily in volume.” White’s mother ushered his sisters, the youngest only six, to the rear of their home to offer more protection against the stones and bullets likely to come. White and his father took their places by the window to guard against the invaders:

There was a crash as Negroes smashed the street lamp at the corner of Houston and Piedmont Avenue down the street. In a very few minutes the vanguard of the mob, some of them bearing torches, appeared. A voice which we recognized as that of the son of the grocer with whom we had traded for many years yelled, ‘That’s where that nigger mail carrier lives! Let’s burn it down! It’s too nice for a nigger to live in!’

White’s father “turned his drawn face” toward him in the “eerie light.” With a remarkably quiet voice, he said, ‘Son, don’t shoot until the first man puts his foot on the lawn and then—don’t you miss!’ And as a boy there in the darkness, “amid the tightening fright, I knew this inexplicable thing—that my skin was as white as those who were coming at me” (1995:12), yet “I was a Negro, a human being with an invisible pigmentation which marked me a person to be hunted, hanged, abused, discriminated against, kept in poverty and ignorance” (1995:11). The mob approached on their lawn and White aimed the rifle. In that moment, a “volley of shots” rained down, fired by his father’s friends, who had “barricaded themselves in a two-story brick building just below our house.” ‘Let’s go get the nigger!’ cried one of the whites. Then another volley of shots rang out, sufficiently threatened, the mob “retreated up Houston Street” (White 1995:12).

### *Black Resistance*

In Pittsburg, a section “thickly settled by the worst negroes in Atlanta,” Lieutenant Poole of the County Police received word “that an incendiary meeting of negroes was in progress.” Poole

brought seven officers with him to investigate the complaint. Once they arrived at the “lodge room,” officers found about a hundred African Americans listening to a speaker denounce whites; he called upon African Americans “to rise and avenge those killed in the riot Saturday night.” Eight black men were arrested, but while the police officers were waiting for a squad car to haul the men to jail, “they were fired upon by a mob of negroes who had followed. Officer Heard was badly cut by the bullets, [Officer] Jordan was fatally wounded, and Poole received a slight wound” (*The New York Times* September 25 1906). Six of the eight men attempting to flee were his by police during a fierce shootout. The whites managed to escape to a nearby house, where they telephone Colonel Anderson, who dispatched three companies of Georgia State Troops to Pittsburg. Only after they had been greatly outnumbered—in combatants, weaponry, and munitions—did these black men abandon their fight.

It was shortly after 1:00 in the morning on Tuesday and still warm. Two men darted out from behind the trees, trudging through the swamp as fast as their legs could carry them. They had hoped to escape the notice of state troops, who had the small swamp near Pittsburg surrounded. But the men were captured, and initially, they were turned over to law enforcement. “Word had gone ahead, and the car on which they were riding was captured by the mob” reported *The Times*.” and the police car was captured by the mob—but not before the two black men fled the vehicle. A chase ensued that extended for six city blocks. Seeking refuge, the men rushed into Park Commissioner R. H. Manley’s office, located at 491 Crew Street. They dashed beneath the porch’s wooden slabs, trembling, only to be discovered by the band of lynchers. The two men were dragged from their hiding spots and stood on the steps of the Manley home, their bodies torn “to pieces with bullets” (*The New York Times* September 25 1906).

Black men and women in Atlanta fought back against white violence to a far greater degree than did African Americans in Wilmington eight years prior. At Howell’s Station, a train depot located three miles west of the city center, the railroad operator was killed; another man was wounded during then attack by African Americans. Four white families who lived at 160 McDonough Road were “driven out of their home at 10 o’clock at night by a mob of negroes.” A group of African Americans “rushed into the house, and fired on those assembled,” but no one was killed (though one man, J. F. Wilson, “had a bullet go through his trouser leg”; NYT September 25 1906). And so of course, with this level of black resistance, the state responds swiftly and with great power—a striking contrast to its previous behavior, as evidenced by the

behavior of Governor Terrell. Military authorities “have begun to raid negro settlements,” a policy inaugurated on Tuesday morning by Terrell that led to the dispatch of six *additional* companies of Georgia troops, which brought the total state force to about 3,000 infantrymen, two cavalry troops and two batteries of machine guns. African-American homes were systematically searched, and all firearms were tossed into wagons; according to *The Times*, when the raid was finished, troops had seized “three large wagons loaded with rifles, revolvers, and ammunition.” By Tuesday night, “all the large autos in the city [were] being used for scouting purposes. Autos carrying four soldiers each are patrolling the city, and every negro seen is made to give an account of himself and searched for arms.” Atlanta’s suburbs were full of ‘stop-and-frisk’ infringement upon the rights of African Americans after African Americans were victimized by white marauders. “Every precaution has ben taken to guard against these” outbreaks in the suburbs (*The New York Times* September 26 1906).

*These* outbreaks, indeed. Police were unable to control or deter the mob activity of white Atlantans, which is “particularly noteworthy, given the relatively small area in which the rioters confined their activity,” argues Godshalk. While several witnesses reported violence “as far as one mile south” of the city center,” white rituals of violence were largely performed (and confined) to Five Points and its side streets. Anti-black violence ranged as far as Peters Street only toward the end of Saturday night. White mobs “generally avoided residential areas heavily populated by blacks,” perhaps fearing retaliation (Godshalk 2005:97). A committed and non-racist law enforcement agency should have been able to combat the spread of violence, protect the lives and property of African Americans, and identify white rioters culpable of arrest. This did not transpire. But it certainly did for white folks. In fact, white folks got a demonstration. In Brownsville, 300 prisoners were “marched three abreast through the streets of Atlanta to prison.” The men were led by a squad of troops in the front, soldiers with rifles loaded and ready at their side, and in the rear, a machine gun “closed the procession. This display of force and the marching of the negroes through the streets and through one populous negro settlement were for effect on the other negroes,” according to *The New York Times* (September 26 1906).

### *Instrumental White Violence*

White Atlanta pointed to black criminality as justification for the violence unleashed against innocent African Americans throughout the downtown area during Saturday and Sunday, September 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of 1906. ‘The riot was greatly to be deplored. But I am not at all



surprised at it,' said the Reverence Dr. G. R. Holdirby, a Presbyterian minister. "One thing is sure and certain, and that is that the people of the South will protect their wives and daughters and sisters regardless of the consequences and at all hazards.' The *Atlanta Constitution* editorialized that the "outbreak of Saturday night came as the logical culmination of a series of crimes and attempted crimes which had wrought Anglo-Saxon patience and endurance to a preternatural tension." Timothy Thomas Fortune, African American and publisher of the *New York Age*, noted how the "better class" of blacks in Atlanta, those doctors, lawyers, and businessmen, "condemned the criminality of the illiterate negro, and yet they have been slain like the guilty ones. They will get no protection from the government," he said, "although the police and the militia in Georgia could stop this rioting immediately. The dispatches say that the Governor is powerless to do anything," continued Fortune. "It is not that he can't, but that he won't do anything" (New York Times, "Atlanta View on Riots," September 24 1906).

A primary motivating factor in the white attack against African Americans was job competition—and black economic advancement more generally. Several years after the riot, whites in skilled occupations like machinists and railway firemen continued "voicing concerns that job competition with African Americans threatened to lower their wages." By ransacking and destroying small lunchrooms and saloons along Decatur Street, Marietta Street, and Peters Street, white raiders "financially devastated marginal black owners." In the riot's aftermath, in a situation entirely similar to what transpired for African-American business owners following the massacre and coup in Wilmington 8 years earlier, "the concentration of black businesses along Auburn Avenue accelerated dramatically, while black business activity in the city's center languished before a precipitous decline after 1910" (Godshalk 2005:108).

## CONCLUSION

The Southern electorate was decimated during the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, entirely "transformed from what it had been twenty years earlier":

More than two-thirds of adult Southern males had voted in the 1880s, and that proportion had risen to nearly three quarters of the electorate in the 1890s in states that had not yet restricted the franchise. In the early years of the twentieth century, by contrast, *fewer than one man in three voted in the South*. The percentage of voters who cast a ballot for someone other than a Democrat declined to the point of near invisibility in many states. There was nothing inevitable about the decline, for Kentucky and West Virginia, which instituted no serious restrictions on voting, registered turnouts of 78 and 89 percent respectively in 1904. (Ayers 2007:309)

“In all the other Southern states,” with the exception of North Carolina and Tennessee, “turnout hovered between 15 and 34 percent,” a situation that “was not to change significantly for generations” (Ayers 2007:309). Without the instrumental white violence of the 1870s that structured political participation in Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina, without the terror of lynching that swept the rural Southern countryside during the 1880s and 1890s, and without the disciplinary riot that helped rid North Carolina of African-American political and municipal service, the Southern electorate would not have been as drastically reduced. Hence instrumental white violence—particularly the ‘race riots’ of Reconstruction and the Wilmington Massacre in North Carolina—played crucial roles in establishing white political supremacy throughout the southern United States.

White supremacy had the sanction of the Christian God, in the minds of many Southerners, and in settling the ‘negro problem,’ as many called it, whites employed myriad techniques of power to systematically relegate African Americans to a subordinate status. Tolnay and Beck reach “an intriguing, and important, conclusion” based upon their examination of lynchings around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “The social atmosphere of southern counties was shaped by the political parties that operated within their boundaries,” and part of this atmosphere was “the racial climate that determined the place of blacks in society and set the tone” for how whites treated African Americans within that town or county. “Where the climate was more hostile, blacks faced greater risks of mob violence,” conclude Tolnay and Beck. “Where the climate was more benign, the risk of lynching declined,” and the racial climate was “harsher where the party of white supremacy exercised greater control.” By contrast, in counties where republicans or populists managed greater numbers, “the climate was less lethal for African-Americans” (1995:198).

# Chapter 4

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## **Disciplinary Violence in the Sundown State**

## **Disciplinary Violence in the Sundown State: Race Riots and the Maintenance of White Supremacy in Illinois, 1900 - 1919**

Often white residents achieved their goal abruptly, even in the middle of the night. In town after town in the United States, especially between 1890 and the 1930s, whites forced out their African American neighbors violently. . . . Towns with successful riots wound up all-white, of course, or almost so, and therefore had an ideological interest in suppressing any memory of a black population in the first place, let alone of an unseemly riot that drove them out.

- James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns* (2018:92)

Today my estimate for the number of sundown towns in Illinois alone stands at 507. That is two-thirds of all the towns in the state! A similar proportion went sundown in Oregon, Indiana, and various other northern states.

- James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns* (2018:vii)

As the sun dipped beneath the horizon, a mob of more than 600 white persons marched toward the county jail in Danville, Illinois. The procession was passing down East Main Street when they passed J. D. Mayfield, a black man recently arrived as a refugee from the race riot in Evansville, Indiana (1903). Mayfield got into “an altercation with some of its members,” according to *The Indianapolis Star*, and when several white men split ranks to approach him, he pulled a revolver. Henry Gatterman, a young white butcher who had also recently arrived in town, “fell mortally wounded and expired in a few seconds.” Mayfield attempted to flee the scene but was captured by local police and quickly ushered into a “city building, barricading themselves behind the door.” This did not suit the mob, which “proceeded to batter down a section of the wall and the door” (July 26, 1903). Police clubs were unable to repel the whites. “A rope was secured and Mayfield was taken to the spot on East Main Street where Gatterman had been slain,” reported *The New York Times* (July 27, 1903); it was “thrown over the arm of a telephone pole,” and J. D. Mayfield was swept up into the air.

The mob then continued their march toward the Danville county jail. They demanded the release of James Wilson, an African American arrested for an alleged assault against the wife of Thomas Burgess, a white man. Sheriff Whitlock refused to turn Wilson loose for a lynching, and just as the mob was preparing to storm the jail, someone suggested they “go back and cut down the negro, Mayfield, reported *The Indianapolis Star* (July 26, 1903):

The suggestion tickled the crowd and was immediately acted upon. Rushing back to the scene of the lynching, they cut down their victim and carried him on the run back to the public square in front of the jail.

Hay, store boxes, and barrels were collected and the corpse was thrown upon the pile. A torch was applied and the flames shot up. While the mob's victim was burning leading members of the infuriated throng fired bullets into the flames. Several of them drew long knives with which they hacked the burning corpse. Ears were chopped off and the feet, which protruded from the flames, were literally hacked to pieces.

The spectacle lynching failed to satisfy their bloodlust, but the ritual of violence bound the rioters even tighter in solidarity. When Sheriff Whitlock again refused to release James Wilson, a white woman climbed atop a large wooden barrel in the jail yard, encouraging the men to “square accounts.” Hang Whitlock, “as well as the negro he is trying to save,” she proclaimed, to the delight of the angry, surging crowd. Hundreds of infuriated lynchers swept the jail, which was valiantly defended by the sheriff and his deputies, who fired into the mob: two white men were fatally wounded in the defense and a “score fell before the hail of bullets.” This only enraged the mob further. Rather than abandon their plans to lynch James Wilson for his attack—he allegedly confessed his guilt after apprehension by authorities, according to *The Times* (July 27, 1903)—the white marauders attacked three African Americans, beating them severely. Two of these black folks were refugees from the Evansville, Indiana riot. It appeared African Americans were not welcome in Illinois nor Indiana. The migration of black Americans out of the South played a critical factor in the eruption of racial violence during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and many would find that white terrorism wasn't confined to the Deep South, or even border states such as Missouri. White disciplinary violence would be utilized as a mechanism to ensure white supremacy in northern states, and in Illinois, as in other northern states, it became a regular feature of social life, not an extraordinary occurrence.

In Anna, a town of around 7,000 people about 35 miles north of Cairo in southern Illinois, African Americans were expelled after a spectacle lynching in 1909. Jonesboro, the next town over, also barred black folks from its borders. “Both cities have been all-white ever since. Nearly a century later, ‘Anna’ I still considered by its residents and by citizens of nearby towns to mean ‘Ain't No Niggers Allowed,’” writes James W. Loewen in *Sundown Towns* ([2005] 2018). Towns like Anna and Jonesboro are often called sundown towns “owing to the signs that many of them formerly sported at their corporate limits—signs that usually said, ‘Nigger, Don't Let the Sun Go Down on You in \_\_\_\_\_.’” Throughout Illinois, towns like Anna and Jonesboro carried signs such as these “as recently as the 1970s,” according to Loewen (2018:3). And they're scattered across the United States, not just in the South or Midwest. White violence had critical implications for the economic, cultural, and social structures developing in the towns and

cities across the New South “It was an uneasy landscape,” writes Hale, “a world where people who went to church some days watched or participated in the torture of their neighbors on others” (1998:201). After the peak decade of the 1890s the number of lynchings decreased, even in the South, but as Hale notes, “the cultural impact of the practice became more powerful. More people participated in, read, about, saw pictures of, and collected souvenirs from lynchings even as fewer mob murders occurred. In the twentieth century white southerners transformed a deadly and often quiet form of vigilante ‘justice’ into a modern spectacle of enduring power” (Hale 1998:201). And the spectacle lynching was not practiced only in the South; whites in Illinois participated in the ritual as well, including during the Springfield riot in 1908.

Lynching spectacles “evolved a well-known structure, a sequence and pace of events that southerners came to understand as standard,” explains historian Elizabeth Grace Hale. “The well-choreographed spectacle opened with a chaise or jail attack, followed rapidly by the public identification of the captured African American by an alleged white victim or the victim’s relatives.” The lynching was then publicly announced in order to “draw the crowd,” followed by “selection and preparing of the site. The main event then began with a period of mutilation—often including emasculation—and torture to extract confessions and entertain the crowd, and built to a climax of slow burning, hanging, and/or shooting to complete the killing. The finale consisted of frenzied souvenir gathering and display of the body and the collected parts” (Hale 1998:203-4). White collective violence was transformed into a ritual for mass consumption, not only of black body parts, but also of any products associated with the murder site: a market for souvenirs developed among consumers, creating “a grisly dialect” in which “consumer culture created spectacle lynchings, and spectacle lynchings became a southern way of enabling the spread of consumption as white privilege” (Hale 1998:205).

Illinois had an incredible record of racial violence during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, in part a response to the incredible influx of African Americans fleeing economic hardship, intensifying racial prejudice, and unpunished mob violence in the South. “African Americans lived in every Illinois county in 1890,” explains sociologist James W. Loewen, but by 1930, “six counties had none.” Another eleven counties had “fewer than ten African American residents. Without a doubt, exclusion underlies these numbers,” Loewen argues. “In Illinois and elsewhere, entire counties developed and enforced the policy of keeping out African Americans.” In 1970, Illinois had 621 towns with more than 1,000 people; of these,

“424 or almost 70% were ‘all-white’ in census after census” (2018:59-50). This did not occur accidentally, nor did it occur because African Americans simply *chose not to live* in these towns. In 1910, nearly fifty years after Abraham Lincoln had pronounced all slaves ‘forever free’ in the *Emancipation Proclamation*, 89 percent of African Americans remained in the South; there were only one million African Americans living in all of the North, and of these, 109,000 were living in Illinois (Delaney 2013:120). Between 1910 and 1920, the African American population increased from 44,103 to 109,458. In Illinois African Americans “had little opportunity to enjoy the guarantees” of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, nor did they enjoy the privileges bestowed by Civil Rights Act of 1875. Writing for the Negro in Illinois Project, Jack Conway explained that African Americans in Illinois endured a Jim Crow existence: in addition to segregated public schools, black folks were denied the right to live wherever they chose, refused admittance to hotels and entertainment venues, denied membership in trade unions, and refused service in restaurants. Discrimination in restaurants, bars, and soda fountains was “the most common form practiced” in the state (Dolinar 2013:116). And organizations capable of coordinating collective violence had a history of activity in the state—the Ku Klux Klan was especially active in southern Illinois dating back to the 1870s.

Southern Illinois coal companies had been importing black workers as strikebreakers for years, and on several occasions, labor tension erupted into racial violence. The Spring Valley massacre of 1895, for example, occurred after striking white miners were displaced by African American laborers; the whites, mostly Italian immigrants, retaliated against the black workers with violence. In 1898 a coal company at Virden imported 300 black laborers from Alabama, along with 75 armed guards to protect them, to take the place of striking miners. Ten miners and six guards were killed in the riot, and about 30 other persons were injured (Dolinar 2013). Sangamon County in Illinois has a long history of labor conflict associated with the mines, which only exacerbated social relations between the races. In July 1899, white miners retaliated against a group of African-American strikebreakers—scabs, as they were often referred by those whites resentful of competition willing to work a lower wage—and expelled them from Carterville, a town in southern Illinois of around 3,600. Five African Americans were killed in the riot, and all whites indicted were eventually acquitted. “Carterville had already pushed the sundown town concept to a new level before 1899,” writes Loewen. African Americans were not permitted “to set foot inside the city limits, even during the day” (2018:65).

Many of Springfield's early settlers came from Kentucky and Tennessee; white southern racial attitudes undoubtedly made the trip to central Illinois along with them. "Several distinct streams of American-born settlers merged in central Illinois," notes Senechal de la Roche, "and the region also attracted a significant number of German and Irish immigrants before the Civil War. By the 1860s Springfield was culturally diverse, though the presence of southerners in terms of numbers and outlook was more prominent than it would be later in the nineteenth century" (2008:56). Coal attracted migrants to Springfield, a city "near the center of a massive coal bed that underlies nearly three quarters of Illinois" (2008:56), and by the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Illinois was second only to Pennsylvania in coal production. Springfield is located in Sangamon County, which, in 1908, had 37 operating mines that provided employment for 6,553 workers. Manufacturing and mining were the primary employers in Springfield at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it was in mining that "potential for interracial competition over employment and wages existed" (Senechal de la Roche 2008:57). This was not the case in other occupations, such as transportation and manufacturing, where labor was far more segregated.

#### BLACK PROGRESS AND WHITE RESENTMENT IN THE LAND OF LINCOLN: THE ROPE, THE TORCH, AND THE SPRINGFIELD RACE RIOT, JULY 1908

The Levee was Springfield's red-light district. Located on East Washington Street, it consisted of mostly two- and three-story brick buildings that housed many of the city's black businesses: barbershops, pool halls, saloons, and restaurants lined the streets at ground level; nestled above were squalid rental units for black residents. In August 1908 about 2,500 African Americans lived in Springfield, a city with a total population of 47,000; nearly 90 percent of Springfield's black population lived in one of the areas located in the eastern half of the city. In the Badlands, a neighborhood of saloons, gambling dens, and pawn shops, stood some of the city's poorest housing, and over time, blacks were increasingly clustered within its boundaries. But around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a "small but significant change," occurred in the African American neighborhood located along East Washington Street in Springfield's downtown. Black folks with few resources began to rent flats above the restaurants, saloons, and shops situated in 'the Levee,' between Seventh and Ninth Streets. The African American population in the Levee was "not large" by 1908—Springfield had only 131 black residents living downtown—yet this "new



black settlement,” one that did not exist in the early 1890s, was growing (Senechal de la Roche 2008:71). Blacks were breaking racial boundary lines.

Springfield “had a higher percentage of black residents than any other major Illinois city” in 1900: 6.5 percent of Springfield’s population, compared with 6.1 percent in East St. Louis, and 1.8 percent in Chicago. African Americans, the city’s ‘native’ whites, and European immigrants vied in direct and often heated competition for precious jobs in the mines and factories” around the city, argues Krohe (1973:4). African Americans were thoroughly excluded from the manufacturing and transportation trades by Springfield’s whites, yet despite discrimination, a small “black elite” had formed in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Black businesses became an even more visible part of Springfield’s economy in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1892, for example, the Levee had one black-owned saloon; by 1907, “six stood on two blocks of East Washington Street *alone*, along with other new black enterprises” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:72). This point is crucial—the *visibility* of black businesses and economic success had increased, stoking white hostility. It was not so much the perceived threat of economic competition as it was the symbolic significance of these newly erected establishments. Black success was more apparent, and it functioned as a nagging, ever present reminder of upward mobility in status. This “new visibility” in the downtown district was likely “more relevant to the growth of anti-black hostility locally than the number or percentage of blacks in the city as a whole,” writes Senechal de la Roche (2008:72). White collective resentment for African American progress grew with the Levee.

Black political participation also increased in the period preceding the riot event. By 1908 African Americans “occupied an unprecedented number of the most highly visible patronage jobs as policemen and firemen, working either in or near the downtown district” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:82). The police force, for example, had four African-American officers on a force of forty-one patrolmen and the city’s fire department “had one all black engine company, which was staffed by six black appointees” (2008:81). Blacks voting at downtown “polling places” was also part of the problem—it exposed a form of political visibility, an exercising of power—but the real concern was racist. Whites were worried “with the character of black political participation,” especially vote selling: “these critics saw black political misbehavior as emblematic of long-standing, more pervasive civic shortcomings” (2008:80). Increased access to power, and heightened political visibility, made African Americans particularly vulnerable to

conflict with whites, especially whites of similar economic status. Black folks had made economic and political status gains on whites, however minor they may have been, and the visibility of these gains caused conflict.

Relations between blacks and whites were already strained in the city, for “beneath the soot and grime of a Northern factory town, Springfield wore a Southern face. Her social and professional elite, like many of the farmers and laborers living in the surrounding county, had come to the capital from border states like Kentucky and Missouri. In everything from her stately homes and the grand manner of her private entertainments to her murky political intrigues, Springfield had more in common with Birmingham than with Albany.” The ‘Southern heritage’ of many of Springfield’s residents was reflected in their racial attitudes, and “whites regarded the city’s blacks with a smugly tolerant paternalism until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (Krohe 1973:3). Two incidents stirred much racial animosity in Springfield in the months before the 1908 riot. The first was the murder of Clergy Ballard during a confrontation with a burglar named Joe James, a “black vagrant” who was discovered by Ballard in the bedroom of his sleeping young daughter. The second was the midnight assault on Mabel Hallam, the 21-year-old wife of a city streetcar conductor. “The press reacted to this latest incident with a passion that bordered on the pathological,” notes Krohe. “DRAGGED FROM HER BED AND OUTRAGED BY NEGRO screamed a *Journal* headline, while the *Illinois State Register* called the crime ‘one of the greatest outrages that ever happened in Springfield.’ The *Register* went on to urge that ‘no effort be spared to find the black viper and to force appropriate punishment’” (1973:5). George Richardson, a black man working in the neighborhood, was arrested for the assault, and as word spread, “crowds began to gather about the jail.” “Feeling against Richardson was intensified,” according to Helen Blankmeyer, a Springfield resident who recorded a memoir of the event, “because of the fact that three or four weeks before, Clergy A. Ballard, a white man, had been murdered by Joe James, a Negro drug and whiskey addict. James, who was later tried and hanged for this offense, was in the jail at the time that Richardson was incarcerated.” At 5:00 p.m. Richardson and James were “secretly taken from the jail and transported by automobile to Sherman, Illinois,” north of Springfield, then by train to Bloomington (Blankmeyer N.d.:3). Sheriff Whitlock refused to produce the two black men for the mob, which “numbered approximately three thousand.” A force of 26 soldiers “formed a line of skirmishers close to the

fence around the jail and cleared the mob back across the sidewalk into the street” through “fusillade of bricks,” according to Colonel Richings J. Shand of the Third Infantry (1908:271).

Having been repelled at the jail, the mob marched five blocks to Henry Loper’s restaurant. A brick was thrown through the restaurant’s window, and “in a few moments, the front of the restaurant had been completely smashed. In the rioting and shooting which occurred at this point, Louis Johnson, of 1208 East Reynolds Street, was shot and killed. His body was found at the foot of the stairs leading to the barroom in Loper’s restaurant” (Blankmeyer N.d.:4). Ross B. Wright recalled how eager whites procured bricks, “tore out by naked hands” from the paved alley south of Fifth Street and used them as projectiles in the demolition of Harry Loper’s restaurant (1986:2). A Ford Model T illuminated the night sky. The flames leapt even higher after the gasoline ignited, setting the stage for a ritual in white solidarity. As the automobile burned in front of Harry Loper’s restaurant, “the crowd danced in frenzied delight and fiendish glee” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:31). “I cannot deny that I felt the exhilaration,” wrote Murray S. Hanes, a young white man. Hanes succumbed to “the urge to join one’s friends, the surge of the crowd, in an imagined righteousness growing by the minute into a monstrous thing. Long buried resentments mount into a fevered excitement,” he recalled, “and there comes a thrill and an indignant justification for the digging of a brick from the pavement and throwing it into a plate glass window. I have always known that I felt the fever” (2008:96). Springfield’s mayor, Roy R. Rice, attempted to calm the crowd of roughly 5,000 but to no avail; some shouted obscenities while others demanded that he turn over Joe James and George Richardson. Several rioters even attempted to seize the mayor and others began launching bricks pulled from the street. The mayor absconded through the back door of a cigar shop with the help of several friends, who ushered him out to safety. “By eight o’clock there was nothing left at Loper’s,” recalled Wright. “You could see people going north on Fifth Street, Fourth Street with poles—where they got poles, I don’t know—with table clothes as flags. Carrying bottles they had taken from Loper’s” (1986:2). As the mob marched from the fires at Loper’s restaurant, “cries of ‘Curse the day Lincoln freed the niggers!’ could be heard, along with a more ominous warning: ‘Niggers must depart from Springfield!’” (Krohe 1978).

The mob had reached its largest size, and smaller groups began splintering apart. It was 10:00 on Friday evening, August 14, and many whites knew where African Americans were employed. In earnest they headed downtown, hunting for any black person remaining on the

streets or in the train station. A group traveling along 4<sup>th</sup> street came upon Walter Reilly, a black porter at the Silas Hotel. Reilly managed to escape the fury of the mob, but the hotel did not; rioters “directed a barrage of bricks at the hotel’s dining room windows, sending surprised patrons fleeing from their meals” in terror (Senechal de la Roche 2008:32). Next the mob targeted the Chicago and Alton railroad station, located on North Third Street: two black porters were beaten, and several other African Americans were pulled from train cars and assaulted.

White vengeance was not yet satisfied, however. “Let’s go down to Washington Street!” declared a voice in the crowd. The Levee was only two blocks from Loper’s, and “the small concentration of black businesses” located between 7<sup>th</sup> Street and 10th Street provided alluring targets for white disciplinary violence (Senechal de la Roche 2008:32). The mob’s destruction “was done with deliberation and without any attempt at concealment,” according to the *Illinois State Journal*. Their assault on black business establishments began with an aerial attack, “a bombardment of missiles” that shattered plate glass windows and heavily damaged doors. Armed with “hatchets or axes,” rioters began their work on destruction on the interior of the establishment. “Others following would continue the work,” reported the paper, until finally “a small army of hangers on and looters” scurried through the debris to finish the job (*Illinois State Journal*, July 6 1908). The white terrorists were also systematic in their selection process: “If rioters began to assault a white business by mistake, the others would shout, ‘That’s a white man’s place! Pass it up!’” Jewish-owned businesses were also targeted by the mob, however, (Senechal de la Roche 2008:33). Whites “visited every black business in the Levee,” possible only because the “rioters’ progress met with little resistance from the authorities” (2008:34). Black resistance was forthcoming.

When the mob finished their work in the area of East Washington and 7<sup>th</sup> Street, they moved on to the 8<sup>th</sup> Street block and continued their assault. But “they encountered unexpected opposition,” as several armed black men positioned themselves in the second-floor windows overlooking the street in ‘Dandy Jim’ Smith’s saloon. Black snipers “let loose a volley of gunfire into the crowd gathering in the darkness outside” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:34). Roy Young, a 22-year-old white man, described his role in the attack:

When the Negroes commenced shooting on East Washington Street, some of us broke into Fishman’s Pawn Shop to get some guns. I took three or four revolvers and some cartridges and some of the other fellows got some guns too. We went east on Washington Street and, when the fighting got bad, I commenced shooting at Negroes. I shot at every one at whom I got a chance. I guess I hit some of them, but I don’t know. They tried to kill me just the same. When we went over on Madison Street, someone started setting fire to the

houses of Negroes and I helped. I guess I poured oil on about fifteen or sixteen houses and set fire to them. (Blankmeyer N.d.:5)

The black snipers continued their defense from above Dandy Jim's for a short time, but it was evident that they were facing far superior numbers and fire power in the hostile throng of whites gathered below. These men "retreated out a back door into an alley," writes Senechal de la Roche, "but not before wounding a number of rioters" (2008:34). Three white men were killed in the gun battle at Dandy Jim's and many were injured. Once heavy gunfire abated, white revealed the extent of their racial hatred. It wasn't sufficient to rob the register, steal anything of value, and consume all of the proprietor's top-shelf alcohol: "the fury of destructionists knew no stopping until everything on the inside had been smashed and splintered until unfit for further use. At these places, the bars were torn loose, chairs broken, tables smashed, and everything standing or removable on the interior rendered worthless," according to the *Illinois State Journal* (1908). Charlie Lee, the African-American proprietor of the "notorious Star theatre and owner of a restaurant, saloon and barber shop in the same building," suffered some of the heaviest losses in the riot, according to the *Illinois State Journal*. "He estimated his loss at about \$8,000. In his saloon the bar was broken down, an electrical piano was chopped almost into pieces, chairs, tables and other furniture were made into kindling wood, and every bit of glassware in the place was smashed. What stock of liquors was not carried away was poured on the floor." White rioters like Roy Young continued to destroy the "black business district on the 800 block of East Washington Street." More than 21 black businesses were destroyed during the carnage.

The 'Badlands' was the name whites had given to a residential section of Springfield located just northeast of the Levee, east of 9<sup>th</sup> Street between Reynolds and Jefferson. Home to many poor blacks, the neighborhood "was vulnerable to invasion by gambling dens, brothels, and other assorted 'dives'" (Senechal de la Roche 2008:16). The white rioters reached the Badlands around 11:00 p.m., and the racial violence evolved to take new form. "The first black-owned building the rioters came across was Scott Burton's wood-frame barbershop, which they burned down in short order," writes Senechal de la Roche. Blankmeyer's account described the extent to which Scott Burton's body was brutalized, even after he was murdered:

At the northeast corner of Ninth and Jefferson Streets, the mob set fire to the building of Scott Burton, a Negro, and lynched Burton. They found him in the yard in back of his shop, tied a rope around his neck, and dragged him through the streets. The mob burned and mutilated the body, and then hung him to a tree. After riddling Burton with bullets, the crowd was dispersed by a company of militia which arrived from Decatur, Illinois. It was necessary to shoot into the crowd before it gave way. At least two of the men in the mob were wounded. (6)

After the Burton lynching, the white marauders “fanned out over the Badlands and began to set fire systematically to black residences along Madison and Mason Streets, and along connecting north-south side streets” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:35).

The Springfield press reported that Charles Hunter, “an unknown Negro was lynched at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> & Madison Streets right in the heart of the so-called ‘bad lands’” (Blankmeyer N.d.:6). Hunter was lynched because he had the audacity to defend himself: “in a fight with the



whites, the Negro was forced into a corner at the saloon and grocery at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Madison Streets. When retreat was cut off, the Negro is said to have opened fire, wounding two. Then came the cry, ‘Get a rope!’” Hunter was dragged through the street, where he was “beaten and then a rope was swung around his neck and the other end of the rope thrown over the limb of a tree right in front of the store. With a cry of satisfaction, the Negro was swung high off the ground. He was dead in a few minutes. Many shots were fired at the body”

(Blankmeyer N.d.:6-7). Wright recalls how whites sought souvenirs to commemorate Scott Burton’s brutal lynching, just as Grace Elizabeth Hale describes in *Making*

*Whiteness*: “They went down there looking for all the blacks they could get and there was one at the tavern at Twelfth and Madison and there was a tree in front of there. Well, there was one hung on that tree—where he come from, I don’t know. And that tree was burnt. And from that time until the tree was completely destroyed it was cut down in small pieces of souvenirs. Everybody had a knife or hatchet or something and cut off a piece of it” (Wright 1986:3). Souvenir photo pamphlets were also distributed: “shortly after this happened, they was postcards sold around here and also a small book form. Now, the cards sold for a nickel and the book form sold for twenty-five cents and all it ever showed was the places that was burnt down, places that was gutted by fire” (Wright 1986:4).

Just as they had done in the Levee, the mob avoided the few white homes that were interspersed among the residences of African Americans: “the rioters ordered white Badlands

residents to pin white cloths to the front of their houses so that they would not accidentally be burned.” A resident described the methodical nature of the mob’s terror. White men would tip over the bed, tear open the mattress, “pour on a little oil and apply a match. That was all there was to it.” The resident also reported that whites quickly abandoned these homes they sent ablaze, “feeling sure that the fire would not be interfered with, and it wasn’t” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:35). Rioters even prevented firefighters from extinguishing their handiwork by cutting the fire hoses.

Having already burned his barbershop, at around 2:00 a.m. on Saturday morning, August 15<sup>th</sup>, the rioters turned their attention to Scott Burton’s home, located on Twelfth Street between Madison and Mason. Burton knew what was coming—he had already sent his wife and children out of town—yet he remained at his home, armed with a shotgun to protect his property. When the whites came to his door, Burton “fired at least two loads of buckshot into the crowd,” but he was overwhelmingly outnumbered; the mob “pummeled him unconscious” after a failed attempt to escape out a side door and into his backyard. Scott Burton was dragged into the street. A clothesline from a neighbor’s yard was torn down. A noose was fashioned. Scott Burton was hung “from a dead tree in front of a saloon at the corner of Twelfth and Madison Streets. By the light of flames from the burning buildings, the rioters mutilated the dangling corpse” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:38). Burton’s body was riddled with bullets. Next, knives were removed from the pockets of white men intent on perpetuating “fiendish cruelties,” as the Springfield \_\_\_\_\_ reported the following day. Fingers and other body parts were removed. Rioters “were still busy disfiguring Burton’s body” when thirty troops from a Decatur militia company arrived to Springfield, marched through its downtown streets clearing away white anarchists, and “swept east through the Badlands” (2008:39). Though the white rioters hissed at their presence, castigating Colonel Shand “with a barrage of catcalls and obscenities,” they fled after a line of officers fired a low warning volley. Third-party intervention ended the night’s rioting.

Springfield did not explode in rioting the next day, August 15<sup>th</sup>, likely because by late afternoon more than 500 militiaman were patrolling the city. By 11:00 p.m., more than 1,400 state troops were in town, many camped in front of the state capital in small tents. “All day Saturday the city police kept busy rounding up suspected rioters and searching the homes of ‘suspicious characters’ for items looted from Loper’s restaurant and Levee shops,” writes Senechal de la Roche (2008:40). Despite the intensive presence of police and state militia, by

7:00 P.M. Major General Edward C. Young “began to receive alarming reports that crowds were gathering downtown.” Neither the sheriff’s department nor the city police had secured the business district, as planned, and Major General Young called to ask what had happened. Sheriff Werner informed Young that he did not have enough officers to prevent the crowd from gathering; the state militia “would have to step in and deal with the problem.” Young ordered two cavalry units to disrupt the crowds, but just before 8:00 p.m., the major general was informed that two more mobs had formed just south of the downtown business district: “Their target seemed to be the large black settlement in southeast Springfield.” Major General Young called to request additional militia reinforcements; it became clear, he said, that “under the cover of darkness,” white crowds were gathering “to commit violence wherever opportunity presented itself.” Troops were already posted “at likely trouble spots,” including the Levee and Badlands, both the city and county jail, and the larger African-American residential enclave located on the north end of the city (Senechal de la Roche 2008:43).

William Donnegan had lived in Springfield since 1845, and at the time of the riots, he was 84 years old, according to Helen Blankmeyer’s account. Donnegan lived at the corner of Spring Street and Edward Street, southwest of the state capitol building; he and “a few other black families lived on block of an otherwise all-white middle-class neighborhood” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:43). Donnegan owned his own home and “other real estate in town.” He was “one of the city’s wealthier blacks,” but he incurred the wrath of white Springfield with an even more dastardly offense: his wife was white. Donnegan remained with Sarah despite the threat against black safety, and, according to his sister’s account, they “telephoned the jail and the militia headquarters several times, asking for protection” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:44). Though they were promised that soldiers would come *each time* they called, none came.

“Forward, citizens!” shouted a white mob leader in front of the State Arsenal, to the delight of the feverish crowd. “Let us complete the good work begun last night!” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:44). The mob began its march down Spring Street, led by an enthusiastic white lad waving the American flag. Clubs of wood hung in their hands, according to Blanche Hankins, the daughter of a white grocery merchant who recalled the terror that transpired that evening, when she was just a young girl. Some carried iron poles. Many carried pistols and some marched with loaded shotguns slung over their shoulder. By late Saturday evening, August 16<sup>th</sup>, Springfield’s white marauders were conducting “hit-and-run attacks over much of the city,”



making it difficult for the state to stop the violence. “They were rendering a piercing yelling; cursing sounds in a wild manner,” Hankins recalled. And then she heard them knock hard on her father’s front door. They demanded a rope, but Mr. Hankins “told them to clear out, that he wanted no part in their activities” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:45). A clothesline had sufficed for Scott Burton the night before—and the Hankins family had one hanging in their yard.

William Donnegan’s throat was slit by a white rioter sometime after 8:00 p.m. that Saturday evening. This atrocity occurred only after he was pummeled at his door step and dragged through the front yard; it occurred only after he endured a beating with “bricks torn up from the sidewalks.” His body was dragged further into the street. The Hankins family clothesline was wrapped several times around his neck. These white terrorists then attempted to “hoist him to the limb of a small maple tree in front of the Edwards School across the street.” For reasons unexplained, Donnegan’s body was not raised off the ground when discovered by authorities. Perhaps the militia and police finally arrived to offer protection for the interracial couple, but by the time they made the scene, William Donnegan was nearly deceased. He died the following day in St. John’s Hospital. The riots ended that morning as well, except for a few minor incidents, and by Monday morning 3,691 militia officers were encamped in the city (Young 1908:268; Senechal de la Roche 2008:45). Nevertheless, assaults upon African Americans, especially “blacks walking through white neighborhoods,” the hanging of effigies, and “occasional instances of arson” persisted for several weeks into September (2008:46).

In her detailed analysis of riot participants, Roberta Senechal de la Roche identified the names of 190 Springfield residents from newspapers and court documents. The typical rioter was a male in his mid-twenties (only nine women were identified as participants), and surprisingly, it appears that “southern-born whites were not involved heavily in the riot,” nor were most rioters actually born in southern Illinois, “an area that did keep its southern character into the twentieth century” (2008:105). The majority of rioters came from the central and northern parts of Illinois, according to Senechal de la Roche: “most were born in Springfield, the surrounding Sangamon County, or nearby towns and counties” (2008:106). Though Springfield’s race riot was “above all, a working-class riot,” ethnic differences were evident in the identities of riot participants. Rioters of Irish and Italian descent were far more heavily implicated than those of German, Lithuanian, or Polish descent. The absence of Lithuanians and Poles “is even more striking when one considers that most non-Jewish ‘Russian’ immigrants were heavily concentrated in the city’s

one industry—coal mining—in which blacks had a significant foothold” (2008:107). Senechal de la Roche argues that analysis of available evidence regarding the identities of riot participants “suggests that those immigrants who shared both workplaces and neighborhoods with blacks were in fact *less* likely to riot than those who lived and labored apart from or distant from blacks” (2008:109). Segregation appears to enhance white racial hostility while integrated whites were less likely to act in violence. “In short,” notes Senechal de la Roche “most of the rioters examined faced no black threat to their employment security and had no black co-workers or customers—contrary to earlier social strain interpretations of the riot that have cited economic competition as the major source of interracial tension” (2008:115).

*Collective resentment* fueled Springfield’s anti-black violence. William English Walling detected these feelings of resentment among white residents he interviewed after the race riot, several of whom were admitted participants in the rituals of violence. Walling said he heard the same justification for the riot repeated many times while talking to white resident on the streets of downtown: ‘Why, the niggers came to think they were as good as we are!’ (Senechal de la Roche 2008:126). But the feeling of resentment did not result from direct economic competition. Instead, the increased visibility of black business and community life symbolized an upward mobility in social status repugnant to racist whites. Senechal de la Roche identified 190 whites who participated in the riot, and the “overwhelming majority” lived in two areas: in and immediately adjacent to the central business district, and further away, working-class sections in the First, Second, and Third Wards. Few whites “lived in the same immediate neighborhood with blacks” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:17). Most of the white rioters lived in either the downtown area or the working-class north end, but “close interracial residential proximity did not significantly reduce relational distance in the Levee and other areas in or near downtown Springfield,” perhaps because those living there were “more transient and geographically mobile,” thus long-term relationships had little opportunity to develop (2008:147). These men were “socially and geographically distant from Springfield’s blacks,” and though their jobs were secure against competition, the “typical rioter usually saw no blacks at all where he worked. He also had no black neighbors and had to walk at least a quarter of a mile to get at those he wished to attack. The origins of this riot,” argues Senechal de la Roche, “cannot lie in white frustrations over any immediate black threat to white material interests or security. The source is racism, an intense antipathy for African American rights and upward social mobility. Progressive reformer

William English Walling, who reported on the events in Springfield for the *Independent*, noted that he “heard the same justification for the riot repeated many times: ‘Why, the niggers came to think they were as good as we are!’” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:126).

Black political participation was a prime target of the rioter’s wrath and the symbolic nature of the attacks indicates white resentment for black voting rights (and the power that accompanies civic participation). Republican C. C. Lee and Democrat William Johnson, Springfield’s “leading black political captains” (2008:132), had their business establishments “systematically wrecked” (2008:133) during the first night of violence. “Lee and Johnson, conspicuous with their ‘flashy’ clothes and election-day wads of dollar bills,” writes Senechal de la Roche, “may have symbolized to these whites the blacks’ so-called ‘exalted notion of importance’” that local whites “so deplored” (2008:133). Margaret Ferguson, one of Springfield’s middle-class African Americans, notes the intent behind the white attacks: “See, the people that they harmed and hurt were not really the no-gooders. The Donnegan that they hung was a very nice man. They were very busy hurting the prominent, and so, of course we were frightened, you see, because we, also, were affluent. We owned property; many poor whites didn’t. There was a great deal of animosity toward any well-established Negro who owned his own house and had a good job” (cited in Senechal de la Roche 2008:136). This is a crucial observation—and it challenges the core of social strain theory, which is that violence is caused by frustration over direct competition for resources. White frustration over economic competition did not fuel the Springfield riot; white resentment for any kind of upward African-American mobility, including the right to work in any industry they choose and the right to vote for any candidate they choose, did produce hostility, especially among the semi-skilled who may have felt they had fallen behind Springfield’s prospering blacks. As Senechal de la Roche notes, Springfield’s riot may be “understood partly as a reaction to a special form of deviant behavior—black progress—a visible violation of a previously inferior place in the social order” (2008:151).

The riot event in Springfield was downward collective violence aimed at cleansing the community of its African-American residents, even though those residents had been thoroughly excluded from major sectors of the economy. White-initiated collective violence became necessary because intense economic discrimination had not proved successful:

Working-class rioters clearly intended to purge the city entirely of blacks and attempted to coerce the city’s economic elite into supporting that goal. From the rioters’ point of view, whites with economic ties to blacks helped encourage and sustain a despised segment of the community. They were traitors. If blacks were deprived of jobs and if all stores refused their trade, then perhaps the remainder not driven away by

violence would be forced to abandon Springfield—literally starved out of the city. (Senechal de la Roche 2008:126)

Contemporaneous reports suggest that some of the riot participants, or at least those sympathetic to their goals, did take other steps beyond collective violence to intimidate, exterminate, and expel the African-American population from Springfield. They sent threatening letters to white businesses who employed African Americans in service-oriented jobs, and they delivered similar terroristic threats to whites who employed African Americans as domestics. This mail increased in the days and weeks following the riot: “the growing number of mailed threats soon alarmed Springfield authorities enough that they requested the intervention of federal postal investigators.” At least one case of arson did actually occur after W. E. Smith, the white owner of a butcher shop on North Sixth Street, refused to “stop delivering meat to negroes” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:127). Even the mayor received letters demanding that all blacks be dismissed from their posts as policemen, firemen, and janitors.

Armed black resistance is a criterion that distinguishes this form of racial collective violence as a *disciplinary riot* rather than a *racial cleansing*. Springfield “stood for the action of the mob. She hoped the rest of the negroes might flee” (Senechal de la Roche 2008:iii). The second crucial variable is the behavior of third parties; had the state not intervened with such a display of force, a southern-style extermination effort may have unfolded given the racial hatred on display in the state’s capital that August in 1908. The intervention of local police forces and outside state militia is the second side of the equation when it comes to predicting the *intensity* (i.e., how long it lasts) and *severity* (i.e., how much damage it causes in loss of life and property) of a riot event. “Only the belated arrival of the state militia halted the mob’s progress into other black neighborhoods,” explains Senechal de la Roche. “Since the increasing number of troops made open mass marches against black enclaves impossible, rioters switched to hit-and-run attacks against carefully selected black victims beginning late the first night of the outbreak” (2008:135-36). The behavior of Springfield’s mob, which waited until nightfall on Saturday to resume collective strikes against black residents, shows the rational intent of white violence.

### *Instrumental White Violence*

In an interview with researchers recorded in 1971, Rose Link recalls how her father had remained awake on those August nights. “But I can remember my dad, he stayed up real late and he heard and seen, he went out and sat on the front porch,” she said. “Oh, these little colored, I

mean people, that had little spring wagons and a little old horse going by with their little families, moving out to the country. They had their little wagon loaded up with some belongings” (Link 1971:3). Mattie Hale remembers how a “crowd of people went to the country for shelter” with only “food and clothing in sacks on their backs” (1987:11). Her family, along with three others (Taylor, Banyon, and Gains) helped assist African-American refugees fleeing Springfield: “They came to our house and they went further up the road. We called it road, it wasn’t a street. And they had their food and their clothes, some were barefooted. We sheltered, I guess, about twenty or twenty-five,” Mattie recalled. “We had a large barn and up above—we called it the barn loft—that’s where we kept our feed for our horses and for our chickens, but at that time we did not have any. And a lot of them went up there and stayed all night in the barn loft. Some slept underneath of our fruit trees and we’d taken some in the house” (Hale 1987:12). In “Negroes Leave For Other Towns. Departing Trains Carry Many Blacks from City,” the *Illinois State Journal* reported that “nearly every train going out of the city carries a few of the departing blacks.” The Reverend Charles Virden, “of the state board of charities” helped the many who were left homeless and “quartered at the arsenal” to leave the city permanently. “Most of those who are going away from Springfield at present *do not expect to return* as they plan to find homes in other cities that have not displayed the same hostile spirit against their race as has been exhibited in Springfield” (1908:12).

The riot had structural consequences for the development of the black community, especially Springfield’s middle-class African-American residents. Marie Cunningham, whose grandfather was William K. Donnegan, the man brutally lynched from an elm tree in front of his home, recalls the changes in Springfield that grew out of the riot: “We had colored stores, if you wanted them, and there was real estate, lawyers, doctors. And we’re coming to that category where after 1908, everything fear brought there. That was the whole thing though, fear. And then they commenced to grouping off, and you couldn’t buy property no place, only in the one section, you know” (1971:1). The more prosperous black families she knew as a child came to leave Springfield in the years after the riot. “Well, see they had bought these places, these were their homes,” Cunningham explained. “So gradually they moved away, not directly after, but gradually. Their children wouldn’t want to live in such a place. And now they’re stranded all over, you know, different places” (1971:3). Cunningham also describes how service in restaurants and other kinds of public accommodations ceased after the riot: “They didn’t serve

colored people after the riot. They wouldn't serve you nowhere uptown." Marie recalls how she got to go because her grandmother was white, and she noticed the signs: "I don't know whether any young people know about it," Cunningham explained in 1971, but "they used to have a sign." She recalls her white grandmother saying, "You have to take these signs down" (Cunningham 1971:3-4).

Intimidation did not end with the riot for Springfield's African-American residents—nor did it end for those whites who employed them. The Illinois State Attorney began receiving "complaints from local merchants who told of receiving threats by phone and letter warning them to discharge their black employes (sic). If they did not get rid of their black help, they were cautioned, their businesses would be burned to the ground." Small leaflets printed on bright yellow paper "denouncing the city's blacks" began to appear in the streets during the weeks after the riot. One read 'Do you want niggers to make white men's laws? If not, get busy.' Another asked 'Are little white girls or ladies safe where niggers are?' (Krohe 1978). Those small houses along Tenth Street that "ended their existence as dilapidated shacks torched by an angry mob started at the tidy dwellings of upwardly mobile white working-class families built in the 1840s and 1850s," writes Erika Holts. An archaeological investigation conducted for the Carpenter Street underpass revealed that there were "five houses in that row, plus two adjacent that escaped destruction." Today, 10<sup>th</sup> Street has been eviscerated from the Springfield cityscape. The "new railroad right of way" goes directly over "the seven excavated house foundations."

#### THE THINGS THEY CARRIED:

#### TWO RIOTS, A LYNCHING, AND AN EXODUS FROM EAST ST. LOUIS

East St. Louis grew up around its railroad lines, its train yards and freight houses lining the muddy banks of the Mississippi. Rapid industrialization transformed East St. Louis, which by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century had emerged as "a railroad hub second in volume of freight traffic only to the nation's largest, Chicago" (Lumpkins 2008:21). Industries began "forming their own little towns" along East St. Louis's rail lines at the start of the First World War, essentially to evade taxation. Though East St. Louis didn't enjoy the benefit of corporate tax revenue, it did endure the sulfur emanating from its industrial smokestacks. Armour and Swift, powerhouse meatpacking companies known collectively as the "Meat Trust," established "National City," an industrial tax-free enclave located just north of East St. Louis. Here the stockyards "stank of

burnt cowhide and rotting pig guts” (Barnes 2008:58). By 1900, East St. Louis housed livestock and meatpacking facilities, iron and steel foundries, building material companies, paint factories, and cement-making firms. These industries demanded low corporate tax rates and relied on unskilled, low-wage labor; they required employees to perform grueling work that was often quite dangerous. Armour and Company’s two smokestacks remain standing even today. Now abandoned for over fifty years, the company’s twin circular towers of red brick stretch into the sky, the Armour name still visible to residents who remain. Some of its bricks are weather beaten, blackened by carbon stains from industrial coal burning; others are still red, somehow spared from years of heavy pollution.

But in 1916 African Americans in East St. Louis were mobilizing against both political parties: the democrats had disenfranchised African-American voters, and many black residents felt that the republicans bosses had taken “their African American constituency for granted” (Lumpkins 2008:80). Lumpkins shows how black politicians were building an independent political bloc to forcefully gain greater access to political participation in local government. Black men like Bundy, who had acted “without consulting white bosses during the local election in April 1916” when he helped a black laborer defeat “a political machine candidate for the position of alderman” (2008:80), and Bluit, who had been advising migrants to “vote not the party but the candidate, Republican or Democrat, who promised patronage” in an attempt to force office seekers “into a dependency upon black voters” (2008:79), were stirring the kettle. By October 1916 the club had renamed itself the St. Claire County (Colored) Republican League, but it actually moved against the party. “They sent Republican bosses a list of demands that called for black control of the election campaign in African American districts and the awarding of the county offices of deputy coroner and assistant state’s attorney to black politicians,” writes Lumpkins (2008:80). After the Republicans rejected those demands, “Leaguers turned to the Democratic Party”; they endorsed Democrats in local elections but continued to pledge support for Republicans in the state and national elections. They also formed a coalition with the Colored Democratic League to pressure for increased patronage by “deliver[ing] the black vote to local Democratic candidates.” The (Colored) Republican League had “positioned itself to be an influential organization in the upcoming November 1916 and April 1917 elections” (Lumpkins 2008:81). White institutions were actively challenged, with black political culture gaining in strength; a rapid shift in cultural and political relations was underway in East St. Louis. When the

Democrat Fred Mollman was re-elected for mayor in April 1917, “it signaled that the St. Clair County (Colored) Republican, Colored Democratic, and Afro-American Protective leagues had succeeded in transforming the black community into a swing voting bloc” (2008:82). Bundy, Bluit, and Parden, along with nearly 400 other “black politicians and political operatives,” celebrated the victory at a banquet where Mayor Mollman and other white politicians “pledged to advance the interests of black residents” (2008:83).

The celebration was short lived because real estate politician Locke Tarlton and other businessmen engaged in East St. Louis politics “planned to put an end to black political influence altogether,” writes Lumpkins, and white leaders “found the opportunity to do so by exploiting certain developments within organized labor” (2008:83). In May 1916 employees at the East St. Louis and Suburban Railroad Company went on strike “without the involvement” of the Central Trade and Labor Union (CTLU), and by July, they had won their demands. Lumpkins argues that this labor strike was a pivotal event for race relations: “In the eyes of CTLU officials and labor organizers, the East St. Louis and Suburban Railroad strike presented an opportunity to connect worker’ strikes to the black migration.” Managers for the company had “considered using black southern migrants as a club to destroy the new union, especially since, for some unknown reason, no black workers had become union members even though they had participated in the strike” (Lumpkins 2008:85). Labor unions are cultural institutions, as are political organizations, and the techniques of power utilized in such organizations extend or contract the *cultural distance* separating groups. Here, unions began to effectively construe black southern migrants with labor unrest, intensifying whites’ fear of ‘negro colonization.’

Worker strikes at the Aluminum Ore Company in October 1916 provided the next major confrontation between capital and labor, and it provided the staging ground for further unrest the following April 1917, which “the CTLU immediately connected to the Great Migration” (Lumpkins 2008:86). Perhaps this is because immediately after the strike in October, the company dramatically changed its racial hiring practices. Aluminum Ore Company “suddenly began hiring African Americans, specifically black southern migrants, to fill positions that either had been vacated by unskilled workers or had opened after the company fired those active in the October strike” (Lumpkins 2008:87). The company employed a total of twelve African Americans between 1902 and late 1916, but after the October strike, the total climbed steadily: from 280 black laborers in November to 410 in December, 470 in February, and 381 in April,



with payroll fluctuating depending on production needs. From the perspective of Central Trade and Labor Union, Aluminum Ore “clearly sought to discipline white workers by hiring low-wage, presumably antiunion, black laborers (Lumpkins 2008:87). CTLU leaders sought to capitalize on this transformation in corporate practice by intensifying its “anti-black migration rhetoric. They, and not white Aluminum Ore strikers, formulated overt racist appeals.” Robert Conway, a meatpacking manager, wrote that CTLU “manufactured a sentiment against negroes because they were negroes, and because they were taking the [jobs] of white men.” The labor union effectively “used racism to organize white workers to build unions, calculating that white working people harbored strong antiblack sentiments ... and embedded their racial identity in their construction of class consciousness” (Lumpkins 2008:88).

In East St. Louis, Central Trade and Labor Union organizers racialized strikebreaking, a cultural factor that played a crucial role in fomenting racial violence. CTLU officials “conveniently ignored the issue of white strikebreaking, preferring instead to dramatize black migrants as strikebreakers,” explains Lumpkins; union activists “rarely discussed the fact that black workers, including southern migrants, refused to break strikes.” (2008:89). A strike at American Steel in late April, where black and white workers united in protest, was completely ignored; the CTLU “lacked interest” in the event. Nor did it “support a predominantly black workforce at the East St. Louis Cotton Seed Oil Company that went on strike. In condemning the black migration, CTLU leaders made economic security for white workers, not unionization of black workers, their central concern” (Lumpkins 2008:89). This is a crucial point, especially given that East St. Louis was an intensely industrial city confronting massive southern migration—if interracial solidarity were the core concern, a goal that might have raised wages for all workers regardless of race, then perhaps race relations among workers may have fared differently during such a volatile period of transformation. Instead, as Charles Lumpkins shows, leveraging white labor into action by stoking fear became the preferred technique of power, and the growing “anti-black coalition that CTLU sought to build outside the labor movement began to appeal to white people of all social classes, in particular real estate men and their business allies, landlords and homeowners, when the organization stressed issues such as housing and crime” (2008:89).

### *Disciplinary Riot in May*

The auditorium at city hall was packed to capacity with nearly a thousand people. Hundreds more were gathered outside on Monday evening, May 28, 1917. Edward Mason and Michael Whalen, leaders of the Central Trade and Labor Union (CTLU), thought they had a private meeting with Mayor Fred Mollman. Mason and Whalen wanted to pressure city hall to settle the strike with Aluminum Ore, and they also wanted to ban African-American migration into East St. Louis. It turned out the meeting was opened to the public, but neither Mason nor Whalen knew who had arranged for the gathering. What they did notice was that many in the audience were not union members, and some were not even residents of East St. Louis. Ferdinand Schwartz, a white painter, came to the meeting to protest the rapid increase in African Americans vying for work in East St. Louis. CTLU speakers maintained public responsibility and advocated for more peaceful solutions, but union leaders “lost control of the gathering to uninvited speakers who railed against black migrants, the companies that hired them, and other perceived problems related to the migration,” according to historian Charles L. Lumpkins (2008:96-7). Alexander Flannigan, a lawyer and politician who was from Belleville, Illinois, “arose and condemned Negroes for moving into white neighborhoods,” writes sociologist Elliott Rudwick (1982:28). There was “no law or rule or anything else to curb mob violence,” Flannigan reminded the crowd as he wound up the meeting. “That was the climax,” recalled *East St. Louis Journal* reporter Roy Albertson. That was the solution for the problems facing East St. Louis: kill the black strikebreakers flooding into town off the trains; kill all the black criminals, those transients roaming the downtown streets. And it was Flannigan who provided the rallying cry as the crowd filed out: ‘No law against mob violence!’ (U.S. Congress 1917b:473).

The auditorium emptied by 10:00 p.m. and a sea of about twelve hundred people were packed in front of city hall. They jeered as police ushered the alleged African-American gunman off to jail. Shouts of ‘Lynch him!’ were met with fierce approval, and some even tried to seize the suspect from law enforcement, but they were thwarted in those attempts. CTLU leaders attempted to disperse the mob. Mayor Mollman pleaded that they return to their homes. ‘To Hell with Mollman! Hang him!’ yelled a voice from the crowd (Lumpkins 2008:97). Two detectives stood outside city hall, and they “told several fellows of a negro operating at the present minute out in the central part of the city; he had committed several hold-ups already and had shot at one man,” recalled Albertson, “and, of course, to make it ‘good,’ one of them exaggerated to the extent of saying that he had killed a white man.” So the crowd marched east on Collinsville

Avenue toward Missouri, where they “discovered a negro going along about his business,” explained Albertson, “and without any provocation whatever, they just took after the nigger” (65<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 1917b:464). At the intersection of Broadway and Collinsville avenues, “the wheel trolleys of streetcars were pulled from overhead wires and men were dragged out of darkened vehicles,” writes Rudwick. “A colored woman was threatened with a lynching, but the mob fled after a white female passenger became hysterical” (1982:29).

A mob of angry whites congregated at the corner of Bond Avenue and Tenth Street. There someone noticed Scott Clark, an African American hastily attempting to enter his home. The mob rushed Clark and seized him before he could enter his home. Someone in the crowd yelled ‘Let’s hang him’; then someone in the crowd said, ‘Let’s drag him around a little,’ and so with a rope tied around his neck they dragged him around the street,” recalled Hallie Queen who worked at Howard University and was given permission to investigate the riot events. A reporter of the *Post-Dispatch* “rushed out and begged them to let this man go. He said, ‘Why, you do not even know him.’ He was told that unless he got out of the way, he himself in five minutes would be dead.” For half an hour “they tore around the street dragging the body” until they reached the corner of Broadway and Tenth Streets, where Scott Clark was strung to a telephone pole. Colonel Tripp rushed to the scene to cut the body down. Clark survived until the next day, when he died in St. Mary’s Hospital. One of the cases she worked on at Red Cross headquarters was of a little girl only eight years old. The mob caught her outside her home and asked where her mother was; the girl was unsure, and told the men she did not know, “so the mob cut off one of her fingers on each hand,” recalled Queen. They left her alone—momentarily. “When they had gotten out, some one in the mob said, ‘You didn’t do enough in there,’ and they went back and amputated her left arm just below the elbow [sic]” (65<sup>th</sup> United States Congress 1917a:21).

It was midnight on Monday and white assailants had now formed two large groups, each operating in different locations: Broadway, with car stops located between First Street and Fourth Street, and Collinsville Avenue, between Broadway and St. Claire Avenue. Early Tuesday morning, well before dawn, a group of nearly 100 whites marched toward the southern end of town, leaving a trail of destruction in their wake: “they damaged Wilkerson’s barbershop near Fourth and Broadway, Schreiber’s saloon at Fourth and Railroad, Fransen’s saloon at Fourth and Trendley, and other establishments that were patronized by African Americans and that, according to assailants, served as black politicians’ ‘headquarters’” (Lumpkins 2008:99).

Bricks became missiles. Glass shards fell upon the pavement in a cascade. Angry whites fired pistol shots into black homes. Buildings were looted. At least one “black-occupied dwelling” was torched, according to Lumpkins, and this was in the southern portion of town; the second unit, larger in number, was heading north to the meatpacking district, “beating black individuals they encountered along Collinsville Avenue and parts of Third Street.” But they did not venture into the predominantly African-American neighborhoods, for rumor had it that black residents ‘were arming themselves and hell would be to pay if they go down in the negro settlement’ (cited in Lumpkins 2008:99). “The crowd got kind of tired beating negroes after midnight that night and it dispersed without doing any murder,” explained Roy Albertson, a reporter for the *East St. Louis Journal*. ‘Come on, fellows, let’s go,’ declared one unidentified riot leader. ‘Tomorrow night we’ll be ready for them. We are not armed now but tomorrow we’ll all have guns. We’ll burn the negroes out and run them out of town.’ By 2:00 a.m., “hundreds of Negroes carrying battered suitcases were seen heading for the bridges that led to St. Louis” (Rudwick 1982:30).

The East St. Louis police force devoted most of its efforts to disarming African Americans on Tuesday. “Detectives were stationed at the bridge approaches to search and arrest Negroes attempting to transport guns,” writes Rudwick. This despite the fact that whites had started the riot the previous evening and proclaimed they were prepared to finish it with greater violence the following day. Nevertheless, Governor Lowden promised to send six troops of Illinois national guardsmen that afternoon, amidst rumors that light-skinned black men were shuttling guns across the river from St. Louis, and since these men “were light enough to pass for white, they were not searched.” Just before sundown a group of whites congregated near the meat packing plants in an area along St. Clair Avenue and Second Street known as the Whiskey Chute, waiting for African Americans to finish their shift: “One by one, the laborers were beaten. A block away, at First and St. Clair, a Swift packing plant employee was shot. As darkness was falling over the city, white youths fired shots into the air, marching unchallenged through the streets singing popular tunes” (Rudwick 1982:31). The May race riot was not fully quelled until the arrival of the Illinois National Guard, Fourth Regiment, around 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday. There were “fully 700 soldiers in town,” recalled Alberston, and they “were placed in the most strategic points” (1917b:477). Soldiers commandeered intersections leading into black neighborhoods to prevent further assault on African-American residents: “They deterred black retaliation against white people by arresting armed black residents. Soldiers cleared the downtown district.”

Seventy-eight people reported injuries during the two nights of violence—all but three of which inflicted upon African Americans—prompting Reverend George Allison to comment that perhaps white folks had simply “intended to turn the city into a sundown town” by intimidating African Americans into leaving East St. Louis (Lumpkins 2008:101). After the May event, an estimated 6,000 black residents fled in terror across the Mississippi River. Local officials did not punish whites for “leading antiblack assaults, presumably either because of their prominence (as in the case of Flannigan) or because of their connections to prominent people in government or business,” explained Lumpkins (2008:101).

In *American Pogrom* (2008), historian Charles L. Lumpkins situates the East St. Louis riot in the context of business and political conflict. Local actors “decided to employ mass racial violence to eliminate the threats that they perceived from rapid shifts in East St. Louis’s political culture between 1915 and mid-1917.” A massive infusion of southern black migrants “altered the existing political balance” (2008:7), and the racial violence that erupted in July would accomplish “what the May riot had failed to achieve: the elimination of the black community’s influential role in local electoral politics.” The July race riot “had less to do with social tensions revolving around such issues as employment and housing and more to do with black East St. Louisans arriving at the threshold of creating their own independent political organization capable of holding the balance of power in city governance,” argues Lumpkins. “The July pogrom represented a political solution planned by certain white real estate men, politicians, and businessmen and implemented by their ‘shock troops,’ many tied to the city’s violent criminal subculture. As political boss and real estate man Locke Tarlton said to a business friend a few days after the pogrom, ‘this is going to be a white man’s town hereafter; the blacks will be run out of here and we’ll have a white man’s town’ (2008:110).

### *Racial Cleansing in July*

There is a section of East St. Louis called the Denver Rise, notorious for being a part of town “where bad negroes live,” according to Hallie Queen, an American Red Cross worker who assisted in relief efforts after the riot. “As a matter of fact, a decent and respectable negro did not go over there very often,” she said. Late in the evening on Sunday, July 1, 1917, an automobile surged through the Denver Rise containing five white men, each dressed in civilian clothing. These men were “firing promiscuously right and left into the various houses,” according to Queen and other reports (65<sup>th</sup> United States Congress 1917a:20). At some point shortly before

12:30 a.m., a second car containing white men drove through Denver Rise. Sergeant Samuel Coppedge and Sergeant Frank Wadley turned off Tenth Street onto Bond Avenue into an area inhabited mostly by African Americans. Their unmarked Ford Model T police car crept forward, no faster than 15 or 20 miles per hour. Two uniformed officers sat in the back, along with local reporter Roy Albertson. Police chauffeur William Hutter slammed the Model T's brakes. The driver pressed on the brakes in a "spot unusually dark," the streetlight being fifty feet further north, with a brick building one side of the street and a frame house on the other.

The Ford's headlights were very poor, but Albertson managed to see the crowd before him. More than one hundred armed black men, perhaps as many as 150, were marching west toward the Free Bridge. They carried guns, "automatics, and blue steel, and cheap revolvers." There were "Winchester rifles, Springfield rifles, and sawed-off shot-guns, everything except a cannon on a wheel," recalled Anderson. "What is doing here, boys," Coppedge asked, wearing ordinary civilian clothes and a straw hat. "None of your damned business," one of the men snapped. "We are down here to protect you fellows as well as the whites," Coppedge reassured them (U.S. Congress 1917:479, 527; see also Lumpkins 2008:112). Coppedge and Wadley flipped open their jackets, flashing their police badges so that "there was no difficulty whatever for the negroes to see the stars," according to Albertson (1917b:502). This did not satisfy them: "We don't need any of your damned protection. Go on; get out of here," snapped one of the black men, from the back of the crowd (1917b:479, 527, 560). Coppedge ordered Hutter to drive forward, but before the car could move, several shots pierced their Model T's windshield. Sergeant Sam Coppedge was killed instantly, the bullet having severed his jugular vein. "Then it looked like they just turned loose and tried to empty their guns as fast as they could," recalled Albertson as the Model T raced down Bond. "I never looked back. They kept firing for the entire distance of the block, and I decided I would rather be hit in the back than in the face" (1917b:554). Coppedge bled to death in the police cruiser as they raced toward Deaconess Hospital. Sergeant died the following night, July 3, from a gunshot wound to his liver.

Paul Anderson found the Ford Model T at the police station, on display right out front, riddled with bullet holes. A "considerable crowd" of possibly fifty men stood around the machine, "talking about what should be done to the negroes in general," recalled Anderson. "I heard several of them say that they should be run out of town; they should be wiped out, and other remarks of that sort" (U.S. Congress 1917b:251). Roy Albertson of the *St. Louis Times*

described how the rioting intensified in the downtown district along Collinsville Avenue and Main Street: “They were just running around there promiscuously from one end of the street to the other, surging from Broadway up to Missouri; then they would get tired of beating up negroes there and they would look for some new game up at St. Louis Avenue, and go along taking negroes off the street cars” (U.S. Congress 1917b:489). By 1:00 p.m. white violence had centered around Collinsville Avenue and State Street.

Grant Chemical was a “storm center” that afternoon, the only building in a four-block stretch which wasn’t burned to the ground. “It was afire in half a dozen places,” recalled Charles Roger, the company’s president, in testimony before congress. The arson work didn’t destroy Grant Chemical—it only suffered “slight damage,” according to Roger—but as he stood outside the plant on the afternoon of July 2<sup>nd</sup> he spotted “a bunch of them” coming his way. ‘There’s the place that would make a good fire,’ Roger overheard one fellow say as he gestured toward the chemical plant. Another voice in the group interrupted: ‘Leave that alone; he’s no nigger lover; he don’t have any niggers’ (U.S. Congress 1917b:107). The East St. Louis Police were apparently unable to provide protection, and the Illinois National Guard actually engaged in killing with the rioters, according to Roger. ‘Were there any soldiers around?,’ asked Congressman Baker. ‘One,’ Roger replied. ‘What was he doing?’ ‘He was shooting niggers.’ ‘What?’ asked Baker, incredulously. ‘Shooting niggers,’ responded Roger, cavalier to say the least. ‘The soldier?’ Baker asked. ‘Sure,’ Roger said. ‘I saw one soldier, yes sir; and I saw him firing at niggers. I have already testified to that.’ Congressman Cooper interjects: “What was this negro doing that he shot at?” He was just coming out of his house, according to Roger. “And the soldier in uniform drew up his rifle and shot him?” asked Cooper. “Absolutely,” Rogers responds. “The surrounding circumstances were three,” he said. Several white rioters were standing around, and “they said something about a soldier, that he couldn’t shoot.” The soldier responded in protest: ‘The hell I can’t. I’ll show you.’ The soldier then placed his rifle to his shoulder and fired. “I saw the nigger drop,” Rogers admitted (1917b:108). Charles Roger’s account of the riot event indicates two features of the violence at East St. Louis. First, that some of the soldiers from the Illinois National Guard were active participants in the riot event rather than agents of intervention, and second, during violent events, if the state fails to protect African American lives and property, a disciplinary riot will likely reach an intensity approaching racial cleansing. The riot event may not ultimately succeed in forcing all African Americans to flee—

white violence in East St. Louis certainly did not force *all* blacks away from the city—but in its failure to protect black lives, the state sends a message: Black lives are not valued enough to demand swift and certain protection. The right to life, liberty, and property was denied.

A few blocks away, the general manager of Armour and Company watched the rioters at their work by the Swifts' plant, which adjoined their factory. Robert Conway testified that “at noon there was a negro killed” outside the Swift plant who was then “thrown into the creek.” Conway reports that “number of them [African Americans] were manhandled and beaten all along ‘Whisky Shoot’—that is St. Clair Avenue out there—from one end to the other” (U.S. Congress 1917c:162). Yet according to Conway, the “police force was disorganized,” and in fact, there were *no police* in the Whisky Shoot, named for the disreputable saloons that lined the street. “I understood there were only fifteen policemen that reported for work on the morning of July 2<sup>nd</sup> out of a force of forty odd,” noted Conway (1917c:164).

A streetcar stopped on Collinsville Avenue, between Ohio and Illinois avenues. The car had been going from Alton to St. Louis, headed for the Eads Bridge, but it was stopped. ‘All you white people get off of there,’ hollered one of the men. The streetcar had been stopped: “we are going to kill these niggers” (U.S. Congress 1917b:305). A black man sat with his wife, his 14-year-old son, and his 13-year-old daughter; it was their first trip through East St. Louis. “They had never set foot on the ground in this city before,” according to a reporter for the *Post-Dispatch*. They were returning to St. Louis from a fishing trip. But they never made it home:

The man and the 14-year-old boy were killed. The woman was severely injured; her scalp was torn out; her hair was torn out; ... The girl escaped. The man was beaten to death; his head was crushed in; and the boy was shot and killed. She said later that when she was put into the ambulance she was put on the bodies—on top of the bodies of three other negroes, and after she had somewhat regained consciousness and wiped the blood from her eyes, she recognized two of the bodies as those of her husband and son. She had seen her husband killed, but thought her son was still alive. (U. S. Congress 1917d:269)

Shortly after this incident, a streetcar slowly came to a halt at Collinsville and Illinois avenues and a crowd of whites surged aboard. The first black man was pummeled and kicked as several whites dragged him by the limbs from the car. A second black man was cornered and kept from leaving the trolley car; he too was pounded and clubbed as he struggled against his captors. Both were unable to escape. “I saw the bodies of the negroes in an ambulance,” recalled Paul Anderson of the *St. Louis Dispatch*. It was about 1:15 p.m. Both had been killed, and at least five hundred people were in the street, perhaps a thousand. White residents were “stopping all street cars” travelling along Collinsville Avenue, and “they were all being searched for negroes,”



explained Anderson, who witnessed two other African Americans who were assaulted during the hour he spent around Collinsville Avenue. They “kicked them, hit them with bricks and stones, but they didn’t kill anybody” (U.S. Congress 1917d:253). Yet Anderson heard the desire expressed often, that they should find them and kill them, all that they could find” (1917d:254).

The ‘race riot’ unleashed by whites had a therapeutic element. Cheering residents gathered at intersections. Main thoroughfares “where black commuters concentrated at streetcar stops” provided the opening staging grounds for racial collective violence. Lumpkins argues that while only “a small number of individuals conducted the actual assaults,” like frenzied ring-side spectators at a heavyweight title fight, those on the sidelines actively encouraged the rioters to keep going—even as they “stepped back to rest among the spectators before resuming their murderous deeds.” Rioters pulled black residents from the streetcars, beating them without mercy, and these rituals functioned to enhance white solidarity, strengthening the community’s will to maintain white supremacy. “Black residents were “hunted prey” on the downtown streets, and murder was achieved with many designs:

Mattie House watched as white men shot her husband and hacked his corpse to pieces. A black man who had concealed himself in a box was discovered by ruffians who, after nailing the box shut, ‘threw it into the flames, remaining until it was burned to ashes.’ Black clergyman James Taylor observed one group of white men who shot and wounded a black storekeeper and his family in their store, then torched the shop and incinerated them. (Lumpkins 2008:121).

Jack Lait, a reporter for the *St. Louis Republic*, wrote that teenage boys as young as 13 were at “the forefront of every felonious butchery” committed against African Americans, while young white girls and women, “wielding bloody knives and clawing at the eyes of dying victims, sprang from the ranks of the mad thousands” (Lumpkins 2008:116). Clubs, knives, firearms and fists. All objects of terror used to discipline the black population and ensure the maintenance of white supremacy in East St. Louis. These people behaved as barbarians—and they harbored such an intense racism that even empathy for black infants and young children was absent.

Paul Anderson and another reporter were driving downtown in an automobile, observing the violent whites as they committed their butchery. Anderson witnessed a white man knock one African American from a wagon: “He was lying on the ground bleeding; a white man was standing over him with a brick in his hand,” recalled Anderson,” when a man hurried out from his home. Can you get him to a hospital? he asked the two reporters. ‘You won’t take this nigger to the hospital,’ interrupted the white man who had delivered the assault. ‘You won’t doctor him.

You had better drive on' (U.S. Congress 1917b:254). The men drove on. Anderson did not know what happened to victim, except he was bleeding from a large gash in his forehead, apparently from the brick. They came back to Collinsville, by Division Avenue, and stopped the car as another large crowd heckled a black man. There was probably fifty or one hundred men milling about and several of them pushed the man out into the street: "The negro was knocked down in the street and stamped in the face two or three times, and kicked, and just then a white man walked up and either had a revolver in his hand, or drew one from his pocket, and he shot the negro right through the back of the head. When he was turned over we could see that the bullet had come out between his eyes. He was dead. He was put into the ambulance and taken away" (1917b:255). Shortly thereafter, around 4:00 p.m., Anderson saw the body of an older black man, "probably 65 or 70 years old," motionless on Main Street and Broadway by a streetcar: "His dinner bucket was lying on the ground beside him; he had been knocked down, stoned and beaten, and was lying on the ground, apparently dead, although he had his arm arched up over his face as if to protect himself from the blows." An ambulance pulled up beside the body. The attendant bent down over the body, began to slide the man onto a stretcher, but he was interrupted by a white man who stood over him. 'If you pick up this nigger, you will get what he got.' The "ambulance driver drove on," recalled Anderson. "I saw that same negro in the undertaking establishment the next day dead, with the arms still arched up over his face." The reporter was able to identify the body that way, because his arm had "stiffened into that position" (1917b:256). Anderson also saw the undertaker—and asked him if he could identify the white man who accosted him. 'Yes sir,' he said. It was Charles Hanna, one of the few white persons indicted for murder following the riot.

Law enforcement was late in arrival, and even when it did arrive, members of the East St. Louis police force were largely sympathetic to the white rioters, as were many members of the Illinois State National Guard. Lumpkins describes the state-sanctioned misconduct that transpired in East St. Louis, as government officials, police, and guardsmen "acquiesced to or joined antiblack assaults, refusing either to protect African Americans or to arrest rioters." Herbert Schaumleffel, the state's attorney for St. Clair County, stood by and watched as whites "beat and killed black people. Schaumleffel even released eighty-nine jailed assailants before police had a chance to book them," notes Lumpkins. "Some militiamen looted and then torched black dwellings and businesses and shot at fleeing black occupants, sometimes forcing them

back into the burning structures. Several troops and policemen disarmed black men and either handed them over to the mobs to be beaten or killed or attacked the men themselves” (2008:119). But African Americans did resist these white marauders, despite the overwhelming firepower they confronted. Those African Americans who were “untouched by assailants lived in either predominantly black or all-black districts in the city’s South End, where residents resorted to armed self-defense” (Lumpkins 2008:125). City leaders like Thomas Canavan stated that armed African Americans “had wounded or killed an unknown number of white people who ventured into black districts during the mayhem.” Major K. Causer of the Illinois National Guard, Fourth Company, reported witnessing black residents fire off ‘a fearful volley,’ which left several white men dead, after they observed “a gang readying to attack their homes.” Black armed self-defense was kept quiet, however: “Some attackers clearly did not want word to spread that African Americans had organized an effective defense against white invaders,” writes Lumpkins. Blacks who survived managed to pull those who fell victim in the streets and ‘either buried them secretly or threw them into the Mississippi,’ according to Causer (2008:125).

Broadway and Main Street was an active war zone that evening. Angry intense white men were firing indiscriminately “into houses and sheds where they thought negroes were,” and around Third Street and Brady Avenue, these men “set fire to several negro houses,” explained Anderson. “I saw several negroes run from those houses” (United States Congress 1917b:257). Several African Americans were shot as they tried to escape the flames: “I saw several of them fall. All that ran out fell, I think” Anderson said, “with the exception of a woman and two little naked children three or four years old.” Their clothing had apparently been torn from their bodies by rioters, and despite the presence of “several National Guardsmen” in that area, nothing was done. No intervention was attempted: “I saw a white man loading a revolver and heard a guardsmen tell him to kill all the niggers he could, that he didn’t like them either” (1917b:258). The “firing of houses became general” at around 5:00 p.m., according to Anderson. The first alarm sounded for “four negro houses at Main Street and Brady Avenue,” according to reporter Roy Albertson of the *St. Louis Times*. “It seems like one part of the mob had broken up and had gone down there just to pick out those four houses,” for the homes were not located in a “thickly settled negro district” (1917b:490). The whites set these houses on fire, and two or three African Americans who attempted to flee were shot down, then “thrown back into” the flames. “The wounded men were picked up by their arms and legs and thrown back into the burning buildings.

A half-dozen soldiers were leaning against a wall across the street, watching. They held rifles and had full cartridge belts, but the men did nothing” (Barnes 2008:143). White racists ‘applied the torch,’ a ritual that offered African American residents a choice: flee (and perform target practice for the butchers eagerly awaiting them outside) or surrender (and suffer the excruciating pain of immolation). At about 5:40 p.m., an alarm rang out for “the big fire,” down on Walnut Avenue in the “negro segregated district (1917b:492).

Paul Anderson approached 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway at around 6:30 p.m. and saw a crowd of whites, some throwing stones and others wielding clubs. A black man raced down Broadway, fleeing for his life, but he was seized and beaten. His clothing was torn; it was ripped and bloody. A rope was secured around his neck, perhaps with a revolver planted in his back, and he “was dragged to death over the cobblestones.” His body was suspended from a telephone pole along Broadway, a message for any in East St. Louis’s black community who chose to remain: expulsion or extermination, it seemed to convey. “At one point there, I counted the bodies of five negroes lying in the street within a radius of thirty feet,” recalled Anderson,” and one hanging to a telephone pole.” The violence was everywhere the eye could dart:

I saw several negro women attacked there, some of them by white women and some of them by white men. I saw one negro woman with children in her arms attacked by a white woman and a white man pulled the white woman away. There were several soldiers standing around this place, and they made no effort, whatever, so far as I could see, to get the rioters in any way. ... There were a large number of shots fired; there was a large number of houses burned; there were mobs all the way along Broadway between Collinsville Avenue and 8<sup>th</sup> Street burning houses and shooting into the houses and assaulting negroes. The negroes were not doing anything to provoke the assaults upon them. I saw two killed with their hands above their heads. (United States Congress 1917d:264)

At least 312 houses were burned that night in East St. Louis—all of them owned by African Americans—and several bodies were found in the ruins (1917d:270). The fires were burning past 1:00 in the morning on July 3, according to Anderson, who roamed the streets the entire night. “There were dead negroes lying in the street every place,” he recalled. The following morning, he “counted the bodies of fourteen negroes piled up in one undertaking establishment,” the Kurrus parlor. Later he was shown the “bodies of eight other negro men and a little negro girl about two years old, who had been shot through the heart and shot through the head” in the undertaking establishment of Benner-Brichler. Anderson “counted three charred bodies in the ashes of houses south of Broadway”; it’s likely other Black bodies were entirely consumed in burning houses, never officially identified as victims of white violence. More than ninety Black residents were hospitalized, some of whom died afterward (U.S. Congress 1917d:265-66).

The hot July sun had dipped low on the horizon by 8:30 in the evening, July 2 1917, and perhaps the approaching darkness invited certain whites to commit the most heinous of crimes. A reporter for the *St. Louis Times* noticed a house at the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> and Broadway had caught fire. G. E. Popkess watched as flames leapt from the wooden shack, which was located directly across the street from the East St. Louis Public Library. Then an African-American woman came running from one of these small buildings, clutching a small child only three or four years old in her arms. The mother “hadn’t gotten ten feet from the front door” when she was attacked and “beaten down to the ground” (U.S. Congress 1917:385). Both mother and child were left unconscious—Popkess could not determine whether the assault had killed the mother, nor whether she had been shot during the vicious attack—but the white men were not yet through. One of them bent over the woman’s unconscious body, and picked up the child, a little boy; in one swift motion the man tossed the body more than four feet through the air, and the boy landed just inside the burning doorway. No one came to the mother’s aid—not even any of the soldiers called in for protection. No one pulled the boy from the small frame house. The home was consumed within twenty minutes.

Eleven-year-old Freda Josephine McDonald watched from her home in St. Louis as huge flames darted into the sky just across the Mississippi River, in Illinois. McDonald would later become Josephine Baker, the internationally renowned dancer, actress, and activist, but on July 2, 1917, young Freda wondered what that “ominous humming sound” was that had “filled the air. It seemed to be drawing nearer,” she wrote. Baker recounts the experience in her autobiography. “Is there a storm coming, Mama?” her brother Richard asked. “No, not a storm, child, it’s the whites.” Her mother pushed Freda and the rest of her siblings out the front door: “What I saw before me as I stepped outside had been described at church that Sunday by the Reverend in dark, spine-chilling tones. This was the Apocalypse. Clouds, glowing from the incandescent light of huge flames leaping upward from the riverbank, races across the sky,” she wrote, “but not as quickly as the breathless figures that dashed in all directions. The entire black community appeared to be fleeing” (Barnes 2008:144).

### *Instrumental White Violence*

The behavior of rioters along Third Street in the downtown district illustrates the instrumental nature of white violence. Mobs attacked several “primarily low-income” African Americans living in clusters within “majority-white districts.” The white marauders, “resentful of any

African American material advancement, set houses ablaze after carrying off furniture, clothing, and other house-hold contents.” Whites also attacked black-owned businesses—and even “several white businesses that employed black people” (Lumpkins 2008:121). This is instrumental white violence: local white residents profited materially by dispossessing African Americans of their property. Goods were hustled off before the property was vandalized and burned. Congressman William A. Rodenberg of Illinois indicated that the mob “burned 310 houses, and the Broadway Opera House” during the riot event—and under the law of Illinois, “the city is responsible for any damage caused by a mob” (U.S. Congress 1917a:16). American Red Cross member Hallie Queen noted the instrumental nature of white violence in her testimony before the United States Congress in 1917:

It was a very clever mob, and they made very sure not to destroy any property owned by white people, so that when it came to a place where colored property was near white property, instead of burning the houses, they first of all barred up the windows so as to make sure of the tenants, and then an armed man stood at the back door and an armed man stood at the front door and fired through the windows. It was also a frugal mob, because after firing through the windows they went in and took out every useful piece of furniture, especially if they were large pieces, and carried them to the homes of the poorer whites. Some of the furniture has been found and taken back, but of course furniture is rather difficult to identify. (1917a:21)

But it was also a mob that was permitted to execute its depredations upon black residents. Though two or three companies of the Illinois state militia had arrived at East St. Louis by noon on July 2, most of the men did little, if anything, to help quell the riot. G. E. Popkess, a reporter for the *St. Louis Times* who witnessed the behavior of many Illinois soldiers, argued that the militiamen could have subdued the rioters if they had only “gone to work with their bayonets, without cartridges,” if they had chosen to engage. “Many of them participated in it, and those [who] didn’t participate didn’t attempt to quell it,” Popkess testified. “By doing that I supposed you would call them participants” in the riot (U.S. Congress 1917b:410).

At least 48 people were killed during the riots by official counts—nine whites and 39 African Americans—but this figure is certainly low, an attempt to conceal the true savagery of the event. A St. Clair County grand jury investigating the riot estimated the death toll at 100, also likely low given widespread reports of black bodies being dumped into the Mississippi River (and thus never recovered). Queen was asked how many people she thought were murdered in the riots. “There are two reasons why you can not tell,” she replied. “You can not tell just how many were burned in the houses, and you can not estimate how many were thrown living or dead into the Mississippi River.” There were also undertakers in the mob who “backed their wagons

up at the various [street] corners,” claiming bodies as they fell; “as fast as they killed people they put them in the undertakers’ wagons,” explains Queen, “and they were put in rough pine boxes and buried in the potter’s field without any identification” (U.S. Congress 1917a:24). In fact, she even claimed to know of a case “where a sexton received 16 bodies at one time, and he asked, ‘Who are they?’” The men responded, ‘None of your business. Bury them.’ The estimate at Red Cross headquarters was “no more than 200 under any conditions,” responded Queen when asked if she had arrived at a figure for the number killed (1917a:25).

In the terror’s wake, an estimated 1,200 refugees camped around city hall (Barnes 2008:175). Lumpkins calculates the amount of property destroyed at three million dollars, razed several neighborhoods, injured hundreds, and forced at least 7,000 black townspeople to seek refuge across the Mississippi River in St. Louis, Missouri” (Lumpkins 2008:1). The National Urban League reported that for several days after the riot more than 6,466 people stayed at the St. Louis municipal lodging house, where black and white church and civic groups provided them with food and other assistance. These groups also helped direct the victims of white violence to temporary housing. Hundreds of refugees, including infants and children who ‘bore marks of the mob’s violence,’ received medical care for their injuries” (Lumpkins 2008:124-5). “Throughout the day, truckload after truckload of Negroes with baggage, luggage and household goods continued to arrive at the lodging house,” observed the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*. “The four-story building packed to the roof, the crowd overflowed on the street, and across to the City Hall lawn” (Lumpkins 2008:125).

In his seminal study *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2 1917* ([1964]1982), sociologist Elliott Rudwick examined school records in East St. Louis before and after the riot. In the year before the racial violence there was a growth in the African-American school population of more than thirty percent, a figure that doubled between 1912 and 1914, then again between 1914 and 1916, but the September after the riot, African-American enrollment had declined from 2,064 to 928. “During the school year after the race riots Negro enrollments slowly rose each month,” notes Rudwick, “but by June, 1918, the number of Negro schoolchildren was still about thirty-five percent lower than it had been the year previous” (1982:164). These figures suggest that a considerable portion of the Black community fled East St. Louis following the cleansing event, revealing the instrumental nature of white violence: African Americans were robbed of property, burned from their homes, traumatized unimaginably, and in some cases left completely destitute.

Oscar Leonard, superintendent of the Jewish Educational and Charitable Association of St. Louis, interviewed many observers who claimed that “a great number” of blacks had been burned alive in their homes, thus they “were not counted among the dead. Some expressed their conviction that a hundred or more perished in the flames consuming a deserted theater where they had sought sanctuary from the mob’s fury” (Delaney 2013:124). Leonard compared the riots to Russian pogroms directed against Jewish people: “the Russian ‘Black Hundreds’ could take lessons in pogrom making from the whites of East St. Louis,” remarked a Russian sculptor he interviewed after viewing the “blocks of burned houses” in East St. Louis. “The Russians, at least, gave the Jews a chance to run while they were trying to murder them. The whites in East St. Louis fired the homes of black folk and either did not allow them to leave the burning houses or shot them the moment they dared attempt to escape the flames (Dolinar 2013:124).

#### BLOOD IN THE WATER: BLACK RESISTANCE AND THE CHICAGO RACE RIOT OF 1919

The beach at Lake Michigan and 29<sup>th</sup> Street was designated exclusively for the use of whites, while the beach at 25<sup>th</sup> Street was designated by tacit understanding to be reserved for African Americans. “An imaginary line in the water separating the two beaches had been generally observed by the two races,” according to the Chicago Commission on Race Relations (1922:596). John Harris, a 14-year-old African American, had just met with four other black boys who lived in his neighborhood on the South Side, each named Williams: Charles and Lawrence Williams, who were brothers, and Paul and Harris Williams, who were not related to each other nor the pair of brothers. The four boys had just met Eugene—somehow also named Williams, bringing our total to five African-American teenage boys named William—at the beach. Together, Harris and the five Williams boys headed “to their own, very private spot,” a little island off the lake front that they “called the ‘hot and cold’” (Tuttle [1970] 1996:4-5). Because it was located just behind the Keeley Brewery and Consumers Ice, industrial discharge might suddenly alter the water’s temperature. Hot and cold.

On Sunday, July 27<sup>th</sup> Chicago was steaming, the culmination of a heat wave that saw high temperatures hovering around 95 degrees. The temperature reached 96 degrees that afternoon, 14 above average, and it was time to launch the wooden raft Harris and his four friends had built. At the same time the boys set sail, “the fury of racial hatred had just erupted” at



the 29<sup>th</sup> Street beach (Tuttle 1996:5). A determined group of four African Americans violated custom when they entered the ‘whites-only’ waterfront space. White men ordered them away, but it was not long before they returned with a large group of reinforcements. The attacks began on the beach, first mainly with stone throwing. Eugene Williams remained in the water, despite the assaults whirling 30 yards away back at the beach: he “found a railroad tie and clung to it, stones meanwhile frequently striking the water near him” (Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922:4). As the boys’ raft floated along the water past the beach at 26<sup>th</sup> Street, a white man stood “on the edge of the breakwater about seventy-five feet” from where the raft was floating in the lake. The man was throwing stones at them: “He would take a rock and throw it, and we would duck it—this sort of thing,” recalled Harris. “As long as we could see him, he never could hit us, because after all a guy throwing that far is not likely a shot. And you could see the brick coming.” The white man stood hurling rocks for “several minutes.” To the boys, it was a game. One of them would say, ‘Look out, here comes one, and we would duck,’ says Harris. “It is not clear whether the rock thrower was playing the same game as the boys,” writes Tuttle, “or whether he was acting in angry retaliation against the black intrusion” (1996:6).

Eugene Williams had just burst out from beneath the water, his forehead dripping in the sun, when one of the other Williams boys yelled his name. Eugene swung his head, and “just as he turned his head this fellow threw [the rock] and it struck him,” Harris remembered. The rock hit Eugene on the forehead, and Harris knew right away something was wrong. He “just sort of relaxed,” Harris said, so he swam to his rescue, but “Eugene ‘grabbed by might ankle, and, hell, I got scared. I shook him off’” (Tuttle 1996:6). The boys raced to get a lifeguard, who “blew a whistle” and dispatched a boat to the area, but Eugene was not found for thirty minutes. His body was recovered from the lake floor. The white man throwing stones had disappeared down 29<sup>th</sup> Street. What transpired next—again, the behavior of third parties proves decisive in shaping the ultimate form racial collective violence will take—was a matter of police inattention to legitimate African-American grievances. The boys marched down 25<sup>th</sup> Street with an African-American officer, and around 29<sup>th</sup> they identified the man they believed was the rock thrower to Daniel Callahan, a white police officer on duty. But Callahan refused to arrest the young man; in fact, not only did he refuse to intervene, but he also refused to allow the black officer to arrest the white man. As the policemen argued, Harris and his friends “ran back to 25<sup>th</sup> Street and ‘told the colored people what was happening, and they started running this way,’ back toward 29<sup>th</sup>

Street. Officer Callahan “continued to ignore the exhortations of blacks to arrest the alleged murderer,” but he did arrest “a black man on the complaint of a white” (Tuttle 1996:7). And while the conflict between black Chicagoans and officer Callahan unfolded, rumors began to spread among blacks, as did rumor among whites.

Chicago’s long-awaited race riot had finally erupted. Several white men were beaten in clashes by the beach as the “Negro crowd from 29<sup>th</sup> Street got into action.” White men who came into the area were assaulted with “rocks, bricks, and other missiles” at the beach, along 29<sup>th</sup> Street, and eventually the fighting also spilled over to State Street. “Even white and colored women got into the mixup,” according to a report in *The New York Times*. “The screams and shouts of the rioters were heard as far south as Thirty-fifth Street, and soon bathers and spectators, white and black, swarmed in from all sides. Several took their fisticuffs into the lake and battled, while those on shore tossed stones. It was during this struggle that several are reported to have been drowned” (July 28 1919). As the afternoon wore on, “four white men were beaten, five were stabbed, and one was shot,” a level of black retaliation practically unheard of in any prior riot event—the most comparable being Black-initiated riot events in South Carolina during Reconstruction. And it certainly ignited a response from white Chicagoans. Darkness settled in, and African Americans living in white neighborhoods to the west were under assault: “Between 9:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m. twenty-seven Negroes were beaten, seven stabbed, and four shot,” notes the commission (1922:597). While African Americans “were armed and stood ready to defend themselves,” they did not engage “in armed forays into white neighborhoods, as marauding bands of whites would do to them, but by attempting to repulse the gangs that either invaded the territory of the black belt or threatened its peripheries” (Tuttle 1996:33-4).

Signs of the Great Migration first appeared in the city two years earlier in 1917. Rumor spread down South that Chicago’s Stock Yards needed 50,000 laborers, and since farm work paid between 75 cents a day—whereas industries in the North were paying laborers between \$3 and \$8 per day, with shorter hours, opportunity for overtime, and bonus pay—the city’s appeal is obvious (Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922:602). Economic opportunity ‘pulled’ southern blacks north following World War I, but myriad factors contributed to the migration: African-American illiteracy rates in the South were abysmal (33 percent for blacks compared to 7 percent for whites); living accommodations, while certainly inferior to those for whites, represented an upgrade over plantation cabins; a “lack of protection from mob violence, injustice

in the courts, inferior transportation facilities, deprivation of the right to vote, ‘rough handed and unfair competition of poor whites,’ ‘persecution by petty officers of the law,’ and ‘persecution by the press’” were the main reasons migrants cited for making the trek north (1922:603).

The railroad network played a prominent role in conditioning the city for racial violence. Employment opportunities were everywhere and in great number, especially during the war, and talk of migration spread through African-American communication networks all over the south. Blacks from Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Alabama, and Texas flooded into Chicago, whose “massive railroad network” made it “the most accessible destination” for many African Americans (Tuttle 1996:85). Between 1916 and 1918 alone nearly half a million African Americans came north, and Chicago represented “the Promised Land” for many fleeing conditions in the South. As Tuttle notes, “To Southern blacks Chicago was not only a city; it was a state of mind” (1996:76). Chicago’s African-American population grew from about 44,000 in 1910 to nearly 110,000 in 1920, yet black residents still composed just 4 percent of the city’s 2.7 million residents. Chicago was a “direct line for migrants from the South, especially along the Mississippi Valley,” explained the Chicago Commission on Race Relations. The city received more than 65,000 immigrants, constituting an increase in the African American population of 148.6 percent (1922:602). Chicago had far more European migration than did East St. Louis. Thirty percent of the city’s population was foreign born; it had “nearly as many Germans as Dresden, one-third as many Bohemians as Prague, half as many Irish as Belfast, and half as many Scandinavians as Stockholm” (McWhirter 2011:115).

Racial segregation in housing played a significant factor in shaping the form of collective violence to erupt in Chicago. Between 1910 and 1920, the population of the black community living on the South Side nearly tripled, “rising from 34,335 to 92,501, which was close to 90 per cent of Chicago’s black population. None of Chicago’s blacks in 1910 had lived in a census tract that was more than 75 per cent Negro; in 1920, 35.7 per cent of the black population did” (Tuttle 1996:163). Growing segregation meant “a paucity of social interchange between the races,” writes Tuttle: “Consequently, there was a decided lack of interracial understanding, and even then observers warned of the creation of two separate worlds in the cities, one black, one white. Whites had long before stereotyped blacks, and Chicago’s newspapers perpetuated these stereotypes in their portrayals of blacks” (1996:103-4). White resentment and hatred is evident in the growing number of firebombing incidents against African American residences; in the two

years preceding the riot, “no fewer than twenty-six bombs were exploded at isolated black residences in once all-white neighborhoods and at offices of certain realtors who had sold to blacks” (Tuttle 1996:159; also see McWhirter 2011:122).

When the United States entered the war in 1917, all home construction came to a grinding halt in Chicago, but African-American migration continued to increase. “A housing shortage resulted,” writes Joseph Bougere of the Illinois Writers’ Project. “White communities began to complain of ‘encroachments,’” and white realtors “moved to curb the expansion of the Negro community. They argued that Negro occupancy depreciated property values. Arrangements were made to keep certain sections of the South Side ‘lily white’” (Dolinar 2013:158). A study performed by the University of Chicago shows the extent of exploitation in housing costs by race and ethnicity: “Bohemians and Poles were paying \$8.50 per week for certain apartments and Jews \$10.50, while Negroes were charged \$12.00 to \$12.50 per week for similar quarters in dilapidated houses bordering the vice district. Rents to colored tenants were now increased from 5 to 30 percent. In some cases, the newcomers paid \$40 per unit for apartments that had been formerly rented to whites for \$20” (Dolinar 2013:158).

Chicago also had ethnic gangs with names like “Reagan’s Colts” and “Our Flag Club” battling for turf on its South Side, and on Sunday, July 27, during the opening explosion of violence, members drew boundary lines against what they viewed as African American encroachment upon their neighborhood. “The territory west of Wentworth Avenue and extending south from 43<sup>rd</sup> to 63<sup>rd</sup> Street” belonged to the Colts, warned one gang member. “We intend to run this district. Lookout” (Tuttle 1996:32-3). Whites had restricted African Americans from accessing Chicago’s open green space; the white athletic social clubs “played the biggest role in driving blacks away from parks” (Fisher 2006:67). In 1913, for example, “a gang of white boys attacked nineteen black boys and a YMCA official as they left Armour Square Park.” In 1915, “white youths attacked a group led by a black priest from St. Thomas Episcopal Church that had come to Armour Square to play basketball. At Ogden Park, white gangs routinely attacked black visitors.” Collin Fisher notes that when it comes to control of outdoor recreational space, white gangs “frequently attacked blacks in Washington Park, especially at the baseball diamonds and boathouse” (2006:67). And they even controlled access to the waters of Lake Michigan. In 1913 the Juvenile Protective Association noted that “a little boy’s efforts to enter the water at Thirty-ninth Street Beach had resulted in mob action by white bathers and a riot call”: “Starting in 1913,

projectile-throwing white gangs made it impossible for the black YMCA to escort children to the lake,” they explained. At the Johnson Park Beach, “a white crowd dunked and nearly drowned a black boy whom they accused of ‘polluting the water.’ During the summer of 1918, the *Defender* reported that ‘a gang of white ruffians’ was patrolling the shore between Twenty-ninth and Thirty-third Streets, trying to ‘prevent Race people from bathing in the lake’” (Fisher 2006:68). City officials then began to designate “exclusive black parks”; they hired an African-American lifeguard for the “unattractive Twenty-fifth Street Beach” and “informally designated the spot as a black beach.” Fisher speculates, with good reason, that white officials “no doubt hoped that the creation of a few black parks and beaches would serve as a device to limit black encroachment on ‘white’ outdoor recreational amenities” (2006:68).

Blacks were systematically excluded from union membership in Chicago. The numbers are striking. In July 1919 when the riot began, 90 percent of whites working the stockyards were unionized; conversely, “three fourths of the black workers, or 9,000 people, were *still outside* the labor movement” (Tuttle 1996:142). “Most unions in Chicago in 1919 probably had no black members at all,” observes Tuttle (1996:143). Of Chicago’s 110 unions representing the American Federation of Labor (AFL), 37 “either excluded black men and women or refused to integrate them into the locals” (1996:144). Chicago’s plumbers’ union “restricted membership by license law”; that is, the union required a license for membership, but “union members sitting on city and state examination boards refused to license black plumbers” (1996:143). There were 15 other “major unions outside of the AFL” in Chicago, and 13 of them, all “all transportation unions, raised the color bar in their constitutions” (1996:144). In a time of rapid industrial expansion, African Americans were systematically excluded from the economic and social benefits of union membership in Chicago, one of the nation’s primary manufacturing engines.

### *Second Day*

Chicago was quiet on Monday morning, but by late afternoon racial violence reignited as African Americans were attacked on their way home from work. “Street-car routes were the centers of lawlessness. Trolleys were pulled from their wires, and Negro passengers were dragged into the street, beaten, stabbed, and shot,” reports the Chicago Commission. “The police were powerless to cope with these numerous assaults” (Chicago Race Riot Commission 1922:597). In East St. Louis we saw white rioters target streetcars and designated streetcar stops along main thoroughfares. The logic was simple: African-American laborers used the cars to commute, thus

providing an ideal staging ground for the rituals of disciplinary violence to unfold. The violence in Chicago followed a similar logic: white rioters waited on street corners “near the gateways to the stockyards” for unsuspecting victims (Tuttle 1996:36). The main areas of violence were the thoroughfares and natural highways between job and home,” according to the Chicago Commission. The “most turbulent corners” were those on State Street, between Thirty-first and Thirty-ninth; on Cottage Grove Avenue at Sixty-third Street; on Halsted Street, between Thirty-fifth and Forty-seventh streets; and on Archer Avenue at Thirty-fifth Street (1922:9-10). By early afternoon “white men gathered in groups and stoned, stabbed, or shot at lone colored men wherever they appeared,” reported *The New York Times*. “The negroes, in retaliation, formed gangs and began to stab, shoot, and throw missiles at automobiles, street cars, or wagons containing white men” (July 29, 1919).

At 35<sup>th</sup> Street and State Street, “no fewer than 4,000” black folks had gathered in anticipation. Rumor was “that an army of whites was assembling preparatory to an invasion of the black belt.” A 60-year-old peddler named Casmero Lazeroni “innocently steered his horse-drawn wagon into 36<sup>th</sup> Street from State. Within seconds he was in the midst of the angry mob, which hurled stones at the elderly man before dragging him from his cart and stabbing him to death. Mobs that night also murdered a white laundryman and a white shoemaker.” It’s unclear from Tuttle’s description whether any of these white men posed any threat as they ventured into the black community; certainly it does not appear that Lazeroni would have presented much of a threat, but given the intense racial hatred many whites harbored for African Americans, those blacks who attacked him may have assumed he had violent intentions venturing into their neighborhood during the riot event. Throughout the evening “carloads of whites sped through the streets of the black belt” firing promiscuously into the houses of African Americans (Tuttle 1996:40). Students and war veterans were posted on guard around the YMCA at Wabash Avenue, between 37<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> streets. Black residents retaliated with sniper fire: “crouched on fire escapes and peering out windows, they waited,” writes Tuttle. Then, according to A. L. Jackson, the YMCA’s director, several ‘cars came through, and they came directly east and turned north on Wabash.’ The cars were shooting as they tore down the strip. ‘My boys, of course, returned the fire,’ noted Jackson. “Snipers fired at practically every vehicle speeding through the black belt, not only at potentially-hostile automobiles but even at the ambulances and hearses carting away the injured and dead” (Tuttle 1996:40). This development is significant for

classifying the riot's form—the black community *repulsed* white-initiated collective violence but did not do their own *invading*. Black self-defense is evident, but proactive black-initiated collective violence is not part of riot's social structure. Sniper fire was a feature of African-American riot defense present in Springfield (briefly, at the outset in the shootout at the Badlands) but not in East St. Louis. It was *retaliatory* violence, thus in its form this kind of black violence was reactive rather than proactive. Were African Americans to attack selected targets (i.e., white folks and/or their property), the violence would have developed a new form or shape in its social structure—that of proactive racial violence, a kind of collective behavior that goes beyond both self-defense and retaliatory violence.

There is some evidence that African Americans began to engage in proactive racial violence during the rioting in Chicago. At about 7:30 p.m. on Monday evening, two automobiles carrying eleven African Americans drove down Wentworth Avenue, near Forty-seventh Street. “The men were brandishing guns and threatening pedestrians,” and an unverified report alleged the group had shot a white man at Forty-fifth Street and Wentworth Avenue. At 34<sup>th</sup> Street, African Americans “pulled down the trolley of a street car and beat Frank L. Webb, cashier of the Central Manufacturing District Bank, cutting his head with a stone.” If reports such as these were indeed true—and there is no reason to believe reports of black resistance are not accurate—then the Chicago ‘race riot’ of 1919 could be called a *reciprocal riot* based upon the framework offered here. African Americans resisted white disciplinary violence with counter strikes, and in some cases, with assaults targeting whites. “There was no concerted battle by the blacks, the outbreaks dotting a large area,” reports *The Times*. “Whites began dragging negroes from street cars; the negroes retaliated with stones and knives. Street cars in the heart of the ‘black belt’ were tied up and windows smashed. A white man a Thirty-fifth Street was dragged from a truck and stabbed to death.” Black violence further evolved, and African Americans “began looting stores of whites in one district” shortly after a squad of policemen fired revolvers “in an effort to break up a fight over a small purchase of groceries.” Groups of young black men “formed in football fashion and charged against whites with razors and clubs,” and one corner, “the scene was like a miniature battleground. Unconscious negroes and whites dotted the street.” As in the New York Draft Riot of 1863, rioters began targeting communication lines: “In an effort to prevent quick dispatch of rifle-bearing policemen from one section to another, the negroes began cutting telephone and telegraph wires,” according to *The New York Times* (July 29 1919).

Two black men were walking along Wabash Avenue on Monday evening in front of the Angelus Hotel, at 35<sup>th</sup> Street. A brick crashed into the pavement, just missing the men, and for a moment, time slowed. Then another brick collided with the pavement, and soon, white men from the upper stories of the hotel were launching missiles at the two men below. Rumor spread “that a white tenant had fired a shot from the Angelus, wounding a black boy,” writes Tuttle. “The fact that no one had actually seen or heard the shot did not deter a mob of blacks from storming the building” (1996:41). Three hundred African Americans gathered outside and ‘stormed’ the white-occupied apartment complex; this violence, motivated by a perceived white assault, was therefore retaliatory in form (not proactive). In contrast, white mobs raged throughout the city initiating violence—this is the critical element of the riot’s social structure and why the riot event is disciplinary in its form. One such white mob happened to cross paths with Lieutenant Louis C. Washington, a black war veteran, who was walking with his wife and two other couples on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street; they were on their way from the theater when Washington heard the whites: “I heard a yell, ‘One, two, three, four, five, six,’ and then they gave a loud cheer, ‘Everybody, let’s get the niggers! Let’s get the niggers.’” Washington must have realized pretty quickly that the count was of their group. The whites ‘crossed the street and walked on up even with us,’ he recalled. Suddenly they were under attack from six white men, some with guns and some brandishing knives. Lieutenant “Washington was stabbed, but before he fell, he plunged his knife into the breast of one of his assailants,” writes Tuttle. The white youth “died before an ambulance could transport him to the hospital” (1996:42). This case illustrates the basic social structure of the riot event on Monday: white-initiated violence is proactive and disciplinary in form while black violence is retaliatory, even if the provocation for violence proves unfounded.

Mayor Thompson asked Governor Lowden to mobilize the Illinois State militia. By Monday evening, 3,500 soldiers arrived for duty, stationed at Chicago’s armories “in or near the black belt.” The troops were not mobilized into action, however. Thompson continued to rely on his police officers: “Undermanned in the first place, the city’s police force now had over 80 per cent of its men stationed in or around the black belt, leaving violence to rage unrestrained in almost every other district of the city” (Tuttle 1996:42). Tuttle argues that “a well-disciplined military troop might have proved to be less biased in its enforcement of the law than a police force with a long history of hostility toward blacks,” and he’s undoubtedly correct in his assessment, as long as those soldiers are *well disciplined* and not active participants, like some



troops were in East St. Louis. Regardless, Mayor Thompson did not order the troops into action on Monday night, July 28, 1919. Seventeen people died and more than 172 were injured during the second day of violence, and the racial violence continued into Tuesday.

The Loop, Chicago's central business district, was named for the elevated railway loop that encircled the area, constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bounded on the north and west by the Chicago River, on the east by Lake Michigan, and on the south by Roosevelt Road, the commercial core was a major center of violence during the riot that July. Young white men, "many of whom were soldiers and sailors seventeen to twenty-two years old, began to hunt for blacks in the downtown district." Predatory attacks were not a new development in the riot's form; what was new was the location, the business district, and instrumental violence in terms of acquiring property. "Wherever they were spotted—in railroad stations, restaurants, hotels—black men and boys were dragged into the streets and beaten insensible or shot. Often the motive was not only inflamed racial hatred but also robbery and vandalism," explains Tuttle. White soldiers and sailors in uniform "raided the 'Loop' business section, killing two Negroes and beating and robbing several others," reported the Chicago Commission on Race Relations. On the West Side a mob composed of Italian immigrants killed Joseph Lovings, an African American rumored to have shot an Italian girl. African Americans living in Englewood in the South Side were "driven from their homes, their household goods were stolen, and their houses were burned or wrecked." (1922:597). And still the troops remained in the armory.

Governor Lowden issued a press statement, noting that although soldiers "were in the armories ready for action, he could not order them out until Thompson had asked for their services. 'We will act on the advices of the mayor,' explained Adjutant General Dickson" (Tuttle 1996:46). The mayor had yet to act, however, and during the first two days of rioting, 136 whites and 266 blacks were treated for injuries (1996:47). The death toll reached 31, yet "the governor and the mayor had as yet evinced no willingness to cooperate," writes Tuttle. "They maintained separate command posts, and seldom conferred, if at all" (1996:50). Leadership and institutional organization prove crucial once any riot event erupts. Individuals make (or fail to make) decisions that prove critical for hundreds (if not thousands) of people. When actors at the micro level fail to mobilize forces at the meso-level of social structure (i.e., local police, state militia, and/or federal troops) the consequences may prove catastrophic. The interplay of state actors during the Chicago riot of 1919 is further evidence of the role leadership must play if massive

casualties and destruction are to be avoided. The rioting regained its force once nightfall came Tuesday evening in the Black Belt and stockyards district, and it “continued with unabated fury during the greater part” of Wednesday.

### *Third and Fourth Days*

Racial violence “spread into the Loop with the dawn.” Crowds of shouting whites were “thrust out of the Black Belt by the blacks and the police,” rushed into the business district. “They found the Loop in confusion, due to the streetcar strike, with the streets crowded with vehicles and thousands of pedestrians, but few policemen. The Loop was theirs to riot in and they went looking for victims. Before noon two negroes were killed, and many were injured.” Black folks who lived in the Stock Yards district were fleeing their homes for the Black Belt, and many others were reported to be escaping the city entirely: “Bands of negroes were to be seen at the railroad depots, preparing to flee the city. Every train that left Chicago yesterday carried many of them, men, women, and children, some of them carrying little bundles of household articles,” according to *The New York Times* (July 30 1919).

Violence even erupted on the North Side, “where nearly 5,000 whites hunted down black people in the streets,” according to Tuttle (1996:50). African Americans attacked automobiles carrying whites during the day, often by throwing stones; several “received severe injuries” as a result of these attacks, according to *The Times*. Black World War I veterans banded together in uniform, several of them even wearing medals commemorating their valor. They “toured the streets, shooting sporadically,” even firing on a “truck load of girls.” More than twenty black men and four black women “barricaded themselves in a South State Street building and fired on all white passers-by, until arrested” (July 30, 1919). At Fifty-first and Halsted streets, “whites hanged a negro in effigy” on Wednesday evening. Another group of whites also committed a lynching, and though it did not involve a noose, the gruesome scene did result in murder. Shortly after 9:00 p.m., a 28-year-old African American was riding his bicycle along Lyttle Street. The unidentified black male was “stabbed and then shot sixteen times,” explains *The Times*; incredibly, the paper provides only a brief account of what transpired next: “When the unfortunate man fell from his bicycle apparently dead, some of the rioters poured gasoline over his body, which was then set on afire.” Policemen rushed to the scene and extinguished the flames, but no arrests were made (July 30 1919).

By Thursday, telephone and electric wires had been cut, plunging the city into total darkness—an ideal staging ground for marauders. The Black Belt had been in “a state of siege”: on every corner stood an armed policeman, and beyond the zoned district, armed whites waited to assault any African American who might venture beyond. “A second attempt by rioting whites to burn a negro home was successful today when a two-frame house in Englewood, far south of the main Black Belt, was burned to the ground,” reported *The New York Times* (July 31, 1919). No one was injured in the blaze, though several African-American families resided in the building at the time of arson, and all fled from the premises. At the Blackstone Hotel, Governor Lowden was in a conference with his advisers when they heard the “yells of angry white men” from the street below. The governor looked out from a hotel window to find “a hundred men turn out of Congress Street into Wabash Avenue in pursuit of a yelling negro.” A mounted policeman arrived in time to block their path and, using his horse and shield, the mob was held at bay until a patrol wagon made the scene (NYT July 31, 1919). Mayor Thompson had not requested the militia until the night before, July 30, by which time more than 30 persons had been killed and more than 500 injured. Houses occupied by African Americans were set on fire and destroyed.

Illinois state soldiers began to patrol the streets around 9:00 p.m. that night as Governor Lowden finally called for reinforcements. Widespread panic reigned as the Black Belt burned: firefighters responded to 112 alarms on the South Side, “most of them from negro settlements,” reported *The Times*. “Incendiarism by whites was charged by the police in many cases, especially in a blaze tonight which destroyed a half dozen houses” (July 31, 1919). White rioters even threw bricks in an effort to prevent firemen from extinguishing the burning homes of African Americans. By 10:00 p.m., 6,200 troops spread through the city between 18<sup>th</sup> Street and 55<sup>th</sup> streets and Wentworth and Indiana avenues. ‘Use butts and bayonets—fire as a last resort. Try to placate the crowd, but stand firm on enforcing orders. Draw no color line—a white rioter is as dangerous as a Negro rioter and must be handled with the same brand of firmness’ (July 31, 1919; see also Tuttle 1996:55). With these instructions, the militia went to work, especially on the athletic clubs; by midnight, with the arrival of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Regiments of the Illinois Reserve Militia, increased the military presence in the city to approximately 7,000 soldiers, according to the Adjutant General. Late in the evening rain began to fall, causing many to flee the streets for cover. The violence would never regain its steam. Order had been restored in Chicago—except for the stockyards, where assaults upon black workers continued on Thursday.

Between 7:00 a.m. and noon on Thursday morning there were 36 fires, all the result of arson. This “wholesale incendiarism” was one of the “principal reasons” Governor Lowden cited for calling the state militia to Chicago: “A plot to set fire to negro houses in the Black Belt was uncovered by the police, the Mayor said” (NYT August 1, 1919). The violence began to settle from that point, with the exception of a major eruption early Saturday morning, when arsonists “fired the ramshackle dwellings of Polish and Lithuanian laborers” in a neighborhood to the west of the stockyards (Tuttle 1996:60). The blaze left 948 immigrants homeless, and the property damage totaled \$250,000 (Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922:597). Blacks were blamed for the attack, but the evidence suggests the attackers may have performed their work in blackface to ensure African Americans felt the backlash to come.

### *Instrumental White Violence*

The death toll in the Chicago riot of 1919 was far more evenly distributed by race than either the Springfield or East St. Louis ‘race riots.’ Police officers “fatally wounded seven black men during the riot,” but Chicago police did not fatally wound any white men; angry mobs “brutally murdered an additional sixteen blacks and fifteen whites, and well over 500 Chicagoans of both races had sustained injuries” (Tuttle 1996:10). In two weeks of violence, 38 people were killed, 23 of whom were African American. The “longest period of violence without noticeable lull” occurred between 9:00 a.m. on Monday and 9:00 a.m. Tuesday; arson became “prevalent on Tuesday for the first time, and the property loss was considerable,” reports the Chicago Commission. “But judging by the only definite index, the number of dead and injured, Monday exceeded Tuesday in violence. While it is apparent that no single hour or even day can be called the peak of the riot, the height of violence clearly falls within the two-day period, Monday, July 28, and Tuesday, July 29” (1922:9). There were three main periods of violence: Sunday at 4:00 p.m. to Monday at 3:00 a.m.; Monday at 9:00 a.m. until Tuesday at 9:00 a.m.; and Tuesday at 12:00 p.m. until midnight Wednesday. More than 537 people were injured—and Black Americans accounted for 342 of those injuries (1922:667).

The most intense rioting occurred in the district west of Wentworth Avenue and in the Stock Yards district, south of the Chicago River to Fifty-fifth Street; it was here that the “greatest number of injuries occurred,” according to the Chicago Commission. The so-called ‘Black Belt’ produced the next greatest number of injuries (1922:601). Law enforcement was “worse than nonexistent,” writes Tuttle. “Many police and militiamen, rather than try to quell the violence,

worked in collusion with white mobs in their quest to ‘get a nigger.’ State troops fraternized and joked with lawbreaking whites, and many were seen helping in the murders and arson” (1996:13). Even though African Americans suffered the most in terms of deaths and injuries, they were also arrested by the police at twice the rate of whites, prompting one skeptical white judge to declare: ‘I want to explain to you [police] officers that these colored people could not have been rioting among themselves. Bring me some white prisoners”’ (Tuttle 1996:64).

The Chicago riot did not take the form of a ‘pogrom,’ unlike the violence in East St. Louis. Blacks and whites fought each other in Chicago giving the violence a bi-directional form. “To be sure, whites invaded the black belt,” writes Tuttle, “but they usually did so hurriedly, in automobiles, and they often encountered retaliation by sniper fire.” Tuttle does not make the distinction between retaliatory (e.g., sniper shooting) violence and proactive violence, however; I argue that distinction is critical, for in future riots, the social structure of racial violence evolves to include black-initiated collective violence. Tuttle does not that in Chicago, 41 percent of the clashes “occurred in the predominantly white district of the stockyards,” while 34 percent took place in the black belt (1996:65)

# Part II

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# Black Rebellion

# **Chapter 5**

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# **Without Recourse**

## **Without Recourse: White Violence and the Prevention of Black Prosperity, 1913 – 1929**

They call it ‘whitecapping,’ the use of terrorism and torture to drive blacks out of their businesses or off their land, and it was openly conducted by officials like North Carolina governor Daniel Russell, who proclaimed in 1900 that for a black man ‘to get above his ordained station in life is to invite assassination.’ If they didn’t die, whitecapped blacks at the very least lost all they owned to mobs who drove them away, then stepped in and seized the abandoned property at discount rates.

- Michael D’Orso, *Like Judgment Day* (1996:53)

African Americans had few options for challenging white discrimination and racism in the South during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—but they *could* just up and leave the South altogether. And in the act of leaving, black folks “rejected the sharecropping system and its abuses, first gradually throughout the 1890s, then by the millions during World War I,” writes historian Kevin Gaines. “The wartime mass migration of blacks from the U.S. South, joined by migrants from the West Indies, created the conditions for a militant, black diasporic ‘New Negro’ race consciousness that challenged uplift ideology’s accommodation to the racial and economic status quo” (Gaines 1996:11). In 1910 the U.S. Census showed that “blacks were overwhelmingly rural and Southern; approximately three out of four lived in rural areas and nine out of ten lived in the South” (Meier and Rudwick 1976:232). Between 1900 and 1910 the African-American population saw “large percentage increases” in cities like “Birmingham (215 percent) and Atlanta (45 percent). New York City had a gain of 51 percent, while Philadelphia and Chicago each reported increases of more than 30 percent” (Meier and Rudwick 1976:233-4).

World War I provided a “stimulus for the mass migration that fashioned a socially ambitious and increasingly culturally diverse black industrial proletariat. Between 1914 and 1920 an estimated 400,000 to 1 million blacks left the South to work in northern industries, filling a labor shortage created by the war’s restriction of immigration” (Gaines 1996:234). Economic crisis was a central factor precipitating mass migration. Several “converging factors” churned an exodus of African Americans out of the South. Cotton crops were already “suffering from the ravages of the boll weevil,” which came to the U.S. from Mexico, then in 1915 disastrous floods in Alabama and Mississippi increased the misery of hundreds of thousands of rural Blacks. At the same time, Northern industry, fed by demands from the Allies in Europe, greatly needed unskilled and semiskilled labor” (Meier and Rudwick 1976:235).



The number of African-American professionals was “extremely small” at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1900 approximately 80,000, or about 1.2 percent “of the gainfully employed population,” were listed in professional occupations. By 1910, “though their numbers more than doubled during the decade,” only 2.5 percent of employed African Americans living in the south and 3 percent of employed blacks in the north listed as professionals; and even “this number included many ministers and teachers who lacked a college, or even a high school education. Yet this tiny group, as Du Bois emphasized, played a crucial leadership role” (Meier 1968:207). During World War I “a new Negro businessman” emerged, and a group economy developed in conjunction with the protest orientation of the radicals (Meier 1968:259). The “newer type of business enterprise and the expansion of the black entrepreneurial and professional group were evident in the changing nature of the Negro class structure,” writes Meier and Rudwick. “In general, between about 1890 and the 1920s the forces of segregation and discrimination were instrumental in creating a *petite bourgeoisie* of professionals and businessmen almost completely dependent for their livelihood on the black masses.” These African Americans “formed an ambitious, striving middle class, and the more successful among them were achieving upper-class status before the First World War,” write Meier and Rudwick. “The process occurred at different rates and times in different cities, most markedly in those communities where the largest in-migration and residential segregation were taking place” (1976:217).

Residential segregation “still rare in the older seaboard towns” of the South during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to historian C. Vann Woodward (2002:100). Southern cities only began passing residential segregation ordinances in 1910: Baltimore, New Orleans, Louisville, Atlanta, Augusta, and Richmond all had some form of residential segregation enacted by law before the Supreme Court declared the practice unconstitutional in 1917 (Meier and Rudwick 1976). The Supreme Court declared such devices unconstitutional in 1917, but “attempts continued to be made to circumvent the decision,” and restrictive covenants were likely the most effective of the new devices (Woodward 2002:101). Yet, as Woodward explains, “it is well to admit, and even to emphasize, that *laws are not an adequate index of the extent and prevalence of segregation and discriminatory practices in the South*. The practices often anticipated and sometimes exceeded the laws.” Indeed, there is “more Jim Crowism practiced in the South than there are Jim Crow laws on the books” (2002:102; emphasis in original).

Woodrow Wilson's administration marks a devastating fault line, a point of rupture that had incendiary consequences for American race relations: "In 1913, Wilson established segregation in federal office buildings. Throughout his administration, he effectively condoned outbreaks of racial violence with federal nonintervention. He ordered racist military interventions in the Dominican Republic and Haiti that effectively turned those Caribbean nations into plantations controlled by U.S. bankers and corporations. In November 1914, President Wilson finally agreed to meet with William Monroe Trotter. The two men essentially argued for 45 minutes, according to Gaines. 'Have you a 'new freedom' for white Americans and a new slavery for your African-American fellow citizens,' Trotter asked Wilson. "The confrontation made the front pages of both black and white newspapers, and it marked Wilson's first public admission of personal involvement in the policy" (Gaines 1996:215). Trotter's meeting demonstrated "the increasing militancy of black leadership," and after Booker T. Washington's death in 1915, the NAACP emerged "as the preeminent race organization." The organization focused on "public education and the exposure of lynchings." After the East St. Louis race riot in 1917, the NAACP campaigned for federal anti-lynching legislation (known as the Dyer Bill because it was introduced by Congressman Leonidus Dyer of Missouri). Gaines notes that as racial violence spread throughout the United States in the World War I era, black resistance helped drive a shift in African-American culture: "crucial to the militant New Negro consciousness was the fact, widely reported in the black press, that blacks fought back against their persecutors" (1996:216). Then in 1915 he warmly endorsed the film epic *Birth of a Nation*, based on Thomas Dixon's anti-Reconstruction novel *The Clansman*" (Gaines 1996:215).

D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) was a cultural phenomenon, a volcano of a film with extraordinary cultural and social significance that further ruptured American race relations. According to Hale, in the film "blacks at last stand virtually alone responsible for the 'hell' of Reconstruction, and its repudiation creates not just national reconciliation but the birth of a new Anglo-Saxon nation as well. The black beast rapist, unlike the blurred figure of the slave/ex-slave, could have no place in twentieth-century southern life" (1998:79). As the film industry grew, especially in *Birth of a Nation*'s wake, so did "racialized imagery packaged for profit." Images of African Americans "joined the bodies of Native Americans and other people of color from around the globe as commodities" (Hale 1998:155). Historian Elizabeth Grace Hale describes these cultural productions: "Black-figured commodities waited silently and smiling to

entertain and assure their white owners. Whether playfully socializing children or humoring adults, Aunt Jemima and her friends signified and magnified whiteness with their uncomplicated subservience. And as importantly, black-figured commodities advertised themselves,” she writes. “This association of black figures with white service, from minstrel characters’ performances to Aunt Jemima’s smiling supply of pancakes, also permeated an expanding advertising industry’s increasingly sophisticated and subtle productions” (Hale 1998:161). Advertisers depicted African Americans as subservient on product labels; marketing strategies were geared toward whites as the “sovereign consumers” (Hale 1998:167). The stereotyping of African Americans in product advertising “helped create an increasingly national market for branded and mass-produced consumer products by constructing the consumer as white,” argues Hale. “And this, in turn, helped organize the one commonality that all white consumers shared regardless of their class, regional, religious, or gender positions: their racial privilege. Whiteness became the homogenizing ground of the American mass market” (1998:168).

World War I “aroused in the Negroes a new hope for restoration of their rights and a new militancy in demanding first-class citizenship,” writes Woodward. More than 360,000 African Americans enlisted for military service, “and a large part of those saw overseas duty in uniform” (2002:114). Many more joined the exodus for the North, seeking the higher wages paid by war industries. In the post-war generation the “mainspring of Negro life” was a strong ‘belief in the efficiency of collective effort, in race cooperation’ (Meier 1968:257). African-American communities swelled with “a rising tide of racial pride and solidarity” during the generation before World War I. Writing in 1913, W. E. B. Du Bois noted an “increase in racial consciousness and group solidarity.” African Americans were “gaining their own leaders, their own voices, their own ideals” (Meier 1968:270). The spirit was one of self-realization, a hallmark of the ‘New Negro’ during the 1920s.

#### FOUR DAYS OF TERROR IN ARKANSAS: BLACK BARGAINING POWER AND THE ELAINE MASSACRE OF 1919

Elaine is situated in the southern portion of Phillips County, a fertile cotton region with swamps and canebrakes located in eastern Arkansas, a place with unpaved roads were impassable for most of the year in 1919. The county had a large African-American community—out of a total population of over 44,000, only 11,000 were white—which further intensified white anxiety,

especially in early October, when the violence erupted. But Robert Hill and the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of American had been stoking hostility ever since its arrival in Phillips County. There was one particular problem nagging Phillips County planters—the need for “docile black labor,” which made the entire engine of progress possible. But the First World War had disrupted the traditional power structure: “Detroit and Chicago were beckoning with the promise of jobs, and blacks had left the South in droves,” writes Grif Stockley, a lawyer and scholar of the Elaine massacre. “Yet thousands of blacks were needed in Phillips County to bring in the white gold. If conditions became too harsh and violent in the Delta, blacks would continue to head north and stay, and all those thousands of acres of lovely, rich soil wouldn’t be worth a yard of manure” (2001:27). The old problem of disciplining black labor resurfaced once more.

Arkansas’ black folks had been doing some organizing. Yes sir, African Americans “outnumbered whites in many counties,” and they had been organizing for years, demanding “the land, equal pay, and voting rights that were promised them during Reconstruction” (Griffith 2018:40). By 1919, “a different kind of sharecropper had begun to emerge in Phillips County,” writes Stockley, and though these sharecroppers represented only “a small percentage of the total population,” they were often men who had fought in World War I, men who, now that they were back home, “expected to be treated differently and were not going to wait until the white man decided to change.” Escalating cotton prices also “encouraged rising expectations” among African Americans who, in increasing numbers, “were able to purchase their own farms, thus giving some an independence they had never dreamed of” (Stockley 2001:31). For many whites in Arkansas, it appeared as if the blacks of Phillips County were contemplating armed resistance; they “were daring to organize, even though they knew that such a thing was not going to be tolerated” (Whitaker 2008:73). White folks did not like African Americans organizing for rights-seeking purposes. It only fueled their anxiety relating to the nightmare whites feared most—that “disenchanted African Americans would rise up into full-blown insurrection.” And it was this fantasy, the idea that blacks would finally rise up and exterminate their former masters, “was used by whites to justify large-scale violence against blacks” (Griffith 2018:40). But in Phillips County, the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America was no fantasy; a black fraternal association organized with dues, by-laws, and even a constitution, the PFHUA embraced “a mission to mobilize their community into action” to better the lives of black farmers and their families “by seeking fair treatment, equal rights, and access to economic

independence,” writes Jones (2018:156). That last one was most important of all—these black folks represented a threat to the established sharecropping system in Arkansas. The ability of white property owners to freely exploit black labor was undermined by even the existence of such as organization, and Phillips County whites would respond in a manner they saw fit on the night of September 30, 1919.

Deputy sheriff Charles Pratt climbed into the Model T Ford shortly after 9:00 p.m. on Tuesday, September 30, 1919. He was joined by W. A. Adkins, one of his officers, and Kid Collins, an African-America prisoner from the county jail and ‘trusted’ helper of the deputy sheriff. Arkansas passed prohibition in 1917, its Bone-Dry Law closing many of Helena’s saloons, thus Pratt and his boys stopped at a friend’s house “where they could get some moonshine.” After staying for perhaps an hour, the men traveled down Route 44, “a miserable dirt road with potholes, making it impossible to drive more than 10 or 15 miles an hour. It was just before 11:00 p.m. when their Model T reached a small church located in Hoop Spur, three miles north of Elaine, located on the Missouri Pacific Railroad line. “They could see that the meeting was still in progress, a soft beam of yellow light pouring out from the church windows,” writes Robert Whitaker in his exceptional *On the Laps of Gods* (2008). Atkins pulled to a stop at a small bridge, approximately 40 yards north of the church, and cut the engine. “They waited for five or six minutes, their headlights off, and then all three men stepped from the car” (Whitaker 2008:81). Who fired first has been a matter of dispute ever since, but a gunfight erupted outside the church between law enforcement and the Progressive Farmers and Household Union.

T. K. Jones reached the Model T parked on the side of the road at around 4:00 a.m. After receiving a phone call from deputy sheriff Dick Dalzell, Jones called Henry Smiddy; both men were Missouri Pacific special agents assigned to investigate ‘some shooting’ at Hoop Spur. “Jones was the first to reach the body lying next to the rear wheel. ‘He’s dead,’ he muttered, and then he and Smiddy turned the body over,” writes Whitaker (2008:86). W. A. Adkins had been shot in the stomach and the neck by a rifle or pistol. ‘It’s all shot to pieces—there must be 15 or 20 bullet holes through it,” another agent announced as he inspected the Model T. Later, as they walked around the pocketed wooden church, Smiddy and Jones found that the building “had been shot into from the north side.” Kid Collins apparently admitted the men came to the church “for the purpose of breaking up the meeting,” according to Smiddy. The three men had “stopped there in the road and Mr. Adkins begun shooting,” claimed Collins. “The Negroes returned the

fire and shooting became general” (2008:87), but as Whitaker notes, most of the sharecroppers who had fled the church “weren’t aware that the guards outside had returned the fire and killed a white man” (2008:89). Many of them went home and fell asleep in their beds, but by 4:00 a.m. Paul Hall began making the rounds, banging on the doors of where his fellow union members lived, “telling them to go to Frank Moore’s house. A dead white man meant more trouble was coming their way” (Whitaker 2008:89).

### *Second Day*

Ed Coleman awoke to the sound of gunfire shortly after dawn. ‘I saw about 200 white men in cars shooting down the Negroes,’ the seventy-nine-year old explained. He was home the night of September 30, and some of the union members stopped by his place; they wanted to let him know ‘about the white people shooting into the church on them.’ The cars kicked up dust and stones along the unpaved roads. Coleman left his wife at home and ran for the fields with the others: “we saw near 300 white armed men coming and we all ran back of the field and when we got back of the field there was a big crowd of white men shooting and killing Jim Miller’s family. We turned and went to the railroad” (Stockley 2001:51).

Henry Smiddy may have been a “weak and pitiable lower-class white,” but in his decision to turn witness, he provided testimony that implicated himself and others. Between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m. on October 1<sup>st</sup> “a great many people from Helena and other portions of Phillips County, and from surrounding counties,” began pouring into Elaine; according to Smiddy’s ten-page affidavit, “quite a large number of them, several hundred of them,” came “to hunt negroes.” His posse “marched down the thicket in the southwest,” he saw “about five or six negroes come out unarmed, holding up their hands and some of them running and trying to get away. They were shot down and killed by members of the posse. I didn’t see a single negro [sic] during all the man hunt that was armed, and I didn’t see a single negro fire a shot.” Armed whites from Mississippi joined the massacre as well: “They shot and killed men, women, and children without regard to whether they were guilty or innocent of any connection with the killing of anybody, or whether members of the union or not,” recalled Smiddy. “Negroes were killed time and time again out in the fields picking cotton, harming nobody” (Stockley 2001:46).

Charles Young was driving from Helena to Elaine along Route 44. Young was publisher of the *Helena World*, and along with two other reporters he reached Hoop Spur around 10:00 a.m. Black men, women, and children were gathered along the side of the road, “emerging from

the woods or their cabins, all of them frightened and waiting for the troops to rescue them.” This did not appear like a ‘negro insurrection’ to Young: ‘I saw several hundred niggers along side the road. I didn’t know what they were doing or who they were, so I put my foot on the gas and got over the road as soon as possible,’ he explained. ‘Later I found out that the niggers gathered there were innocent and scared of their lives too’ (Whitaker 2008:110). Colonel Jenks, the commander of the Camp Pike military unit—a force composed of “five hundred men from rifle companies and fifty troops from a machine gun squad—gathered his men on a train to Elaine, loaded with “six liberty trucks, two ambulances, two motorcycles with sidecars, and twelve machine guns, along with a ‘sufficient supply of ammunition to quiet the situation no matter how serious’ (Whitaker 2008:106).

Early Wednesday morning two posses of white men converged, one led by Herbert Thompson and the other a group from Elaine. “Both groups had seen the blacks running into the slough to hide, and Thompson had ordered the men to get on both sides of the ditch so that there would be no chance that the blacks could escape,” explains Whitaker. “As they followed the slough southwest, five or six blacks came ‘out unarmed, holding up their hands and some of them running and trying to get away,’ Smiddy said. ‘They were shot down killed’ (2008:91-2). As the posse marched through the thicket, Smiddy spotted movement behind a bush near Jim Miller’s house. ‘When I shot him, he was not trying to shoot anybody and didn’t have a gun,’ Smiddy admitted. The boy was “shot through the chin, the bullet lodged in the back of his neck.” Henry Bernard claimed to have seen ‘six or eight’ dead African Americans” (Whitaker 2008:92). White men were arriving every hour, more than 500 before the killing had ended, from towns in eastern Arkansas and Mississippi. Eager to slaughter black sharecroppers and silence their alleged uprising, these men arrived by train in Helena and headed south for Elaine. Smiddy describes his experience with these out-of-towners: “During that afternoon, October 1, 1919, a crowd of men came from Mississippi and began the indiscriminate hunting down, shooting, and killing of Negroes. They shot and killed men, women, and children without regard to whether they were guilty or innocent of any connection with the killing of anybody, or whether members of the union or not,” he admitted. “Negroes were killed time and time again out in the fields picking cotton, harming nobody.” (Whitaker 2008:99). One band of twelve men from Mississippi traveled across the river, armed with “eleven guns and an ax,” which they used against any African American they encountered.

But like the murders that took place in Elaine, “the gunning down of blacks along this 20-mile stretch of road, between Helena and Wabash, is only sparsely documented”; in the days to come, “a veil of public silence descended” in southern Arkansas, but the whites were not through (Whitaker 2008:98-9). Black families hid in the canebreaks that night, both in the woods west of Elaine and in the Yellow Banks Bayou, east of Route 44. “The rivercane was 20 to 25 feet in height, so dense in spots that the sharecroppers had to turn sideways to squeeze through the bamboo-like cane stems. It was wet in there, mud giving way to swamp, and this was where Nina Jenkins and her family had come. So too Ed and Frank Hicks, and John Martin and Alf Banks, and Will Wordlow. ‘I had eight women and children with me to hide, keep them from getting killed,’ Wordlow said.” At dawn the posses were expected to continue their hunt.

### *Third Day*

The train carrying the troops from Camp Pike arrived at the Elaine depot on the morning of October 2, shortly after 8:00. Upon debarking from the train, leadership was met by a “committee of civilians” who explained the situation at hand, according to a military intelligence report produced by Captain Edward Passailaigue,: “the negroes of the surrounding country had assembled and were killing the whites whenever they ventured out to their farms. The white population had armed themselves as best they could and were assembled at Elaine, the Negroes holding the woods around the town [sic] and preventing them from getting out.” This assessment was “almost completely inaccurate,” as Stockley notes; though the captain wrote the report on October 7, at no point did he acknowledge that information received from the committee of civilians was, in fact, proven false (2001:61). In his effort to secure the area, Colonel Jenks positioned a machine gun on the roof of the Elaine Mercantile Building, the town’s tallest, and “from that perch he peered through binoculars at the battle scene off in the distance.” From the looks of it, Jenks thought his troops “might need some help,” so a number of white men were deputized and armed by various shotguns, rifles, and pistols donated by local hardware merchants (Whitaker 2008:108-09). He directed four companies to march to Hoop Spur, three miles to the north, where there were reports of a gun battle raging. Jenks ordered another detachment to remain in Elaine and “begin the process of disarming the civilian population, both black and white.” Jenks made no mention of how this was accomplished in his report, however.

Frances Hall was the first black person the military encountered, motionless on her doorstep. She was “barely alive, shot through the neck several hours before,’ according to Jenks,



and though medical attention was given, 'she died shortly afterwards.' White posses had likely "killed at least four other blacks along this road," according to Whitaker, and most likely many more, "given that the shooting had been going on for several hours." The sharecroppers had been under attack from heavily armed whites throughout the morning; now the military columns rolled down the street, more whites with rifles. Four black men, hiding in a thick patch of trees, suddenly rushed onto the street, and seeing military, they likely didn't think these were men there to protect them: "they frantically fired off a couple of shots as they fled down the road," writes Whitaker, and although the shots had missed their mark, the troops and Arkansas's governor, who went along for the tour, had now been fired upon. "Posse members advised the troops that there were perhaps 150 Negroes in the woods, and that many were 'ex-soldiers,'" writes Whitaker. "The patch of trees and rivercane they were approaching was about 200 yards thick, east to west, and ran for a half mile to the north. *Shoot to kill* at the first sign of resistance, that was what they had been ordered to do." The troops came to a stretch of barbed wire that fronted the canebreak: "someone hiding *in there*, in that darkness, shot twenty-nine-year-old Sergeant Pearl Gay in the chest. His was only a flesh wound, but neither Jenks nor Callen had to say anything more. 'The soldiers,' said posse member J. W. Butts, 'immediately laid down a field of fire.' The troops spent the next hour searching the woods, through the swamps, "the rat-a-tat-tat of their machine guns and the blasts from their rifles shattering the Mississippi Delta morning." The soldiers attacked one group of sharecroppers with their rapid-fire weapons, and, according to a reporter for the *Memphis Press* who claimed to have seen 'many persons fired upon,' two African Americans were "killed outright"; the rest "threw up their arms and surrendered" (Whitaker 2008:111).

The terrain was uncleared, with 'dense cane brake and nearly impenetrable,' wrote Jenks. The troops had cleared the first section of woods and crossed a field, into this second patch of woods, a bit further to the north. Whitaker describes what transpired over the next several hours: "There was little resistance, the soldiers fired and then the Negroes who were hiding fell or jumped to their feet and ran deeper into the woods, and then this was repeated over and over," writes Whitaker. The officers 'gave them orders to shoot everything that showed up,' Brough told Charles Young later that day, 'and they took machine guns out there and let 'em have it. The slaughter continued until about early afternoon. They were 'shooting them down like rabbits,' according to one of the soldiers who participated, but then Corporal Luther Earles stepped on a

fallen log, disturbing a terrified black man in hiding. The sharecropper leapt to his feet, fired his gun, and shot the corporal in the face, 'tearing away part of Earles' jaw.' Corporal Earles was killed and Captain Gay wounded; these were the only white casualties of the day, but according to J. W. Butts, a white posse member, the soldiers "'killed many negroes who were resisting them'" (Whitaker 2008:112).

Gerard Lambert was a Northerner who owned the 21,000-acre Lambrook plantation outside of Elaine. He had more than 700 African Americans cutting timber and growing cotton under sharecropping contracts on his plantation. The day before, after learning of the assault upon the church at Hoop Spur, several black laborers rode on horseback toward Elaine, only to turn back, leaving many whites anxious. When a squad of soldiers reached Lambrook, a so-called 'colored leader' was taken into custody and interrogated. Gerard Lambert was out of town at the time, but in *Out of Step* (1956), his autobiography, he recounts what he had been told. Troopers brought the man to his company store and "tied him with stout cord to one of the wooden columns on the other porch." The black man had apparently been "extremely insolent," and the soldiers, "enraged by the loss of two of their men that day in the woods, had pressed him with questions." He continued to resist their questioning, "and one white man, hoping to make him speak up, poured a can of kerosene over him. As he was clearly unwilling to talk, a man suddenly tossed a lighted match at him. The colored man went up like a torch," recounted Lambert in his autobiography, *All Out of Step* (1956), "and in a moment of extreme agony, burst his bounds. Before he could get but a few feet he was riddled with bullets." According to Lambert, the superintendent, ostensibly from Camp Pike, told him "with some pleasure" that they had to use the fire hose from his store to extinguish the body of this African-American leader from the Lambrook plantation (Stockley 2001:43; Whitaker 2008:117).

Soldiers fanned out along a road running west from Route 44 during the afternoon of October 2. They swept past Frances Hall's cabin before moving north, searching every sharecropper's cabin for weapons. Around '400 guns and 200 pistols' were found during the search, which was not surprising, as it was a rare sharecropper who didn't own a firearm." The search for weapons devolved into a hunt for any remaining black folks, "and it produced yet another killing field," writes Whitaker (2008:117). Many sharecroppers were "trapped in the canebrakes west of the Hoop Spur fields," perhaps as many as 400 according to newspaper accounts, and as the soldiers moved into the wetlands, the "sound of constant gunfire could be

heard from miles away.” While indicating that no soldiers were wounded during the confiscation mission, news reports nevertheless did not provide “any further accounts of what happened to the trapped Negroes” (Whitaker 2008:119).

In his report concerning what transpired in and around Elaine, Arkansas, Colonel Jenks neglected to mention how the military handled those white posses who flooded the town upon hearing word of a ‘negro insurrection.’ His intelligence officers also failed to address how the forces from Camp Pike handled those vigilante groups. ‘Upon arrival, we found the town in a great state of excitement,’ Jenks wrote. ‘Hundreds of white men all carrying fire-arms, were on the streets, near the station and in groups, all over town.’ That was all. “This failure to acknowledge either the entry of the white mob into the area or what they were doing speaks for itself,” argues Stockley. “The only plausible explanation for the omission is that the military was seeking to cover up its own activities” (2001:63). Three conflicting military reports emerged: one from Colonel Jenks, who only mentions two African Americans who were killed in his entire report; a second from Captain Passailaigue, who estimated that, to the ‘best of [his] knowledge about 20 negroes were killed by soldiers for refusing to halt when so ordered or for resisting arrest,’ and a third from Major Eugene Barton, who wrote that 14 African Americans were killed, along with another 22 wounded. Grif Stockley, a lawyer, condemns the military’s reporting, arguing that its omission of events, especially when referenced against other sources, indicates the existence of a cover-up: “Each of the reports is vague about what occurred. Given other accounts, it is impossible to believe that the troops did not fire a shot in their first and only reported battle with blacks. The failure of Jenks or his officers to give a plausible account of the events of October 2 taints the entire military perspective. On balance, the evidence suggests that the military used excessive force and may have killed perhaps hundreds of blacks (2001:66).

That night Henry Smiddy passed the Hoop Spur church, or what remained, for it ‘had been burned down.’ Three white men, two of whom were soldiers, pulled up to the church in an automobile, got out of the car and “walked around the church house.” By the time they had returned to the car, the church “was burning—flashed up around the roof, and the car sped away,” according to testimony (Stockley 2001:166). Smiddy had spent all of Thursday, October 2, in those fields, hunting African Americans with the white posses and the Camp Pike forces. ‘I do not know how many negroes were killed in all,’ Smiddy said later, ‘but I do know that there

were between two and three hundred negroes killed that I saw with my own eyes' (Whitaker 2008:120).

#### *Fourth Day*

The violence continued over the next several days, but the killings “were scattered events,” rather than periods of wholesale slaughter, as had occurred the prior two days. Early Friday morning, around 3:00 a.m., a white guard posted outside Elaine spotted four African Americans making a run for the river; when these men “refused his command to stop, he opened fire with his machine gun.” ‘One negro’s body was almost cut in two,’ according to an account in the *Arkansas Gazette*. A second African American was shot and killed during this exchange, while a third was ‘received a shot in the head and was captured.’ The fourth black man escaped. Two of the men were World War I veterans, the *Gazette* noting they ‘had on their khaki’ at the time of the murder. “A few hours later, with heavy rain coming down, a squad of seventy-five soldiers began clearing the woods and canebrakes east of Route 44,” writes Whitaker, “and by noon, they had ‘cornered’ fifty or so Negroes in a bayou 3 miles east of Elaine.” Newspapers reported that ‘heavy fire’ was heard throughout the afternoon. Fifteen African Americans were captured and returned to Elaine for military interrogation; no mention was made regarding the other 35 black persons cornered in that bayou, but since the soldiers had been ordered to ‘shoot on sight’ once gunfire began, “presumably many and perhaps all had bene killed” (Whitaker 2008:122).

The state began processing hundreds of detainees later that morning: 225 African Americans were “crammed into the basement of the Elaine schoolhouse,” another 60 were kept in the Helena jail, and many more were brought in for questioning regarding their involvement with the Progressive Farmers and Household Union (Whitaker 2008:120). Those African Americans who had no connection with the union were issued passes, like a “stay-out-of-jail card,” that were signed by an army officer. These passes would be necessary for “all Negroes within ‘a radius of several miles of Hoop Spur and Elaine.’” Black folks were not to return to the fields nor be seen on the street without such a pass. It would take Jenks and his crew more than a week to complete this surveillance process, but when it was done, “more than eight hundred Negroes had been detained” (Whitaker 2008:121).

It is impossible to arrive at a precise figure when attempting to ascertain the number of black men, women, and children who were murdered by southern whites in Arkansas during the fall of 1919. “There are limits to the narrative of these events that can be constructed today,”

writes Whitaker. “The best that can be done is a mapping of the killing fields, locating them in space and time, and identifying whether it was the local posses, the outside posses, or the Camp Pike troops that were doing the shooting.” Robert Whitaker’s investigation produced 22 ‘killing sites,’ but there is “no way to know how many blacks were slaughtered in the largest killing fields, such as the woods west of Elaine, where hundreds were reported hiding—and surrounded—by troops” (2008:123). Sharp Dunaway, an Arkansas newspaper reporter and “ardent white supremacist,” concluded that whites killed 856 African Americans in and around Elaine up until October 6, a figure that is “certainly much too high,” according to Whitaker. John Miller, the prosecutor for the First Judicial Court, argued that “well more than 100” had been killed, as did Henry Smiddy, an active participant turned witness. Thirty miles west of Helena in Pine City, George Washington Davis, the grand secretary of a black fraternal order known as Pythian and Masonic lodge, reported that he “paid death benefits” for 103 African Americans after the violence, and he “‘knew personally’ of 73 more blacks” who had been killed. Whitaker concluded that “even a very conservative estimate” would place the figure at “well over one hundred,” that “perhaps the real toll was two or three times that many” (2008:125).

### *Instrumental White Violence*

The military “pursued a scorched-earth policy during the massacre,” writes Stockley. In the early 1920s, African Americans from Phillips County “applied to the Slater fund for money to rebuild school buildings because they said all the black schools and churches had been burned in the area,” according to University of Arkansas historian Walter Brown (2001:51). As in prior events known as ‘race riots,’ an exodus followed the violence. While the exact number of African Americans who fled is not known, it may have been several hundred—or perhaps more. An agricultural census taken in 1925 “revealed a drop of 592 black farm tenants in Phillips County since the previous count, in 1920,” but since African Americans were fleeing the Arkansas Delta—and the rest of the rural south—for industrial work in the north, “no conclusions can be drawn from this data” (Whitaker 2008:82).

Whites also profited from the widespread panic generated by violence. Whitaker recounts the stories of Mary Moore, Lulu Ware, and Edna Martin as they returned to their homes for the first time following the riot event: “as they walked from the railroad stop in Hoop Spur through the cotton fields, they all saw the same thing. Their hogs and chickens were gone; their homes had been stripped bare. Household goods were missing, their ‘clothes burned.’” Lulu Ware left

her husband in prison and returned to find that whites had ‘broken open the trunks and drawers’ as they scavenged for items of value; the mob had also ‘shot into the mirrors’ and stolen the family’s safe (Whitaker 2008:144). Ida B. Wells, who traveled and met with the Arkansas defendants while they awaited trial, reported “that whites stole their cotton and personal belongings.” Ed Ware wrote that his family lost all of their ‘household goods and 121 acres of cotton and corn, two mules, one horse, one Jersey cow, and one farm wagon and all farming tools and harness and eight head of hogs, 135 chickens and one Ford car’ (Stockley 2001:52). Wells Barnett provides “an itemized list of the crops that thirty-four of the convicted men had lost, estimating that ‘white lynchers of Phillips County made a cool million last year off the cotton crop of the twelve men who are sentenced to death, the seventy-five who are in the Arkansas penitentiary, and the one hundred whom they lynched outright on that awful October 1, 1919!’ Even the convicted men had no idea of the scope of the tragedy” (Stockley 2001:52). ‘Everything was gone,’ said Mary Moore, and when she went to her landlord to complain, he was forthright: ‘He told me if I didn’t get out and stay out, he would kill me, burn me up, and no one would know where I was’ (Whitaker 2008:144-45).

Whitewashing violence further assists in the instrumentality of white violence because it obfuscates reality—it presents a false or at best incomplete version of events in order to justify or excuse the conduct of whites. Shockley notes how the Arkansas papers “studiously avoid mentioning what the other six hundred to one thousand men did” who ventured into Elaine from outside the state. “Once the newspapers realized the carnage that had occurred in and around Elaine to the black population, they censored their reporting” (2001:56-7). The papers ‘avoid looking,’ they ignore certain events while focusing on others in their reporting more favorable to the region: “What about the names of any other of the more than five hundred men who had come into the area [besides Herbert Thompson]? Who was commanding them? What had they done all day? Had they fired on anyone? Been fired upon? The papers are silent,” explains Shockley. “We will never know in any detail how the white mobs went about murdering blacks on October 1. It was a subject more taboo than incest. Avoiding unpleasant news about white behavior toward blacks had become a part of the Southern psyche since the days of slavery” (2001:58). Whitaker contends that “by Wednesday evening Helena’s town fathers had established firm control over the Hoop Spur narrative, and after that there were no further glitches in the story told to the public” (2008:127). Blacks had finally risen against the whites in

an insurrection which was then put down valiantly with overwhelming—but absolutely necessary—force. Anonymous officials from Helena “now became the source for most of the news, and starting on Thursday morning, a coherent account of the blacks’ criminal actions began to emerge” (Whitaker 2008:128).

#### THE GREAT BURNING OF GREENWOOD: ARMED BLACK RESISTANCE AND THE TULSA RACE WAR OF 1921

Roy Belton was seized from the Tulsa County Courthouse by a throng of white vigilantes. He was placed in Homer Nida’s taxi, the very cab Belton hired Nida to drive two nights earlier. Roy Belton had only intended to rob the cab driver, so he struck Nida in the head with the butt of his revolver and demanded all his money. When he realized Nida had little cash, Bolton became enraged; he shot Nida in the stomach, kicked him onto the highway, and roared off with his taxi, only to be apprehended by police on a tip. Then Homer Nida died from that gunshot wound, and a mob of white Tulsans decided he would pay for the transgression with his life. And so, at around 11:00 p.m., on Saturday, August 28, 1920, Roy Belton was removed from the courthouse, Sheriff Jim Woolley offering little resistance. Hundreds of whites watched outside as Belton was dragged down the steps and thrown into Nida’s cab, “which had been stolen from the authorities,” his arms flailing with terror while spectators roared with delight (Ellsworth 2001:51). A line of automobiles estimated to stretch for nearly a mile followed the cab as it raced out past Red Fork, three miles southwest of Tulsa, not far from where he had shot Nida.

Roy Belton’s body was suspended beneath a large billboard for the Federal Tire Company, his legs kicking beneath him. ‘Don’t shoot!’ one of the men shouted. ‘Don’t anybody shoot! Let him hang and suffer like Nida suffered.’ Belton dangled for 11 minutes. News reports claimed that at least a thousand cars were present to witness the event, including women and children. Most of the Tulsa police force was there, too, “but they were instructed by Chief Gustafson not to intervene,” according to historian Scott Ellsworth (1982:42). Once Belton’s body fell to the ground, the *World* reported that ‘pandemonium broke loose’: “Hundreds rushed over the prostrate form to get bits of clothing. The rope was cut into bits for souvenirs. His trousers and shoes were torn into bits and the mob fairly fought over gruesome souvenirs. An ambulance was finally pushed through the jam of automobiles. The body was carried to the car, late arrivals still grabbing for bits of clothing on the now almost nude form (Ellsworth 1982:43).

The automobile provided connected people for racial violence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, just as trains were used to transport white curiosity seekers to these gruesome lynch spectacles in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This case is perhaps all the more extraordinary because Roy Belton was white.

Police Chief Gustafson justified his order not to intervene in Belton's murder because on the grounds that he was *saving* lives. For Gustafson, 'any demonstration from an officer would have started gun play and dozens of innocent people would have been killed and injured' (Ellsworth 1982:42). Belton's life appeared of little value to Gustafson: "I do not condone mob law—in fact, I am absolutely opposed to it," he declared afterward, "but it is my honest opinion that the lynching of Belton will prove of real benefit to Tulsa and vicinity. It was an object lesson to the hijackers and auto thieves, and I believe it will be taken as such." Sheriff Woolley agreed: "it shows to the criminal that the men of Tulsa mean business" (Ellsworth 1982:43). The lynching of Roy Belton "was of special significance to black Tulsans" because it shattered any faith they may have had in law enforcement: "If a white could be lynched in the 'Magic City,' what was to stop a mob from lynching a black?" (Ellsworth 1982:45). Less than one year later, the city would again explode in racial violence. The Tulsa 'race riot' of 1921 is perhaps the most devastating riot event in American history, yet many white people—including myself, prior to this project—remain unaware that it ever occurred.

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tulsa's population was still minimal, estimated at 1,390, but that changed on November 20, 1905, when oil drillers hit the first gusher from the Mid-Continent Oil Field, the "most bountiful producer of petroleum in the nation for years to come" (Madigan 2001:18). A "veritable forest of derricks" followed the discovery, and "from some of Glenn Pool's five hundred producing wells flowed more than two thousand barrels of oil per day" (Ellsworth 1982:9). White migrants flocked to Tulsa seeking their fortunes in oil: by 1910, the U.S. Census Bureau listed Tulsa's population at 18,182; by 1920, it was 72,075. Tulsa's City Directory estimated the population to be even higher, at 98,874 in 1921. "From the modern office buildings that were rising up out of downtown, to the electric trolleys that rumbled back and forth along Main Street, to the rows of freshly painted houses that kept pushing the city limits further and further into the surrounding countryside," Tulsa was "nothing short of an overnight sensation," writes Ellsworth (2001:37). Tulsa had rushed into existence with its oil wealth, leading local boosters to call it the Magic City.



During the 1920s white racism spread across the United States like wildfire. The Ku Klux Klan's resurgence contributed to this intensification, with its focus on ritual and symbolism. Organized in Georgia in 1915, the new Klan reached peak popularity in the mid-twenties, with a reported five million members; it now included "other racial and religious minorities" among its targeted groups, and the new Klan actually "attained a larger following outside the South than within" (Woodward 2002:115). In Tulsa, Klan membership was distributed among all classes and trades, and at the height of its power in the mid-1920s, there were perhaps more than 100,000 Klansmen in Oklahoma (Oklahoma Commission 2001:46). Klan membership in boomtown Tulsa transcended "every category of profession and income" (Madigan 2001:64). The Ku Klux Klan was highly influential in government in the county of Tulsa during the 1920s: "mayors, city commissioners, sheriffs, district attorneys, and many other city and county office holders who were either klansmen or Klan supporters were elected, and reelected, with regularity" (Oklahoma Commission 2001:47). The Klan "regularly issued lists of Klan-approved candidates for both state and local political offices" in newspapers. And in 1921, Oklahoma's state government was "almost completely under the domination of the Klan" (Woodward 2002:116). So it is perhaps unsurprising that African Americans were denied equal access to the law; in fact, blacks were discriminated against across three stages of the criminal justice system: Tulsa's police did not apply the law equally on the street, Tulsa's judges and prosecutors did not equally apply the law in court, and the "statutes enacted by the legislature" were never structured to promote racial equality. "The pattern of using law to reinforce white superiority was common to all three," writes legal scholar and professor Alfred L. Brophy (2002:15).

African Americans in Oklahoma have a history of using the courts to challenge white supremacy, a legal use of power that only exacerbated the cultural tension between races. Black folks used the courts "to obtain equal treatment on railroads, in schools, and—perhaps most important—in voting rights," writes legal scholar and professor Alfred Brophy; they "had the confidence that someday, perhaps soon, the courts would hold government officials to the requirement that there be equal treatment" (2002:79). The Oklahoma Supreme Court had consistently upheld the state's grandfather clause when blacks filed suit, and the court "upheld the poll tax and capricious reading tests in a series of cases," but African Americans were not deterred. They took their case to the U.S. Supreme Court, which, in its 1915 decision *Guinn v. United States*, declared Oklahoma's grandfather clause unconstitutional; despite this victory, the

Oklahoma legislature “passed a registration law designed to limit blacks’ voting rights and get around the Supreme Court’s *Guinn* decision,” and that law was not struck down until 1939 (Brophy 2002:82-3). African Americans orchestrated other legal battles as well during the 1910s: “The antilynching, voting rights, and railroad segregation trilogy represented perhaps the most prominent causes of civil rights in Progressive-era Oklahoma. But they were not the only ones,” notes Brophy. “The quality of segregated schools and taxation to provide for those schools were central issues for the Oklahoma black community, as were opposition to the exclusion of blacks from juries and ordinances that required racial segregation (2002:83). The legal activities of African Americans during this era represent not only more intensive organization but also greater cultural representation. American institutions were being challenged, and blacks were demanding equal access to those institutions.

Ambitious black men like O. W. Gurley flocked to the boomtown, aiming to join in the prosperity. In 1908, Gurley “constructed the first building, a rooming house” that would later become the Vernon A.M.E. Church on “a muddy trail.” Gurley purchased “30 or 40 acres, plotted them and had them sold to ‘Negroes’ only”; from these beginnings, Greenwood would become known as the Black Wall Street of America (Oklahoma Commission 2001:vi). O.W. Gurley built his impressive store out of bricks made at a nearby factory at 112 Greenwood Avenue. North of Gurley was Andrew Smitherman’s newspaper office. Greenwood had restaurants, barber shops, a dry cleaners, a lawyer’s office, cigar and clothing stores, and even an African-American mechanic who garnered such a reputation for his handiwork that whites patronized his store when engine trouble struck. In fact, in 1913 “an organizer for a national Negro business association described Greenwood as ‘a regular Monte Carlo’” (Madigan 2001:19). Black Tulsans were ‘welcomed’ to work as domestics and laborers in any part of Tulsa, but they were ‘not welcome’ to “patronize white businesses south of the tracks and in other sections of the city.” In fact, racial segregation in public establishments precipitated the growth of Greenwood Avenue, Tulsa’s black business district. “Thus, in the early years of the twentieth century, Tulsa became not one city, but two,” writes Ellsworth. Confined by law and by white racism, black Tulsa was a separate city, serving the needs of the black community. And as Tulsa boomed, black Tulsa did too” (1982:14). Residential segregation was strictly enforced by law in the years preceding the riot. In 1916, the Tulsa City Council passed an ordinance prohibiting “anyone from purchasing a house on a block if 75 percent of the residents on the

block were of a different race,” explains Brophy. African Americans were permitted to reside on a majority white block only “if they were employed at least five days a week as domestic servants at a property on that block” (2002:84). White Tulsa was demanding more segregation in the years after World War I, and social relations became increasingly hostile.

Deep Greenwood was located on the first two blocks of Greenwood Avenue north of Archer. Known locally by some whites as the ‘Negro’s Wall Street,’ Deep Greenwood was the heart of Tulsa’s African American commercial district. It stretched for several blocks, lined with red brick buildings that “housed dozens of black-owned and operated businesses, including grocery stores and meat markets, clothing and dry goods stores, billiard halls, beauty parlors and barber shops,” drug and jewelry stores, like Economy Drug and William Anderson’s jewelry—it even had A. S. Newkirk’s photography studio (Ellsworth 2001:40; see also Ellsworth 1982:15). The business district “could boast of a number of impressive commercial structures,” like the three-story Williams Building at the corner of Greenwood Avenue and Archer Street. John and Loula Williams also operated the Dreamland Theater, a 750-seat venue that featured “live musical and theatrical revues as well as silent movies accompanied by a piano player” (Ellsworth 2001:41). Deep Greenwood was home for a burgeoning professional class of black lawyers, realtors, and physicians; at the time of the riot, there were 15 African-American physicians in Tulsa, including Dr. A. C. Jackson, whom a Mayo brother described as the ‘most able Negro surgeon in America.’ It was a prospering African-American community, “assuredly one of the finest black commercial districts in the entire Southwest” in 1921—and it was precisely this kind of black progress that fueled white resentment (Ellsworth 1982:15-6).

Greenwood had two African-American residents who had reputations for resistance and for fighting for their rights. A.J. Smitherman, editor of the *Tulsa Star*, was 36 years old, and though small in stature, he was “fearless in defending his rights.” Smitherman “stood down a mob in Bristow, Oklahoma” amidst talk of a lynching in 1918, and the following year, he filed a lawsuit against a railroad regarding the inferior accommodations forced upon him during his travel (Brophy 2002:21). J.B. Stradford also had a history of fighting in the court for equal treatment. Owner of the 54-room Stradford Hotel, “one of the largest black owned businesses in Oklahoma,” J.B. Stradford owned perhaps twice the assets of O. W. Gurley (Ellsworth 2001:42). Stradford and Smitherman are indicative of an increasing militancy in African-American culture, particularly when it came to matters involving racial injustice. The community must stand united

in a show of force against white injustice whenever a black man's life was threatened within a biased legal system. Black men like Stradford and Smitherman "saw such aggressive action as a way of seeking justice." The refrain or resistance could even be heard between shows at the Dreamland Theatre: 'Don't let any white man run it over you, but fight' (Brophy 2002:21).

The *Tulsa Star* was a crucial vehicle in stoking black resistance to the point of militancy. Edited by A. J. Smitherman and located in Greenwood, the *Star* was critical of African Americans for not taking a more aggressive stance in the defense of Claude Chandler, a young black man accused of killing a white police officer. Chandler was beaten, hung from a tree ten miles outside of Oklahoma City, and shot twice. The *Star* now openly promulgated that African Americans use force, if necessary, to combat the horrors of white lynch mobs. Smitherman's rhetoric celebrated armed resistance against lynching as a duty of citizenship and legal right: "While the boy was in jail and while there was danger of mob violence any set of citizens had a legal right—it was their duty—to arm themselves and march in a body to the jail and apprise the sheriff or jailer of the purpose of their visit and to take life if need be to uphold the law and protect the prisoner" (Brophy 2002:18). On May 30, 1921, Greenwood residents would again answer the call to defend the life a black man against white vigilantes.

### *Memorial Day*

Sarah Page screamed with fright. Her cry echoed beyond the elevator and down the hallway of the Drexel Building. A clerk from Renberg's store rushed to assist her, according to a report from the *Tulsa Tribune*. Sarah Page was 17 years old. And she was white. And her whiteness was about to become a major problem for Dick Rowland, the young black man arrested for the attempted 'assault.' Rowland was reported to be only 19 years old himself at the time. "had seized her arm as she admitted him to the car." Rowland claimed "that he stumbled and accidentally stepped on the girl's foot." Regardless of what actually transpired, Page screamed and Rowland ran. Given that whites were bound to believe he was guilty, Dick's instinct to flee is likely an indication of the terror that lynching inflicts upon the psychology of a black male more than it is any indication of his guilt in wrongdoing.

The afternoon edition of the *Tulsa Tribune* hit the streets shortly after 3:00 on May 31. The paper reported that Rowland "attacked her, scratching her hands and face and tearing her clothes" before fleeing (Ellsworth 1982:48). The *Tribune* carried this provocative headline:

Nab Negro for Attacking Girl In an Elevator.’ The *Tulsa Daily World* claimed that there was “a movement afoot” among white folks to head to the “county courthouse Tuesday night and lynch the bootblack,” a report that “spread over ‘Little Africa’ (Willows 1921:1). The *Tribune* also declared that a mob of whites was forming to lynch Diamond Dick; both the article and headline were “certain to incite the racial hostilities of white Tulsans, for nothing attracted attention the way a rape charge did,” writes Brophy. Greenwood residents were well aware of the “emotions that talk of rape would set off, and they were preparing to take action” (Brophy 2002:26).

It was getting dark, and a crowd of whites began to gather around the Tulsa County Courthouse. The building was constructed like it was a fortress: it occupied “most of a city block” and sat high upon an embankment at the corner of Sixth Street and Boulder Avenue. “Steep sandstone steps led to the doors, which were flanked on either side by broad limestone terraces” (Madigan 2001:72). ‘Diamond’ Dick Rowland was being held on the fourth floor of this fortress, and by 7:00 p.m., three hundred angry whites stood waiting ‘to avenge the purity of a white woman,’ according to Sheriff McCullough. By 9:00 p.m. the number was estimated at 400. Shortly thereafter, “false reports reached the Greenwood area that the white mob was storming the courthouse. Stradford and J. K. Smitherman, black deputy sheriff, began recruiting an armed posse to defend Rowland from being lynched. ‘Come on boys. Let’s go down,’ Smitherman is reported to have said as the crew began piling into vehicles. A “short convoy of cars approached the courthouse from the west, driving down Sixth Street,” writes Madigan. It was just past 9:00 p.m. The whites gathered at Sixth and Boulder didn’t realize it at first, but each of the three cars approaching “was filled with heavily armed Negroes” (Madigan 2001:96). Stradford and Smitherman stepped from their cars and pulled their pistols. Black businessman John Williams had driven one of the cars; he slid out of the vehicle with his shotgun, prepared to confront the throng of angry whites. A group of about twenty-five black men, armed with rifles and shotguns, marched toward the courthouse. They offered their help in protecting Rowland to Sheriff McCullough. The mob outside the courthouse was perhaps as large as two thousand, but McCullough managed to diffuse the situation, and the men returned to Greenwood.

Major James A. Bell of Tulsa’s National Guard is a man who stands in stark contrast to those members of the Illinois National Guard in East St. Louis—those who stood, watched, and did nothing. Bell did his duty, and was, in fact, proactive. Despite assurances from Sheriff McCullough and Police Chief Gustafson that “matters were under control,” Bell ordered all

Guard officers already at the armory to gather all “arms and ammunition, and to start contacting other guardsmen in case Governor Robertson called them out” (Ellsworth 1982:51). Bell returned to his home, dressed in his uniform, and was hastily interrupted—two “runners” were banging down his door with news. A mob of whites were trying to break into the armory. Bell grabbed his pistol and returned to the armory, where he noticed a group of white men trying to pry open a window. He ordered them to leave, but “some three to four hundred whites had gathered” in front of the army, demanding rifles and ammunition. Bell refused. Angry white residents ‘continued to press forward in a threatening manner,’ Bell said later; he “told the crowd that the guardsmen inside would shoot any unauthorized visitors” (Ellsworth 1982:51). The mob finally dispersed. Sheriff McCullough’s actions are less clearly defined in the hours leading up to the racial violence. “Apparently, there was some confusion as to whether Sheriff McCullough desired and sought black aid for the defense of the courthouse,” writes Ellsworth (1982:49). McCullough may have “disarmed one black man,” but it does not appear he made much of an effort to liquidate the white mass that had formed outside the Tulsa County Courthouse.

More than one thousand people were congregated outside the four-story structure; some reports suggested that the number was closer to two thousand. And now a second armed group of African Americans marched on the courthouse, only this time they had greater reinforcements. The men piled back into their cars and headed south, across the tracks and into white Tulsa; additional groups “started south on foot, shouldering their rifles, shotguns, and garden tools, marching in military formation toward the courthouse” (Madigan 2001:102). Shortly after 10:00 p.m. the men arrived at the courthouse, perhaps as many as 75 this time around (Ellsworth 2001:63). At the courthouse the black men once more “offered their services to the police, who were dwarfed by the white crowd, and again they were refused and asked to leave” (Ellsworth 1982:51). Sheriff McCullough “did not order his deputies to conduct a general disarmament because he feared that this would start a riot,” writes Ellsworth. Apparently, “neither the sheriff nor Chief Gustafson had seriously attempted to disperse the crowd of whites or get them to leave, and there is evidence to suggest that Gustafson had not even called the entire police force to the scene” (1982:51-2). Police officer Barney Cleaver, an African American, did attempt to intervene and quell the impending eruption of violence. Cleaver “was trying to convince his fellow black Tulsans to go back home” (1982:51), and according to Robert Fairchild, one of 9

Tulsa residents interviewed by Scott Ellsworth, the armed group of black men had been mollified. They were preparing to leave.

Then an older white man approached one of their own, O. B. Mann, a 6'4" black veteran who was carrying "an Army issue 45-caliber." Mann had once chased down a "chased down a fellow who tried to rob the family store and nearly killed the would-be thief with his bare hands, until half a dozen men finally pulled him off" (Madigan 2001:86). He was not the kind of man to be messed with, but perhaps alcohol (or the sheer size of the white crowd) fortified his courage. 'Nigger, what are you going to do with that pistol?' he asked. 'I'm going to use it if I need to,' Mann replied. 'No, you give it to me,' demanded the white man. 'Like hell I will.' And that became the opening confrontation in a race war that rocked Tulsa. The old white man lunged for Mann's pistol, the gun discharged in the scuffle, and within moments, bullets were flying in all directions. White Tulsans unleashed their arsenal, but those who were unarmed fled in terror. The groups of black men "rushed north toward Greenwood on foot, most of them dashing up Main and Boulder Avenues toward the safety of Frisco tracks. Behind them, at least twenty people, both whites and Negroes, lay dead or wounded. The old white man who had confronted O. B. Mann was among the first to die." The 'race war was on,' Sheriff McCullough later recounted, 'and I was powerless to stop it' (Madigan 2001:103). The opening gunfight "lasted only a few seconds," but when it had ended, "perhaps as many as a dozen" people had been killed—both black and white. Whites outnumbered African Americans more than twenty to one, and with gunfire continuing along Fourth Street, black fighters began retreating toward Greenwood, marauding whites in fast pursuit (Ellsworth 2001:63).

Tulsa police deputized scores of whites—perhaps as many as five hundred men and boys were sworn in as 'Special Deputies'—some of whom had taken part in the shootout outside the courthouse (Ellsworth 2001:64). A light-skinned black man able to 'pass' as white had infiltrated a meeting of these 'special deputies,' however, and according to Ellsworth, he uncovered their plan: the whites would "invade the Greenwood district from the west." A group of whites broke into McGee's Hardware Store, looting all firearms and ammunition. The store's owner "later stated that he thought Captain George H. Blaine of the Tulsa police force was the one who broke into his store and dealt out the guns." Whites targeted other establishments as well; in fact, "fifteen other hardware stores and pawn shops reported break-ins on the night of May 31, and some \$42,923 worth of merchandise was stolen" (Ellsworth 1982:54). Midnight had arrived and

Tulsa's attention was no longer fixed on Rowland's third-story courthouse jail cell; it shifted to Greenwood and *all* its black residents.

A building at the intersection of Archer Street and Boston Avenue was on fire, and the fire department rushed to the scene. It was 1:00 a.m., June 1. A mob of whites refused to permit the crew to extinguish the flames. Reports later indicated that during the night hours, cars full of white folks would tear down Greenwood's streets terrorizing black residents by indiscriminately firing their guns into the homes of African Americans. Blacks had armed in self-defense; they retaliated with violence against the injustice of lynching at the Tulsa County Courthouse. Now black self-defense reached a new level of intensity:

White rioters attempting to cross the rail-yard and invade the black district had to contend with the gunfire of black residents defending their property. Black Tulsans were outnumbered, but had the advantage of being in defensive positions on well-known ground. Probably the most active fighting that night occurred along the Frisco Railroad Tracks, located between First and Archer streets, which formed an important boundary between black and white Tulsa. (Ellsworth 1982:55)

The armed black resistance in Greenwood made its "first major stand" at the intersection of Second Street and Cincinnati Avenue, which was located at the edge of Tulsa's white downtown district. "The battle unfolded just outside the luxurious Hotel Tulsa," writes Madigan. "White guests with rooms on the upper floors observed the fight below the, but not for long, because every few seconds, bullets splintered another hotel window" (2001:115). Curious whites began crowding along Main Street to witness the furious gun fight. The "battle on Cincinnati raged for more than an hour," but ammunition began to run low. Black fighters retreated down Archer Street, where the next great point of black resistance was to unfold around the Frisco tracks, the borderline between black and white Tulsa (Madigan 2001:116).

It was the middle of the night when McCullough heard a voice he recognized outside the courthouse, that of a reporter from the *Tulsa World*. The young man slid a sheet of paper through the steel bars—it contained the signatures of a state judge and the police commissioner. McCullough signed his name and at 1:46 a.m., authorities sent a telegram to Oklahoma Governor J. B. Robertson, "formally requesting National Guard assistance to put down what was later described in Guard action reports as a 'Negro Uprising'" (Madigan 2001:117). Three hours later they boarded a train in Oklahoma City for the 100-mile trip from the state capitol east to Tulsa.

White Tulsans were also deputized during the outbreak, but rather than combat those attacking Greenwood, many actively participated in the great burning. Police Chief Gustafson,



with the support of Mayor Thaddeus Evans, “deputized men and issued them weapons” (Brophy 2002:59). O.W. Gurley describes how men in uniform warned him of the burning to come at his hotel: ‘You better get out of that hotel because we are going to burn all of this God damn stuff, better get all your guests out,’ said the white men who wore khaki suits:

And they rattled on the lower doors of the pool hall and the restaurant, and the people began on the lower floor to get out, and I told the people in the hotel, I said, ‘I guess you better get out.’ There was a deal of shooting of going on from the [grain] elevator or the mill, somebody was over there with a machine gun and shooting down Greenwood Avenue, and the people got on the stairway going down to the street and they stampeded. (Brophy 2002:53)

Susan Williams also testified to the burning. She and her husband John Williams owned the Dreamland Theatre and the Williams Building, which housed a soda fountain and confectionary. More than 20 men arrived, “searched the house, and then set it on fire” (Brophy 2002:53). Whites began “flushing Negroes from homes and businesses along Boston Avenue and on the western end of Archer Street.” The burning of houses was initially intended to drive Black snipers from buildings where they were firing at whites, but it “soon became evident that whites would settle for nothing less than scorched earth” (Madigan 2001:119).

White Tulsans engaged in rituals of arson, using kerosene (or gasoline, anything flammable) and the torch. Then they added human target practice to their catalogue of atrocity, just as East St. Louis whites had done in 1917. African-American men were “holed up” inside a small house on Boston Avenue, “fighting furiously to fend off the advancing mob.” So the home was fired after the black fighters ran out of ammunition. “The white mob listened to the tortured bellows of four Negro gunmen who burned to death inside,” writes Madigan. A fifth African American was “shot down as he attempted to flee. A handful of whites surged forward, retrieved his body from the yard, rushed it through the front door and tossed the Negro back into the flames” (2001:120). This kind of ritualistic behavior indicates the extent to which white Tulsans wielded disciplinary violence during the riot. Black prosperity was punished. Black armed resistance was punished. Assertive behavior that challenged white supremacy would be eliminated through violence.

### *The Invasion of Greenwood*

The all-night restaurant was full of activity, but in a few moments it would be cleared. ‘Everybody go to Fifteenth and Boulder,’ a white man declared. ‘Choc’ Phillips and his young white companions watched as people “were drifting out of the restaurant,” so they decided to

drive over to the meeting place. The streets were so crowded that people began to abandon their vehicles and walk. 'We left the car more than a block away and began walking toward the crowded intersection,' Phillips recalled. 'There were already three or four hundred people there and more arriving.' A white man climbed atop a touring car: a second mass of white citizens was meeting at Second and Lewis streets, and the man announced that the two groups would be joining forces. So the people returned to their cars, heading east. Choc Phillips estimated that perhaps six hundred had gathered, eagerly awaiting word of what was to come. Once again, white men began climbing atop a car to address the crowd. 'Men, we are going at daylight,' one announced. Another informed the audience that they would be conducting an "ammunition exchange: 'If any of you have more ammunition than you need, or if what you have doesn't fit your gun, sing out,' he declared. 'Be ready at daybreak.' 'Nothing can stop us,' another man added, 'for there will be thousands of others going in at the same time' (Ellsworth 2001:70).

Archer Street was the first to burn. African American homes and businesses were fired as the whites marched along, torches in hand. The sounding fire alarm rang out through the thick summer air. When an "engine crew from the Tulsa Fire Department arrived and prepared to douse the flames, white rioters forced the firemen away at gunpoint," writes Ellsworth. By 4:00 a.m. on June 1, more than "two dozen black-owned businesses, including the Midway Hotel, had been torched" (2001:66). In those early morning hours, black folks began fleeing the city. Irene Scofield, an African American resident turned refugee of Tulsa, told the *Black Dispatch* that after whites began burning their community, a group of about forty "started out of town and walked to a little town about fifteen miles away." The exodus had begun, and some, like Billy Hudson, were even hunted down in the process of trying to flee. A laborer who lived on Archer, Hudson "hitched up his wagon as conditions grew worse," and with his grandchildren in tow, he set out for Nowata (Ellsworth 2001:68). He was murdered by the side of the road on the way.

Police Inspector C. W. Daley arrived at the Frisco station around 4:30 in the morning, just before dawn. He found the guards he had posted outside Greenwood "engulfed by a mob of whites preparing to enter the black district" (Ellsworth 1982:55). Daley and a contingent of "armed black residents" managed to hold off the rioters at the Frisco station for over an hour. But at 5:00 a.m., a shift whistle sounded, signaling the start of a white invasion into Greenwood. C.F. Gabe testified to what happened next: "When that whistle blowed you could hear shooting everywhere in town, firing boom, boom, boom, boom," recalled C. F. Gabe. "My wife jumped

out of bed and told me there was trouble in town, and when my wife said that, in came some group of men beside my house,” Gabe testified. One of the men called him. ‘Gabe, get up,’ he said, ‘the white folks is killing all the niggers in town and burning their houses.’ And my wife she jumped up and looked out the door and saw fire burning away up high (Brophy 2002:45). A mob of whites rushed passed Daley and “invaded black Tulsa” at the sound of that morning whistle, and the cleansing of Greenwood began. ‘It was just dawn; the machine guns were sweeping the valley with their murderous fire and my heart was filled with dread as we sped along,’ recalled Dimple Bush. ‘Old women and men, children were running and screaming everywhere’ (Ellsworth 2001:73).

O. W. Gurley looked out a window from his three-story brick hotel. He noticed a few white men dressed in clothing khaki, perhaps men donning their uniforms from the First World War, set fire to his building (Ellsworth 1982). After torching Gurley’s place, they moved up Greenwood, setting fire to other buildings. The fighting at the Frisco tracks intensified as black veterans manned positions in second- and third-story windows to defend their community. Already “six black corpses lay between the warring forces, the place that came to be known as ‘no-man’s-land,’ writes Madigan. “The whites cheered raucously as the body of a fallen Negro fighter was tied behind a car and dragged through downtown Tulsa, a macabre trophy. In the next several hours, Negro corpses dragging behind the cars of whites became a common sight in the streets of the city” (2001:121). One of the most atrocious acts concerned an elderly blind man who had both of his legs amputated. The man’s body was “attached at the hips to a small wooden platform with wheels,” recalled E. W. Maxey of the Tulsa County Sheriff’s Department who witnessed the act take place at around 8:00 a.m. downtown. “One leg stub was longer than the other, and hung slightly over the edge of the platform, dragging along the street. He scooted his body around by shoving and pushing with his hands covered with baseball catcher mitts.” The man would support himself selling pencils and singing songs for donations. He had hung around the street car tracks that ran along Main Street for years, with an old tin cup. “These white thugs had roped this colored man on the longer stump of his one leg,” explained Maxey, and they “were dragging him behind the car up Main Street. He was hollering. His head was being bashed in, bouncing on the steel rails [of the streetcar] and bricks” (Ellsworth 2001:83). Several bystanders did nothing to help, and the men roared away. The elderly blind man was “never seen

in downtown Tulsa again” (Madigan 2001:148). Whites in Tulsa took intimidation and murder to a level of intensity perhaps never before seen in the history of the United States.

No other riot event in this study resembles warfare like the Tulsa race riot of 1921. Dr. R. T. Bridgewater, an African-American physician practicing in Tulsa, described what he witnessed shortly after the whistle blew: ‘The shots rang from a machine gun located on Standpipe Hill near my residence and aeroplanes began to fly over us, in some instances very low to the ground. A cry was heard from the women saying, ‘Look out for the aeroplanes, they are shooting upon us [sic]’ (Ellsworth 2001:73). In his report for the Oklahoma Commission on the riot, Scott Ellsworth notes “there is little doubt” that some of those flying planes carried whites who were firing upon black Tulsans; there is also “evidence to suggest that men in at least one airplane dropped some form of explosives, probably sticks of dynamite, upon a group of African American refugees as they were fleeing the city” (2001:74).

Standpipe Hill “extended into Greenwood like a long, fat finger,” writes journalist Tim Madigan in *The Burning* (2001). “Dozens of cars” were parked on the hill, and though some were merely spectators, “there was an army up there, too. Several men in the khaki uniforms of World War I veterans, and other men wearing civilian clothes, lay on their bellies at the crest of the hill, firing with rifles and shotguns into the Negro neighborhoods below” (2001:163). Local guardsmen “traded fire with armed African Americans, who had set up defensive lines off Elgin and Elgin Place.” White guardsmen also opened fire on Sunset Hill, another black neighborhood. A “deadly pattern” emerged during those wicked hours: “First, the armed whites broke into the black homes and businesses, forcing the occupants out into the street, where they were led away at gunpoint to one of the growing number of internment centers. Anyone who resisted was shot,” as were black men found with firearms. “Next, the whites looted the homes and businesses, pocketing small items, and hauling away larger items either on foot or by car or truck,” explains Ellsworth. “Finally, the white rioters then set the homes and other buildings on fire, using torches and oil-soaked rags. House by house, block by block, the wall of flame crept northward, engulfing the cities black neighborhoods” (2001:74).

Meanwhile, from the belfry of Mount Zion—which “offered an unobstructed line of fire at the enemy” on Standpipe Hill—black defenders prevented invading whites from advancing further into Greenwood. “For an hour or more after the battle began, Negro marksman trained to fight Germans picked off any white hoodlum foolish enough to expose himself trying to move forward” (2001:157). “Kill one white and ten more sprang up in his place,” explains Madigan. Added to the problem of numbers was that of ammunition; the black fighters “didn’t have the luxury of looting a dozen pawnshops and hardware stores. Their bullets had been purchased for hunting, and that ammunition soon ran low” (Madigan 2001:159). Despite these “daunting odds,” African American fighters positioned in the church belfry “valiantly fought back” (Ellsworth 2001:75). But when the machine gun was moved from its perch at “the top of the mill on First Street” to Standpipe Hill,” the snipers in the belfry stood little chance (Madigan 2001:165). White men unleashed the machine gun on the Mount Zion belfry, a rapid-fire reigning down upon those few freedom fighters who remained active against white violence.

‘In a couple of minutes pieces of brick started falling, then whole bricks began tumbling from the narrow slits in the cupola,’ Choc Phillips recalled. ‘Within five or six minutes the openings were large jagged



Source: *Tulsa Race Riot (Oklahoma Commission 2001:75)*

holes with so many bricks flying from that side of the cupola wall that it seemed ready to fall.’ The fighters in the belfry were no longer able to pick off the white arsonists ranging below, their torches and kerosene ready for action, and ‘almost immediately the houses on the outer rim of the area that had been protected by the snipers became victims of the arsonists,’ explained Phillips. Mount Zion was “the last great vestige of Greenwood life” to burn on that June 1 morning, and when the belfry finally collapsed, the “whites cheered” (Madigan 2001:166).

By 9:00 a.m. Tulsa police had begun to apprehend black prisoners at random. “Many were forcibly removed from their homes by the police, by National Guardsmen, by numerous ‘special deputies,’ and by various unauthorized whites,” writes Ellsworth. “Some of these

‘arrests’ were made by white women. Although some whites drove blacks around downtown in vehicles, the majority of the prisoners were taken to three improvised interment centers: Convention Hall, McNulty [baseball] Park, and the fairgrounds. All of these actions, needless to say, rendered the defense of black property impossible.” The behavior of law enforcement during this time “played right into the hands of the white rioters who were looting and burning” (Ellsworth 1982:59). More than 6,000 African Americans, “most of Tulsa’s black citizenry,” was imprisoned before the night of June 1 was over. Captain McCuen reported that by 11:00 a.m. ‘all firing’ “had ceased,” but as Brophy notes, the riot “wound down not so much because the Guard had succeeded in bringing the white rioters under control, but because the Greenwood residents had been arrested or driven out: ‘practically all of the negro men had retreated to the northeast or elsewhere or had been disarmed and sent to concentration points’” (2002:59).

What transpired in Tulsa was a race warfare, especially when airplanes entered the battle zone, a first in American riot history. African Americans were heavily outgunned that morning—especially after whites raided the city’s hardware stores and pawn shops for guns—and badly outnumbered. Multiple sources report that airplanes were used to raid and terrorize African American residents, and at least according to some reports, law enforcement officials were part of the coordinating efforts. Van B. Hurley, a former Tulsa police officer described as having been ‘honorably discharged from the force,’ actually “named city officials who *planned the attack on Greenwood using airplanes*”:

Hurley described ‘the conference between local aviators and the officials. After this meeting Hurley asserted the airplanes darted out from hangars and hovered over the district dropping nitro-glycerin on buildings, setting them afire.’ Hurley said the officials told their deputies to deal aggressively with Greenwood residents. ‘They gave instructions for every man to be ready and on the alert and if the niggers wanted to start anything to be ready for them. They never put forth any efforts at all to prevent it whatever, and said if they started anything to kill every b\_\_\_\_\_ son of a b\_\_\_\_\_ they could find.’ (Brophy 2002:46)

Though there remains question over how airplanes were deployed during the conflict, Brophy asserts that “[a]t a minimum, it seems airplanes were used to coordinate the attack” (2002:46). According to the *Tulsa Tribune*, airplanes had been used to target “sections where shots were being fired from sniping stations,” such as the belfry of the Mount Zion Baptist Church that had just been completed prior to the invasion—after seven years of saving and construction.

The Tulsa riot lasted but 24 hours; yet in that time, the destruction was so great that it likely eclipsed that of other riot events during the World War I era which lasted for several days (e.g., East St. Louis, 1917; Chicago, 1919). In Greenwood 35 blocks were burned to the ground,

and more than a thousand families were left homeless (Brophy 2002:60). The long shot (below) displays “Greenwood’s ruin, smoke rising from the fires blazing in the background”:

### **Greenwood is Burning: June 1, 1921**



Source: Oklahoma Historical Society (Oklahoma Commission 2001:18)

Not only were state officials and guardsmen used as agents of internment in concentration camps; city officials “issued demeaning green tags, reading ‘Police Protection,’ which were signed by white employers” who flocked to the camps seeking their ‘help.’ “The tags marked the wearers as acceptable people,” writes Brophy. “Those without tags were similarly marked—and subject to arrest and derision (2002:91). The green tags were useful tactics of social control designed to scrutinize and classifying black bodies. The *Tribune* praised the practice: ‘The city does just what it should do when it gets rid of the negro who cannot give a good account of both his time and conduct’ (Brophy 2002:91). As black survivors began leaving the internment camps, they returned to what could only be described as a decimated war zone: “Where the African American commercial district once stood was now a ghost town of crumbling brick storefronts and the burned out bulks of automobiles,” writes Ellsworth. “Gone was the Dreamland and the Dixie, gone was the *Tulsa Star* and the black public library, gone was the Liberty Café and Elliott & Hooker’s clothing store, H. L. Bryars’ cleaners and Mabel Little’s beauty salon” (2001:87). And six days after the violence ended, the Tulsa City Commission passed a fire ordinance specifically designed to prevent the African-American community from rebuilding; in the meantime, “the so-called Reconstruction Commission, an organization of white business and political leaders,” began turning away offers of financial aid (Ellsworth 2001:88).

### *Instrumental White Violence*

Maurice Willows, the Director of Relief for the American Red Cross, documented 184 African Americans and 48 whites who were hospitalized “for surgical care as charges of the Red Cross within twenty-four hours after the disaster” (1921:3). Twenty surgeons, eleven of whom were African American, performed more than 163 procedures, 82 of these being classified as “major” operations (Willows 1921:13; see also Ellsworth 1982:67). A total of 531 people were given aid at the Red Cross stations during the first three days after the riot, thus records indicate that at least 763 people were wounded in the riot event, not including those found afterward on nearly every road leading out of Tulsa (Willows 1921:3). Willows reports that a most “conservative figure” for property loss due to the white violence was \$4,000,000, a basement figure based on lawsuits filed by July 30, 1921, when all property claims had yet to be filed.

The Red Cross’s *Disaster Relief Report* (1921) indicates that 1,115 *residences* were destroyed during the attempted racial cleansing, a figure that does not include “stores, cafes, and other business properties” decimated by fire; according to the Oklahoma Commission, 1,256 homes were burned (2001:16). An additional 314 houses were “looted of practically all household possessions and valuables,” but not burned, for whatever reason (Willows 1921:11). The *Tulsa Daily World* reported that “some 338 people suffered losses of real estate, 82 of whom were black” (Ellsworth 1982:70). Madigan notes that “five hotels, thirty-one restaurants, four drugstores, eight doctors’ offices, the new Dunbar School, two dozen grocery stores, the Negro hospital, the public library, and even dozens of churches, including the community’s most magnificent new edifice, Mount Zion Baptist Church” were torched (2001:221). Before firing the property, white scavengers took whatever suited their fancy, of course: “Most personal belongings of the blacks were consumed as well, along with monetary savings that Greenwood families typically kept tucked away under mattresses or hidden in cupboards because no black banks existed on the north side of the tracks” (Madigan 2001:221). Many African Americans owned rental property in Greenwood; those who suffered the most significant property losses due to white violence—and a lack of protection from either Tulsa authorities or the state of Oklahoma—included R.T. Bridgewater, J.H. Goodwin, Sadie Partee, Loula Williams and G.W. Hutchins, among many others (O’Dell 2001:146). Figure 4 (below) depicts an African-American family trying to salvage whatever they could following the riot amidst the charred remains:



## The Dispossession of Greenwood Residents



Source: Oklahoma Historical Society (*Oklahoma Commission 2001:148*)

Larry O'Dell examined three sources of data—the Tulsa Real Estate Exchange Commission, the claims filed against the City Commission at its meetings, and the actual damage claimed in court cases against both Tulsa and insurance companies—to determine the extent of property loss African Americans suffered as a result of white violence. He reached an estimate of \$1.8 million in 1921 dollars (O'Dell 2001:149).

Surveys taken by the Red Cross estimated that some 5,366 persons from 1,765 families had been “more or less seriously effected (sic)” by the explosion of racial violence in Tulsa. By the end of July 1,400 lawsuits had been filed against the city “for losses upward of \$4 million” (claims ranged from \$25 to \$150,000). Greenwood’s prominent structures were decimated as if burned out in a warzone, each building a symbol of African-American success. White disciplinary violence decimated the Gurley Hotel (\$150,000 claim); the Dreamland Theatre and Williams building (\$100,000); the Mount Zion Baptist Church, for which black Tulsans had saved for seven years to erect (reportedly at a cost of \$85,000), and Tulsa’s black newspapers, the *Star* and the *Oklahoma Sun* (Ellsworth 1982:70). The Stradford Hotel, a 54-room brick building with a drug store, barber shop, and restaurant, was also burned to the ground, as were the Red Wing Hotel and the Midway Hotel. “Literally dozens of family-run businesses—from cafes and mom-and-pop grocery stores, to the Dreamland Theater, the Y.M.C.A. Cleaners, the East End Feed Store, and Osborne Monroe’s roller skating rink—had also gone up in flames,

taking with them the livelihoods, and in many cases the life savings, of literally hundreds of people” write John Hope Franklin and Scott Ellsworth (Oklahoma Commission 2001:23). White rioters dispossessed African Americans of their property and eliminated a prosperous community, yet the Tulsa legal system “did virtually nothing” to prosecute those responsible. The grand jury “issued several dozen indictments, mostly for blacks,” notes Brophy, but no indictments for murder were issued, nor for arson (2002:75). White prosecutors did seek to extradite A.J. Smitherman (from Boston) and J.B. Stradford (from Kansas) to face charges, but they were unable—or unwilling—to prosecute a single individual: “no white Tulsan was ever sent to prison for the murders and burnings on May 31 and June 1, 1921 (Ellsworth 2001:89).

Tulsa’s white community added to Greenwood’s destruction by helping to ensure it wouldn’t be rebuilt—or, at the very least, rebuilding would not be accomplished with help from sympathetic donors. Publicly, Tulsa’s Chamber of Commerce declared that “as quickly as possible rehabilitation will take place and reparation made’ On June 4, 1921 Tulsa’s Executive Welfare Committee held a meeting; like the Chamber of Commerce and other ‘relief’ groups, it had no African American members on its board. The white folks on the welfare committee “decided not to accept any other kind of donation” beyond cash payments to the Red Cross used explicitly for ‘relief work.’ Tulsa’s economic and civic organizations decided it was *Tulsa’s responsibility*, and Tulsa’s alone, to handle the rebuilding effort:

Thus, while the officials of the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce were telling the nation’s press that reparation and restitution would be made, they charted a directly opposite course, *even to refusing offers of aid* for people whom they hardly represented. One Chamber of Commerce member stated that ‘numerous telegrams were received by the executive committee from various cities in the Union offering aid, but the policy was quickly adopted that this was strictly a Tulsa affair and that the work of restoration and charity would be taken care of by Tulsa people.’ (Ellsworth 1982:84; emphasis added).

In fact, it was becoming clear that those in power never had any intention of restoring Greenwood. The riot provided another opportunity for unscrupulous white businessmen to exploit African Americans.

The Tulsa Chamber of Commerce established a Real Estate Exchange, and beginning the day after the riot, a board began to “consider converting the burned area into an industrial district and expanding the railyard.” Brophy notes that the Real Estate Exchange “estimated that the value of the property when used for commercial purposes was more than three times its value when used for residences,” so they proposed relocating the African-American community “farther north, away from white Tulsa” (2002:93). A report from the Executive Welfare

Committee from June 7 indicates that the Real Estate Exchange had ‘organized to list and appraise the value of properties in the burned area and to work out a plan of possible purchase and the conversion of the burned area into an industrial and wholesale district’ (Ellsworth 1982:84). White businessmen attempted to acquire black-owned property at basement prices. When many blacks refused to sell that property to whites, the City Commission passed Fire Ordinance No. 2156. The ordinance required “any structure within the city’s ‘official’ fire limits had to be constructed of concrete, brick, or steel, and had to be at least two stories high,” explains Ellsworth. “The effect of the ordinance was to prevent some black Tulsans from rebuilding their burned homes where they had been” (1982:85). These maneuvers were performed less than one week after the trauma had officially ended for black Tulsans, and now an even greater struggle laid ahead. The *Black Dispatch* was appalled by how ‘white men sat down and deliberately conspired to confiscate the very land and ashes where black men had dwelt’ (Brophy 2002:94). White disciplinary violence proves instrumental for Tulsa’s ecology as a city—it is the opening mechanism launching structural change to its very design.

Tulsa’s mayor, Thaddeus Evans, also supported a relocation of the African American community. On June 14 he addressed the City Commission: “Let the negro settlement be placed farther to the north and east,’ for ‘a large portion of this district is well suited for industrial purposes than for residences.’ Mayor Evans had another recommendation: ‘We should immediately get in touch with all the railroads with a view to establishing a Union station on this ground. The location is ideal and all the railroads convenient.’ Ellsworth notes it isn’t clear whether the mayor and the Executive Welfare Committee “had been working in conjunction prior to this meeting,” but it really didn’t matter, as both parties “were basically expressing the same designs for black Tulsa” (1982:85). African Americans had to fight even for the continued existence of their community, even for the *right to rebuild* what had been devastated by whites. We have seen the instrumental nature of white violence during Reconstruction and Redemption, where terrorism essentially structured political power in particular counties; now, 40 years later, we see the instrumental nature of white violence in land acquisition (i.e., the use of violence to destabilize the value of land, further exploiting the black community). The historical evidence indicates that “the aftermath of the riot was marked by a concerted attempt by white Tulsa’s social and economic elite to further destroy the city’s black community” (Ellsworth 1982:105). Yet not all of Tulsa’s African Americans were not ready to capitulate. As Ellsworth notes,

“Black Tulsans were far from silent on this issue, and it was only their action which prevented this further attempt by white Tulsans to destroy their community” (1982:86).

The attempted racial cleansing in Tulsa, Oklahoma left heavy psychological scars that never really healed for those who experienced the trauma firsthand. The “burning was not something regularly discussed in black Tulsa,” explains Madigan. “The Negroes who survived were muzzled by fear, by the possibility, however remote, that it could happen again. They were also silenced by shame, by the memory of how their proud community had been so ruthlessly and completely subjugated” (2001:169). Journalists and historians really didn’t even bother investigating the Tulsa ‘race riot’ until the 1970s—a half century after the devastation! The violence also spurned much of Tulsa’s black leadership to leave the city. “The feisty heart and soul of black Tulsa had been ripped away,” writes Madigan. “Its leaders had fled. There would be no more loud public debates about race in Greenwood, not for decades.” African Americans in Tulsa “had learned in the most convincing fashion imaginable that they could not prevail against whites, who had both numbers and the law on their side. For decades after the burning, black Tulsans kept their collective eyes to the ground” (Madigan 2001:232). J.B. Stradford fled to Independence, Kansas to live with his brother for a time; he eventually moved to Chicago, “this time to his son’s home.” A.J. Smitherman “eventually turned up in Buffalo, New York, where he edited another black newspaper. Neither man ever returned to Tulsa” (Madigan 2001:230). This kind of migration is critical for structuring a community. The removal of a city’s most talented residents—its leaders, in enterprise, politics, and culture—abandoned the place in search of greater tolerance, though it was in short supply in white America during the 1920s. It’s difficult to ascertain what may have been difficult had all of Greenwood’s affluent leaders remained; it’s futile to speculate on the ways in which they may have advanced the march towards equality were it not for the effects of white terrorism.

The rebuilding of ‘Deep Greenwood’ was “a testimony to the courage and stamina of Tulsa’s black pioneers in their struggle for freedom,” writes Ellsworth. “Many of the buildings along the first block of Greenwood Avenue running north from Archer Street were rebuilt by the end of 1922,” and “many of the new buildings assumed the form of their predecessors” (1982:108). In fact, the same local brickyard provided that had supplied the red bricks for the original buildings also supplied them for the rebuilding. African-American businesses flourished once more, and with prosperity black culture expanded: “a local Negro Business Directory was

published, a Greenwood Chamber of Commerce organized, the National Negro Business League hosted here, and a black entrepreneur by the name of Simon Berry established a black-owned bus system” (Ellsworth 1982:108). By the end of 1921, only six months after the devastation, “more than six hundred homes in Greenwood also had been rebuilt.” ‘Deep Greenwood’ looked “almost exactly as it did before the burning, except newer,” writes Madigan (2001:240).

In the late 1950s, however, white merchants ‘found that the dollar from Greenwood was just as green as the south of the tracks dollar,’ as Henry Whitlow phrased it. Greenwood was on the decline. Worse still was Tulsa’s “remarkable conspiracy of silence.” Plenty of American cities have done their best to “sweep their racial atrocities under the carpet, but in no other city were the horrors as great and the cultural amnesia so complete as in Tulsa” (Madigan 2001:252). By 1978 “only two businesses” remained; many of the red brick buildings were “empty ghosts of an earlier era.” A freeway bisected the community. As Dr. John Hope Franklin told Ellsworth, ‘There are two ways which whites destroy a black community. One is by building a freeway through it, the other is by changing the zoning laws’ (1982:109).

#### SEVEN DAYS OF TERROR IN FLORIDA: WHITE RESENTMENT AND THE ROSEWOOD MASSACRE OF 1923

Minnie Lee Langley was standing outside in her yard that New Year’s Day in 1923. It was cold, and she remembered her mother staring down the dirt road from their home. “Here come a gang of crackers, coming down the railroad,” her mama yelled to the children. There were so many of them. Some were on horseback, the thumping hooves rumbling up ahead; some of them were “riding them little buggy cars down the dirt roads,” and “some of them was in the railroad, just as far as you can see them [sic],” their rifles resting against the shoulder as they marched along the tracks. Langley estimated there were at least a hundred white men—and perhaps even 150—descending upon her community, some wearing them “big ole’ tall hats” (Jones et al. 1993a:35). Emma Carrier was Minnie Lee Langley’s mother, and when several men slowed their horses at her front yard, she did all she could to conceal her trembling. She hadn’t seen anybody pass their house, Carrier informed the men, and they passed along, down the dirt road.

Aaron Carrier’s wrists were wrapped tightly with a rope, which was secured to the bumper of a black Model T. Emma screamed from the front porch of their home: ‘He didn’t do

nothin!' she cried out for her son. The white men had been led back to their house by a team of bloodhounds; they were tracking the scent of an accused rapist. Apparently, a black man had raped and assaulted Fannie Taylor, the young wife of a white mill worker named James. As Emma Carrier pleaded for her son's life, "the driver hit the gas, and Aaron Carrier's body was dragged up the hard dirt road, his short torn by the gravel, his skin seared by the sand," writes Michal D'Orso in *Like Judgment Day*. "A quarter mile they dragged him, and then they stopped, the driver saying he was tired of wasting his gasoline on this nigger. 'Kill him!' someone shouted, and that's when Aaron Carrier spoke." 'I didn't do nothin' wrong,' he said. 'It was Sam Carter took him' (D'Orso 1996:4).

Sam Carter was a blacksmith, and when he arrived at his home on the southwestern edge of Rosewood, he alighted from his wagon. A group of whites rushed from their hiding spot behind some bushes, knocking the 47-year-old Carter to the ground. When he refused to tell who had transported in his wagon, one of the white men pulled Carter toward a large oak tree. A rope was dropped from the tree and tightened around his neck, "some jeering, some cheering as the body rose off the ground. They were hanging Sam Carter not to kill him but to choke him, to squeeze the truth out of him," explains D'Orso. 'I'll tell you!' he gasped (1996:4). The white men lowered Sam Carter, "dragged him to a stump, tied him down and took knives to his ears, to his fingers and thumbs, slicing off body parts for keepsakes." The sand around him was soaked in blood, and Carter agreed to take them men to the fugitive. He stopped his wagon at a swampy forest known as Gulf Hammock, said he had left the men there, but the bloodhounds didn't smell anything, so a white man stepped out, leveled his rifle, and called Sam Carter a 'black son of a bitch.' 'You didn't do it, neither,' he said, spitting into the sand as he pulled the trigger. Knives were used to carve other appendages from the blacksmith: "More of his body parts were taken, to be stored in jars, pulled out and chuckled over for years to come." Then someone grabbed his pocket watch. "It too would show up from time to time, in a bar, in a barbershop around Sumner or Cedar Key, Chiefland or Bronson," writes D'Orso. And the watch would appear. 'Let's see what time it is by old Sam Carter,' a white person would chuckle as they removed the watch from their pocket. Carter's mutilated body was again lifted by a limb from a nearby tree. The white men shot it up in rapid succession, then left his riddled body lying in the road before heading back toward Rosewood. It was over—for now.

Rosewood was a “small hamlet of twenty-five or thirty families in Levy County,” Florida. In 1920, the town’s voting precinct had 355 registered African Americans (Jones et al. 1993a:20). Hilton Station was at the center of town, and the railroad cut right through it. The station was named after one of Edmund Goins’s children, and Goins owned acres and acres of land in Rosewood. He leased a lot of it too—the Levy County Courthouse records show it, “page after page” of land they had leased and owned” (Jones et al. 1993b:192). The M. Goins & Brothers’ Naval Company distilled turpentine and rosin from the vast tracts of pine growing in the area. ‘Goins Quarters’ was a series of shanties erected to house his employees. Turpentine was the “focal point of production in Rosewood,” according to Gretchen Douglas, whose mother Eva was 13 at the time of the cleansing event; her family cared for Rosewood survivors in Gainesville following the violence (Jones et al. 1993b:197). In 1920, African Americans in Rosewood had three churches, a train station, a black masonic hall, and a private school for the education of their children; they even had a community baseball team named the Rosewood Stars, which played against other teams from Levy and the surrounding counties.

Sylvester Carrier was 30 years old, a tall and strong black man who knew how to handle a rifle. He hunted to support his family. Sylvester and his wife, Gertrude, had been married ten years; they lived with his mother, Sarah, and his three sisters, Annie, Leland, and Bernadina, in a two-story home with a piano, where Carrier would sit and practice. Each Sunday he sat at the organ of the Rosewood Methodist Church and sang with their choir, but on Tuesday, January 2 he “gathered his kin from around town, more than a dozen of them, mostly children—cousins and nieces and nephews—and brought them all together under his parents’ roof.” Emma and James Carrier, Aaron Carrier’s parents, went to Sarah Carrier’s home, along with ten of their children and grandchildren; in all, there were “nearly twenty people squeezed into the Carrier house” (D’Orso 1996:8). Rumor began to spread among the white folks. Something was brewing at the Carrier household, a stockpiling of arms in anticipation of an attack, and this kind of thing could never be tolerated, because Sylvester Carrier was a dangerous black man. He “was angry, and he was proud, too proud,” writes D’Orso. “He had no fear of white men” (1996:7).

Two groups converged at Sylvester Carrier’s property around 10:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 4. Henry Andrews, a short and stocky chief sawmill superintendent who, because he had a habit of kicking men who worked too slowly, garnered the name ‘Boots,’ led a crew from Otter Creek. Andrews “had never cared for Sylvester Carrier, and now, with the light of a full moon

showing the way, he was bound to do something about it,” explains D’Orso. Poly Wilkerson, a quarter boss at the lumber mill—quarter bosses acted as “sheriffs of sorts” in mill towns, where “formal law enforcement was spread thin”—led a crew from Sumner in his Model T (D’Orso 1996:8). There were no more than 12 white men combined in these crews, but the air was frigid, and the small posse “built a fire over by the tracks.” Sylvester Carrier saw the car lights approaching and extinguished any that remained in his own home. “Now he sat with two loaded rifles by a darkened front window, watching as the white men built their fire. He could see their faces clearly in the bright moonlight,” writes D’Orso. Sarah Carrier could see them too. The family dog dashed around the side of the house, heading for the makeshift campsite, barking furiously but still a puppy. Poly Wilkerson, undeterred, raised his pistol and shot the dog. He hollered for Sarah Carrier to come on out and bring the children. He said he “didn’t want to hurt the children.” He had come for Sylvester. Sarah Carrier “went to her window, upstairs, opened the window and yelled out to the mob, many of whom she had nursed as babies, and they respected her,” explained Arnett Doctor, Carrier’s grandson, in a recorded interview with members of the Rosewood investigative commission, in 1993 (Jones et al. 1993b). ‘Y’all go on home,’ Sarah yelled in return as she slipped her head through a window. ‘Just get yourselves on *home*’ (D’Orso 1996:9; emphasis in original). Carrier was a well-respected black woman, and it “wasn’t anything strange for her to verbally chastise young white men, explained Doctor, “because it was that kind of relationship. And that’s what she was actually doing, chastising them verbally” (Jones et al. 1993b). But Poly Wilkerson was undeterred. He turned and fired his pistol. Then a window shattered and Sarah Carrier fell to the floor, blood running from the bullet hole in her head.

The children hid together upstairs. Ruben Mitchell, one of the grandchildren, was peeking out a window when a bullet crashed the glass, which shattered in his face, costing the boy his left eye. Sarah Carrier’s 20-year-old daughter Bernadina, the one the family called ‘Honey,’ raced past her brother and “up the steps to see to the children. Her nightgown was splashed with her mother’s blood. Mama Sarah was dead, she told the children” (D’Orso 1996:9). Sylvester Carrier stood guard at the foot of the stairs, crouched to the ground, “waiting with a pump-handled shotgun and Winchester rifle.” One of the children raced down the steps, and Sylvester grabbed her, pulled her back between his legs. It was Minnie Lee, Ruben’s sister, and as she grabbed Sylvester’s pants, squeezing his legs tightly, the front door was kicked open.



“Sylvester Carrier squeezed one of his triggers, and with a deafening blast, Poly Wilkerson fell back on the porch, shot through the face,” writes D’Orso. “A voice shouted, Sylvester fired again, and Henry Andrews dropped dead as well. One of the mob moved toward the bodies on the porch but was driven back by a fusillade from inside the house” (1996:10).

It was early morning, January 5<sup>th</sup>, when word reached Gainesville, 40 miles to the northeast, that white men had been shot and killed by armed blacks down in Rosewood. By dawn more than 250 armed whites converged on the town and raided the Carrier home. They found the body of Sarah Carrier, and that of her son Sylvester, who stayed behind to keep the whites at bay as his family fled into the cold winter night. Sylvester’s sisters, Annie, Leland, and Bernadina, along with Emma and James Carrier, Minnie Lee Mitchell and her big brother Ruben all escaped, among several others. “Out the rear door dripped trails of blood, down the steps, across the sandy yard and on into the woods. They had escaped,” writes D’Orso, had “crawled away during the siege through cover of trees and the night, and now they were out there, out in the swamp” (1996:10). The white men retrieved their axes; though most everything in the house was destroyed, the glass shattered and strewn across the floor, wood splintered by bullets, hatchets and axes were “taken to everything still intact in the house. Lamps, dishes, chairs, tables. Finally, the piano. All smashed to shards in a burst of fury. Cans of kerosene appeared. Matches. And now the morning sky was darkened with billowing black smoke” (D’Orso 1996:10-11). Michael D’Orso’s brilliant writing illustrates not only the intensity of white resentment—all household items were targeted for destruction—but their desire to dispossess African Americans of *all* property. If it wasn’t attractive enough to steal, it was still worth the time and effort to destroy. And this ritual left any returning family member(s) entirely destitute. One cannot pass down what has been destroyed; one cannot inherit family valuables that are stolen.



Infuriated white folks descended upon Rosewood, some from as far away as Jacksonville. The Carrier house was the first in flames as the streets filled with “white rage. Another house went up in flames. Then another,” writes D’Orso. “The Methodist church, Man’s church, was set

ablaze. Then the other two churches as well, their bells tolling languidly, rocked by the wind and rising heat” (1996:11). Several whites tried to help. John and William Bryce brought railcars from Cedar Key and, under the protection of night, the white conductors’ train “rolled slowly, quietly, through the dense mossy woods, its crew calling into the darkness for women and children to climb aboard.” John Wright, “the only white man who lived in the village proper,” ran Rosewood’s largest general store. He risked sheltering women and children from the white marauders, but neither Wright nor the Bryce brothers could risk helping black men, as it might “mean death for them all.” The whites continued their depredations throughout the day:

As the mob torched building after building, hour after hour, it passed the Wright home by, knowing it belonged to a white man. They did not know Wright had filled some of those rooms with black women and children, hiding them until the train pulled up Saturday night at the rail platform in his back yard, where quickly, quietly, a line of shivering survivors was loaded into darkened cars and spirited away to Gainesville, never to return to Rosewood again. There was nothing to return to. Sunday afternoon, the last twelve homes still standing among the smoke and ashes were set aflame. (D’Orso 1996:12)

Law enforcement was a bit late in arrival, of course. There was “no one left to save” and the town was emptied: “As for the burning, they just watched” (D’Orso 1996:13).

Emma Carrier survived the swamps. Her and her daughter, Beulah, whom they called Scrapie, hid in those Florida swamps for three days along with the children. ‘She stayed with us out in those woods for three days, feeding us berries and cabbage root. It was so cold, Jesus it was cold,’ recalled Minnie Lee. ‘And we was about naked. We ain’t had no clothes. But Scrapie wouldn’t let us build but a little bitty fire, because she didn’t want them to find us’ (D’Orso 1996:66). Minnie “could see the flames from Rosewood lighting up the evening sky” on the second night. ‘Like Judgment Day,’ she remembered thinking. On the third night the train arrived. ‘Captain Bryce,’ as Minnie Lee called him, sent word that he would take them to Gainesville. Emma lived with Minnie, Ruben, and the rest of the children in “a small shack in the black section of the city. ‘But she ain’t never got well,’ Minnie explained: “Emma had been hurt in the gunfight, shot in the hand and the wrist, but it wasn’t those wounds that killed her, says Minnie. ‘She just took sick over what happened, and she never did get well.’ Emma died the summer after they arrived in Gainesville, in 1924. The children were on their own. Minnie Lee was 11 years old; her oldest cousin, Lonnie, was 13 years old. All the children “pitched in to put dinner on the table each evening,” and Lonnie acted “as the father, leading the group in prayer” (D’Orso 1996:67).

One month after the violence ended in Rosewood, an all-white grand jury composed of “local farmers and merchants” convened in Bronson, the county seat. During three days of hearings, 25 witnesses were called to testify, including 8 African Americans, but the jury ruled the evidence was ‘insufficient’ to merit indictments: None of the white residents who participated in the butchery at Rosewood were indicted, and the case was closed. James Hunter, the alleged rapist of Fannie Taylor and incendiary event responsible for the release of white violence, was never found. “And so it was finished. The town was gone, and its memory soon vanished as well.” The national media soon ceased reporting on the event, as did the Florida press, and the facts of white terrorism retreated from public view. “Like the remains of a rock thrown into a pond, the record of Rosewood faded from a single splash, to scattered ripples, to stillness,” writes D’Orso. “It was the “final ‘race riot’ of its time. It would also be the one that was forgotten, the only one not detailed and documented on library shelves. And perhaps there was a reason for that” (D’Orso 1996:58).

### *Instrumental White Violence*

“Who could believe there had once been a town up here in this godforsaken swamp country, a busy town filled with black people, three hundred of them at its peak, at the turn of the century, land-owning people with their own homes and businesses,” writes Michael D’Orso. “Hard to believe there could have been anything at all out here in the middle of nowhere. Harder still to believe it could have been here one day and be gone the next, swept away overnight, the houses burned to the ground, the land seized, the people driven into the bogs, never to return, and nothing done about it.” Hard to believe indeed. And since no mention of the event is made in any history book, it is “as if none of this had ever happened, as if the place had never existed” (1996:27). Black progress was not tolerated by some southern whites in the post-World War I era. And in executing violence they sought to dispossess their African-American neighbors, whether in the form of lifted property or goods rendered valueless because they were destroyed.

The consequences of white violence reach across generations, negatively affecting upward economic mobility: “his own people had once had something like that—their own land, their own businesses, their own big houses with living rooms and lamps and sofas. Not just two rooms and a kitchen, like the shotgun shacks they lived in now. They owned pianos, his mother said. And organs. They had horses and buggies, and on Sundays they rode to church like royalty. Royalty,” writes D’Orso as he explains the revelations of Arnett Doctor, a Rosewood descendent

who spearheaded the survivors' legal case against the state of Florida. His mother relayed only bits and pieces about his family history, always seeking to shield him from the pain she had endured: "The Goinses and the Carriers, the two families her father and mother came from, they were the most important people in the town of Rosewood, she said. Her great-uncle, Martine Goins, he was the best businessman in those parts, the way she described him, a man respected by blacks and whites a like. He ran a turpentine operation so big it had housing for some of the men who worked there, quarters just like the Cummers' [mill]" (1996:29-30).

The story of Philomena Carrier reveals the enduring trauma imposed by white violence, how it reaches beyond physical safety and economic considerations into the psychological: "The town was gone. No one ever came back," she told her son, Arnett. "Not then, not ever. And that, she explained, was why she cried every Christmas, because for her the holidays meant nothing but memories of that week, of Rosewood, of what she had lost and what they, Arnett and Yvonne, had lost, too. She was eleven years old when it happened, she told them. Just a child, she said. But she would never feel like a child again (D'Orso 1996:31). Philomena's father "owned land, a lot of land," and she wanted Arnett to know this, to understand that he was "special," that his "ancestors were special people, people of importance," even if their circumstances in the present were not as bright. Philomena's story illustrates the devastating consequences unleashed by white violence—and the trauma reverberates across generations, manifesting itself in a variety of destructive ways. It effects all aspects of the survivor's existence from that moment forward; in this way, the tentacles of white violence touch subsequent generations. "Always, according to my mother, always afraid," explained Arnett of Philomena's youth following Rosewood, "that any particular day that someone was going to come up and tap them on the shoulder and something was going to happen." That they would be attacked. That the white folks would return to finish what they had started. But "basically, they did not have a stable lifestyle because of what happened in Rosewood," and after several years, his mother relocated again, this time to Lacoochee, Florida, where the "older members of the Carrier family" had moved (Jones et al. 1993b:183).

Black families were dislocated as a result of the violence, separated until the producers of 60 Minutes began showing up at the doorsteps of survivors like Minnie Lee Mitchell, who had been pulled back by her cousin Sylvester just as the front door of Sarah Carrier's cabin was kicked open. Minnie moved to Jacksonville in 1926 and she never talked about Rosewood again,

not until 1982, when a newspaper reporter from St. Petersburg arrived at her home. The article led to an appearance on 60 Minutes, and later, a reunion: ‘I knowed I had some cousins somewhere, but I didn’t know where they was, didn’t even know if they was still alive,’ Minnie Lee admitted. She hadn’t seen A. T. Goins since the cleansing event sixty years earlier—the two were about the same age at the time of the riot—but the news program brought them together. Arnett Goins was 8 years old at the time of the violence, and at times he wondered how his life may have turned out differently had those whites not decided to transform it, “what life would have been like if their family had been able to hold onto their houses and land and make it all grow into something even bigger and better” (D’Orso 1996:70). Former Rosewood residents were dispersed across Florida: “They was all around,” Arnett recalled in an interview with the Rosewood investigative commission, “some in New Smyrna, some in Miami, some in Pensacola, Jacksonville, and ah, Ladooche [sic]” (Jones et al. 1993b:223).

Arnett Doctor was finally determined to satisfy his curiosity. He would drive to Levy County. He would check the property records, see just how much land his family had owned in Rosewood around the time of the riot. Doctor was “stunned” with the records he obtained:

There, on the pages of deeds and tax rolls, were his people’s names, next to columns of acreage owned and taxes paid. There was Sarah Carrier’s name beside two acres of land she bought in 1901. And her husband Hayward’s name beside another half-acre. There was Lexie Gordon buying a small piece of property in 1913. And Ransome Edwards, the grandfather who raised Arnett’s uncle Willie Evans, he had two acres. The Hall family was down for twenty. Emma Carrier herself had an acre. And Ed Bradley, Lee Ruth’s uncle, he owned three. (D’Orso 1996:91).

Arnett noticed that Ed Goins’s name appeared frequently in the property records: “The deed books were full of transactions with Arnett’s great-grandfather’s name beside them. Starting in 1907, Ed Goins began leasing land left and right. By 1919 there were thirty-one leases in the Rosewood area with his name on it,” writes D’Orso. “Then Ed Goins moved away, and his leases expired. The 1921 tax rolls showed him owning a single sixty-five acre plot of land. That year’s list was the last that showed any black families in Rosewood owning property. Their names were absent on ensuing lists. Gone. Other names had replaced theirs, the names of white people. Their land had been sold for delinquent taxes, sold, Arnett was certain, to some of the same people who had burned the town down. (D’Orso 1996:92). Arnett Doctor also noticed that John Wright, the white man “who had risked his reputation to save Lee Ruth and her family, who had hidden them in his house till the train came,” was also the name “listed on page after page of the 1927 tax rolls as the owner of acres of property that formerly belonged to the people of

Rosewood” (D’Orso 1996:92). Arnett eventually decided to pursue a lawsuit against the state of Florida, seeking compensation for losses suffered “to break the whole cycle of poverty in our entire family, the cycle that goes straight back to Rosewood” (D’Orso 1996:126).

Levy County Court records indicate that a significant amount of property previously owned by African Americans exchanged ownership in 1925, two years after the theft, murder, and arson had ended. “That’s what [is] so strange about 1925,” explains Arnett Doctor, “is that you go through the deeds and the things that changed hands in 1925, a lot of property changed hands in 1925 that belonged to the Goins Family, the Carrier Family, the King Family, the Edwards Family and its been presented to us that these people did not receive compensation or they did not receive fair compensation.” Doctor claims that Goins’s land was “sold under threat,” that his relatives were “contacted and threatened in 1925. They were contacted and threatened to sell their property” (Jones et al. 1993b:182). “I think they [white invaders] saw Rosewood as an area that could enhance their financial welfare,” Doctor opined. “They could run these people off, they could take their property, they could seize their property, they could seize their farms, they could seize whatever, and that’s basically what it was” (1993b:175). There were economic motives behind the violence—the dispossession of African Americans, and specifically a community of *successful* black citizens—in addition to a well of collective resentment. “I think that these were just whites in the area who objected to the lifestyles of the blacks,” Doctor said, “who objected to the success of blacks” (1993b:174).

# Chapter 6

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## **From White Discipline to Black Rebellion**

## **From White Discipline to Black Rebellion: The Shifting Social Structure of American Race Riots, 1935 - 1943**

The Harlem problem is a racial one, rooted in the Negro's dissatisfaction with his racial status not only in Harlem but all over the country, and exhibited in his efforts, sometimes intelligent and moderate, sometimes blind and extreme, to break down the economic and social discriminations, barriers which at times seem unbearable. In Harlem and other Negro districts where all told 500,000 persons live, there is no question that an ugly mood has existed for some years, especially among the younger Negroes. This condition is not peculiar to New York. As all reports make clear, it is a reflection of a nation-wide attitude—a feeling of resentment and bitterness which came to a head in the depression years and has been nourished by a variety of old and new grievances.

- Russell B. Porter, *The New York Times* (August 8, 1943)

A 16-year-old boy eyed the ten-cent pocketknife on the counter, thinking of all the possibilities. What he hadn't anticipated was that the store's manager and his assistant, Charles Hurley, were watching him from the balcony above. Young Lino Rivera casually slid the knife into his pocket and proceeded toward the five and dime's main entrance, located at 125<sup>th</sup> street. It was the middle of the afternoon. Charles Hurley, a store clerk, dashed down the stairs, weaving through the crowd in pursuit of the young shoplifter; with the assistance of another clerk, Stephen Urban, he apprehended the boy. Rivera clung to a store pillar, and "bit Urban and Hurley so severely on the hands" as they tried to wrestle him away that the young clerks required medical treatment, according to *The New York Times* (March 20, 1935). There were around 500 customers in the S. H. Kress store, and a patrolman escorted Rivera through the basement to the rear entrance in order to avoid the crowd that had gathered out front. An African American woman, anticipating a reoccurrence of police brutality, cried out that they had taken the boy to the basement to 'beat him up,' and the arrival of an ambulance "summoned to dress the wounded hands of the boy's captors" only escalated an already tense situation. For many onlookers, the ambulance "seemed to substantiate" the rumor of police brutality (Mayor La Guardia's Commission 1935:7). As word spread through the community, "customers went on the rampage, overturning counters, strewing merchandise on the floor and shouting." Two separate riot calls were placed—one to the West 123d Street station and the other at police headquarters—and by early evening, "emergency squads swarmed into the store" (March 20, 1935). It was March 19, 1935 and Harlem's black community was about to transform the social structure of American 'race riots'; they were about to demand their rights through *compensatory rebellion*.



Harlem is bounded north and south by 99<sup>th</sup> Street and 181<sup>st</sup> Street; the East and Harlem Rivers form its eastern boundary, while the Hudson River is the western bound. Between 1910 and 1920, the African-American population grew from 23,000 to 83,807, an increase of more than 191 percent. In the following decade, “the rate of increase was 244 percent,” and by 1930, there were more than 204,313 black folks living in Harlem (La Guardia 1935:28). In 1934, African-American families represented 31.1 percent of all families living in Harlem, according to a survey conducted by the New York City Housing Authority. Black folks were “concentrated near the center of the area,” however; they were “surrounded, with the exception of the Puerto Ricans on the south, by whites, about a third of whom are foreign born.” The majority of the African-American population “is from the rural South or the West Indies.” (La Guardia 1935:27). New York attracted a *different type* of immigrant than other major industrial cities in the United States. This demographic factor is of crucial importance for the development of African-American culture in New York, as opposed to industrial cities such as Detroit. Migrants who ventured to New York “were not the ‘rural cotton folk’ who went to Chicago,” writes sociologist Janet Abu Lughod: “Drawn from southern cities on the Atlantic seaboard, they were considerably ‘better prepared to adapt themselves to life and industry in a great city.’ A goodly proportion were also attracted selectively from among the better educated classes in the British Caribbean—a group that eschewed migration to industrial cities such as Chicago or Detroit.” Harlem had become “a magnet for ambitious blacks,” a cultural mecca “whose fame would spread worldwide in the 1920s.” Conditions in Harlem “contrasted dramatically with the minority slums in other cities” (Abu Lughod 2007:136-37). Harlem had always attracted “the pleasure-seeker, the curious, the adventurous, the enterprising, the ambitious, and the talented of the whole Negro world,” noted James Weldon Johnson, African-American author, lawyer, and first black executive secretary of the NAACP. Johnson, whose mother had emigrated to the United States from the Bahamas, declared that in Central Harlem, black folks could enjoy the ‘fundamental rights of American citizenship’ (Flamm 2017:30-1). Harlem was “the center of African American political thought” during the 1920s and 30s (Flamm 2017:32). Several prominent black publications were headquartered in Harlem: Du Bois and Jessie Faucet edited *The Crisis*, the NAACP’s magazine. *Opportunity*, edited by Charles S. Johnson and published by the National Urban League, called Harlem home, as did *The Messenger*, edited by A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen and published by the Socialist Party.

The African-American population in Harlem increased 600 percent between 1910 and 1935, and as a result, securing suitable housing became “the most serious problem” for black folks arriving in Harlem (La Guardia 1935:63). During the 1930s, more than 145,000 African Americans came to New York City, many of whom fled the south (Brandt 1996:39). ‘Negro Harlem,’ as it was known, was “a community unlike any other, ‘a city within a city,’ the largest black neighborhood in the country, covering in its three and a half square miles close to four hundred city blocks” (Brandt 1996:24). Duke Ellington and Bessie Smith entertained at the Apollo Theater, the Cotton Club, and the Savoy Ballroom. African-American writers such as Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and Jean Toomer all lived and worked in Harlem; black academics like E. Franklin Frazier, a sociologist from Howard University, and Alain Locke, author of *The New Negro* and a Rhodes Scholar, produced important scholarship on African-American culture and social life. Harlem was rich in culture and diverse in community, “with deep divisions between the ‘respectable’ churchgoers and the ‘rebellious’ street people, the middle class and the lower class, the native-born and the foreign-born, the light-skinned and the dark skinned,” writes historian Michael Flamm (2017:32). The Depression era also witnessed a “resurgence in radicalism,” not only in Harlem but also at the national level: Black writers such as Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, and Richard Wright were all associated with the Communist Party. The Communist Party would “come to challenge the NAACP as the preeminent organization advocating the cause of African Americans” (Gaines 1996:251).

All Americans felt the grip of the Great Depression during the 1930s, but in Harlem the problem of unemployment was “exacerbated by continuing large-scale discrimination” (Brandt 1996:37). African Americans not only found it difficult to attain work due to racist hiring practices; their economic mobility was severely hindered due to restrictions in employment opportunities patterned by race, as the La Guardia Commission noted: “Negro men here since 1910 shifted from domestic and personal service to manufacturing and mechanical industries and transportation,” with a similar shift “noticeable for Negro women,” but a close analysis of occupation statistics revealed that “while the proportion of Negro men and women in manufacturing and mechanical industries has doubled since 1910, they are still in the lowest-paid and unskilled occupations” (1935:29). The commission documented the true extent of discrimination in hiring practices in several New York industries. Records from the utilities companies “indicate that they have systematically excluded Negro workers or restricted them to

a relatively few menial jobs. The Consolidated Gas Company has only 213 Negroes among its 10,000 employees.” The New York Edison Company had even fewer: only 65 of 10,000 employees were black, “all of whom are confined to such menial jobs as porters, cleaners, and hallmen.” The same situation was said to exist at the New York Telephone Company, “which employs only a small number of Negroes as laborers” (La Guardia 1935:32).

Racist hiring practices also structured New York’s transportation industry. In the 1930s, transit represented another sector of the economy that was almost exclusively white. The New York Railways Company employed “about twenty-five Negroes, most of them in menial positions, out of a total of 1,700 employees. Among the 10,000 employees of the Interborough Rapid Transit Company we found that there were about 580 Negroes employed as messengers, porters, and cleaners, while the Brooklyn-Manhattan Transportation Company has a contingent of about 200 Negroes in similar positions” (La Guardia 1935:32). Company officials in these industries claimed “tradition and custom have restricted the employment of Negroes” to positions “symbolic of their inferior status in American civilization.” The vice-president in charge of personnel at the New York Telephone Company, for example, “did not regard the exclusion of Negroes from all positions, except a few jobs as laborers, as discrimination”; rather, for Mr. Boggs, it was only “a customary practice” (La Guardia 1935:33).

African Americans were also systematically denied membership in unions throughout the city, thus practices of exclusion furthered their economic isolation. The construction industry was perhaps the most discriminatory: “In the various locals representing the building trades, there are less than 1,000 Negroes in a membership close to 40,000,” the commission noted. In New York’s clothing and textile industries, with “a membership of over 150,000 in various unions,” there were 6,704 African-American members. The mayor’s commission conducted a “survey of 393 hotels of all types in the Borough of Manhattan,” and 238 of these “had no Negro employees.” This means that 60 percent of the hotels in Manhattan in 1935 had exclusionary hiring practices due to the “prejudice of hotel managers.” New York’s insurance companies, “with thousands of policy holders in Harlem, are adamant in their policy of refusing to employ Negro agents even in Harlem. First among such companies is the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company” (La Guardia 1935:39). This kind of racism denies African Americans the right to work, and in so doing denies them the human dignity that comes through the satisfaction of work. “This extraordinary record of discrimination against the Harlem Negro in the matter of

employment accounts to a large extent for the continuous impoverishment of the more than 200,000 citizens of this area of New York City,” concluded Mayor La Guardia’s Commission. “It represents a denial of the fundamental rights of a people to a livelihood. The amount of charity, good will, social privileges, or political freedom can’t compensate for the enforced idleness and poverty of the citizens of this community. The low economic status of the Negro in Harlem is basic to every other problem in the community” (1935:43).

Economic discrimination plagued African Americans trying to scrape a living from Harlem’s crowded streets—and it assumed many forms. “Last hired and first fired, blacks suffered an unemployment rate at least several times that of whites,” writes Flamm. “In Central Harlem, whites owned three-quarters of the businesses, including Blumstein’s, the largest department store on 125<sup>th</sup> Street. And only one quarter of those businesses would hire blacks, even for entry-level positions” (2017:33). A coalition of Harlem activists launched a ‘Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work’ campaign, ultimately forcing Blumenstein to hire “fifteen black female clerks, all of them light-skinned and attractive. But the department store reneged on promises to hire more black employees and other businesses followed suit, and in 1935 the campaign collapsed amid charges of corruption and anti-Semitism (a majority of white store owners in Harlem were Jewish)” (Flamm 2017:34). Discriminatory hiring practices ensured that African Americans represented a far higher percentage of those on ‘relief’ during the Great Depression. “The proportion of Negro families ‘under care,’ was, from 1924 and onward, between 20 and 25 percent; but began to mount as the economic crisis approached. Since the fiscal year, 1930, the proportion of Negro families ‘under care’ has remained between 40 and 45 percent of the total” (La Guardia 1935:44). Figures from the State Employment Service indicate that in 1926, the Harlem office had 5,609 applicants; by 1930, that figure had risen to 28,279. The mayor’s commission concluded that “[a]lthough the number declined to 17,434 in 1934, there is no reason to believe that this decrease has been due to a comparable increase in the number of Negroes employed.” In September 1933 there were 24,293 African-American families “on relief in the Harlem area alone,” or 43.2 percent of black families—and this figure does *not* include “unattached men and women” who may have been on the relief roles in Harlem (La Guardia 1935:45). The mayor’s report emphatically notes, “it is an incontrovertible fact that systematic discrimination has been carried on against the Negro in work relief” (1935:57). African Americans were “assigned chiefly to menial jobs” and “given an inferior status when, by training

and experience, they merit different types of appointments.” The authors emphasize that “the disproportionate number of Negroes on work relief” is primarily due to discriminatory practices at the Works Progress Administration: “Thus, the Negro worker finds himself in a vicious cycle. Discrimination on the part of public and private enterprises causes large numbers of Negroes to be dependent upon relief; but when the relief administration sets up work projects, they are denied the work for which their training and experience fit them” (La Guardia 1935:62). Discrimination in employment was only part of the larger problem—the systematic exploitation of African Americans by white capital. La Guardia’s commission revealed the extent to which white property owners exploited black renters concentrated in the poorest of living conditions.

African Americans were crowded into areas containing the oldest and most dilapidated housing in Harlem—and white landlords were charging higher rents for these miserable dwellings to boot. Using data collected from the New York Housing authority, the mayor’s commission found that “rentals tend to increase in proportion to the percentage of Negro families” living in the area. In ‘Area I,’ a census tract in which African-American families ‘comprise[d] 90 per cent or more of the families,’ nearly 60 percent were paying between \$30 to \$50 dollars rent, “whereas in Areas II and III with increasingly smaller proportions of Negro families, 47.0 and 41.3 per cent respectively of the families pay such rentals. In Area IV, a practically white area with dwelling slightly more deteriorated on the whole than Area I, only 16.9 per cent of the families pay rentals within the same range” (La Guardia 1935:68). The commission reports that in Area IV, where less than 5 percent of the population is African American, 35 percent pay rentals between \$10 and \$20; in Area I, where 90 percent of the families are black, less than 8 percent pay rentals in that range (1935:69). African-American renters “pay relatively higher rentals than tenants in other sections of the city,” but because their median income was also lower than that of whites, black families had “to surrender an exorbitantly large percentage of their meagre incomes for the privilege of living in dwellings, many of which are unsanitary and dilapidated, and some totally unfit for human habitation” (1935:70). Harlem landlords were “able to exercise such autocratic power over the lives of 200,000 people” only because African Americans faced housing barriers, “sometimes due to the cooperative efforts of property owners” (1935:70).

Black-white social relations in Harlem were quite rigidly structured. Segregation was the rule, and home-owners’ associations helped maintain separate relations. One such housing

association existed solely to ensure the exclusion of African Americans from “the area between 135<sup>th</sup> and 168<sup>th</sup> streets and west of Convent Avenue,” notes the mayor’s commission. “Already this association has been successful in forcing Negro families to move to the east of this boundary. By thus compelling the Negro to keep within a limited territory, the landlords are able to force the Negro to pay whatever rentals they demand for their depreciated properties.” Black residents had “no choice but to live in these depreciated areas,” and since demand continued to rage from further immigration, “no heed [was] paid to his demands for improvements” (La Guardia 1935:70-1). Exorbitant rents tended only to exacerbate existing conditions when it came to overcrowding, because families took in ‘lodgers’ to make ends meet. The problem of housing in Harlem required a “large scale housing program for low income groups extending over a period of years,” and the commission was not optimistic for the future: “the present proposed federal housing project for five or six hundred families will scarcely touch the problem of the 56,157 Negro families in Harlem” (1935:76).

A segregated school system also contributed to the resentment felt among Harlem’s growing black community. Schools for African-American children were “overcrowded,” and two sessions were run each day, thereby ensuring that black students received far fewer educational hours than white children. Many of the schools attended by black students had no gymnasium, no library, and was “generally lacking in the educational equipment which is deemed necessary in modern schools of its grade” (La Guardia 1935:80). The commissioners were blunt in their assessment of discrimination in the New York City system, especially when it came to the distribution of resources among white and black schools: “our study of the school system in Harlem has brought out many forms of discrimination which are racial in character,” they began. African Americans are subjected to “grossly unfair, discriminatory and prejudiced treatment,” evident from the fact that New York’s Board of Education, in requesting funds from the federal government for 168 new schools buildings in the city, “asked for but one annex in Harlem,” despite the conditions. Of the \$120,747,000 sought in federal assistance, “only \$400,000 was earmarked for schools attended by the vast majority of colored children” (La Guardia 1935:85; emphasis in original). The program was abandoned, yet the racism inherent in the Board of Education is so blatant that it provides a strong indication for how these administrators regarded African Americans: more than \$120 million dollars would have been earmarked for white schools that were far superior existing condition; less than one-half million dollars would have

been distributed to those black schools in Harlem suffering from far worse conditions. This discrepancy in planned funding “indicates the general attitude of the school authorities towards the educational needs of the Harlem community” (1935:85). There is also the matter of discrimination in recreational facilities for children. “When the Depression began, there were more black children in New York than in any other city in the world—more than seventy-five thousand under the age of fifteen, some forty-seven thousand in Manhattan alone,” writes Brandt, and “while 255 new playgrounds were opened throughout the city during the 1930s, only one of them was in Harlem” (1996:41). Harlem had poorly funded and segregated schools and school children had limited recreational facilities due to obvious racial discrimination in park planning and funding. These kinds of discriminatory relations produced resentment, and since white officials made financial decisions to benefit white New Yorkers, festering animosity is directed toward the white power structure.

Discrimination from law enforcement was perhaps the incendiary factor that most aggravated Harlem’s African-American community. As noted by the mayor’s commission, the “insecurity” of Harlem residents “against police aggression is one of the most potent causes for the existing hostility to authority” (La Guardia 1935:115). The ‘numbers racket’ was responsible for the majority of arrests among African American men in Harlem, and police officers often used ‘policy papers’ as an excuse to execute unlawful searches of black men and women. More than 30 percent of the arrests in Harlem in the first half of 1935 were associated with the ‘numbers racket,’ and “illegal searches of persons and their property” helped drive the more than 2,000 arrests during the period (1935:115). “Police aggressions and brutalities more than any other factor weld the people together for mass action against those responsible for their ills” (1935:121). The mayor’s commission acknowledged the existence of ethical police officers, yet asserted “inasmuch as the Police Department makes no effort to discipline police-men guilty of these offenses, but either hides behind such subterfuges as the exoneration given by grand juries or actually justifies the infringement of the rights of Harlem’s citizens, then the Police Department as a whole must accept the onus of these charges” (1935:120).

## COMPENSATORY REBELLION: THE HARLEM RIOT OF 1935

Kress's Five and Ten Cent Store was located just across the street from the Apollo Theater, and it sold many items that would have appealed to a 16-year-old boy like Lino Rivera. But neither Jackson Smith nor his assistant manager would have offered Rivera a job: Kress's department stores had a well-earned reputation for discriminatory hiring practices. African Americans were excluded from any kind of customer service position requiring interaction with white clientele, and though Rivera was Puerto Rican, he too would have been refused employment. Now there was rumor that a colored boy had been killed by a white police officer over a ten-cent pocketknife; continued brutality at the hands of law enforcement aroused the collective resentment felt by many in New York's burgeoning black community and intensified their animosity for white power, made most visible by the police force.

A group of men attempted to hold a "public meeting" on a street corner near Kress's five and dime; when officers ordered them to move on, "they set up stand in front of Kress' store. A Negro who acted as chairman introduced a white speaker. Scarcely had the speaker uttered the first words of his address to the crowd when someone threw a missile through the window of Kress' store" (La Guardia 1935:9). When the crowd reassembled across the street, a speaker climbed onto a makeshift porch beneath a lamppost; he too was pulled down. Both men were arrested on charges of 'unlawful assembly' and jailed. Yet the "persistent rumor that the boy had been so severely beaten that he had died that kept the spirit of the rioters inflamed," explained *The Times*. "The sight of a hearse in the vicinity about 7 P. M. gave rise to the belief that it had come to take the boy's body away," though it was bound for another neighborhood entirely (NYT March 20, 1935). Rumors of Rivera's murder "awakened the deep-seated sense of wrongs and denials and even memories of injustices in the South. One woman was heard to cry out that the treatment was 'just like down South where they lynch us.' The deep sense of wrong expressed in this remark was echoed in the rising resentment which turned the hundred or more shoppers into an indignant crowd" (La Guardia 1935:8).

The crowds in Harlem formed mobile attack units. They were not concentrated in one place at any particular time; a crowd would form in one area, and when it was dispersed by police, it would re-form in another. "These crowds constantly changed their makeup," wrote La Guardia's Commission. "When bricks thrown through store windows brought the police, the crowds would often dissolve, only to gather again and continue their assaults upon property" (1935:12). At around 7:30 p.m., without having confirmed any of the rumors, members of the



Young Liberators began circulating a “leaflet”: CHILD BRUTALLY BEATEN! WOMAN ATTACKED BY BOSS AND COPS. CHILD NEAR DEATH, the headline screamed. “One hour ago a 12-year-old Negro boy was brutally beaten by the management of Kress’ Five and Ten Cent Store,” the writer alleged. “The boy is near death, mercilessly beaten because they thought he had stolen a five-cent knife. A Negro woman, who sprang to the defense of the boy, had her arm broken by the thug and was then arrested.” The Young Liberators then positioned a second headline; beneath information regarding the event was a request for action: WORKERS! NEGRO AND WHITE. “Protest against this Lynch Attack of Innocent Negro People. Demand Release of Boy and Woman. Demand the immediate arrest of the management responsible for this lynch attack. Don’t Buy at Kress’. Stop Police Brutality in Negro Harlem. JOIN THE PICKET LINE. Mayor LaGuardia’s Commission noted that these leaflets were distributed at around 7:30 p.m. At about the same time, the Young Communist League began issuing similar material. The cultural organization already present in Harlem is evident in the workings of both these groups; though “attacks on property” were already underway by the time these leaflets hit the streets, the distribution of false information undoubtedly provoked additional persons to participate in the developing disorder.

Squads of mounted patrolmen charged the crowd outside the store as officers on foot, five police cars, and what *The Times* referred to as “emergency men” rushed to the scene. Many in the crowd fled through the store to 124<sup>th</sup> Street, where they collected “bricks and other missiles with which to pelt the police.” Amidst the protestors and law enforcement activity, a hearse drove down the street, stopping across from the store: ‘There’s the hearse come to take the boy’s body out of the store,’ cried a woman. Harlem’s collective resentment for white authority came to a boiling point—and the fury was released. “Stones were hurled through windows. A barrage of missiles fell on the ranks of the police,” reported *The New York Times*. African-American and white residents battled in the streets as well: “One of the roving bands hurled stones at an unidentified man in front of 226 West 125<sup>th</sup> Street about 10:30 P. M., knocking him unconscious and fracturing his skull,” while at 126<sup>th</sup> Street and Seventh Avenue a 26-year-old African American named John Hademan “suffered a fractured skull in a melee.” A group of rioters “stoned a Fifth Avenue Coach Company’s bus at 127<sup>th</sup> Street and Seventh Avenue” at around 11:00 p.m., but none of the passengers were seriously injured. Whites shot several black men, including De Sota Wingate, at 144<sup>th</sup> Street between Seventh and Lenox

avenues; Lloyd Hart, 16, was shot by a white police officer when he refused to obey a policeman's command to halt; and Clarence London, at 125<sup>th</sup> Street and Seventh Avenue. Two additional shootings occurred around 2:00 in the morning: Wilmot Henry, a 29-year-old African American, and Victor Fain, 19 and also black, were both shot at 128<sup>th</sup> Street and Lenox Avenue"; Henry was "shot in the back and seriously wounded," according to *The Times* (March 20, 1935).

The rioting reached its height around midnight. "Roving bands of Negroes, with here and there a sprinkling of white agitators, stoned windows, set fire to several stores and began looting," writes a reporter for *The Times*. Sporadic outbreaks continued until about 4:00 a.m., including "men sniping from rooftops," but the police department responded swiftly with considerable force in containing the rebellion. James Thompson, a 19-year-old African American, was the first person killed during the night of violence in Harlem. He was "shot in the chest" by a police detective, who claimed Thompson had looted the A & P at 138<sup>th</sup> Street and Lenox Avenue in the early morning hours, shortly after the peak of riot violence. Later that morning, Wednesday, March 21, curiosity seekers "gasped when they saw the shattered store windows" along Seventh and Lenox avenues and West 125<sup>th</sup> Street (March 21 1935). "Of the 100 or more white men and Negroes who were shot, stabbed, clubbed or stoned during the rioting," including four patrolmen and four detectives, "only a handful remained in Harlem hospitals," according to *The Times*. More than 200 shop windows were shattered, and when the violence was finally quelled by law enforcement, 121 persons were arrested on various charges, "chiefly inciting to riot, burglary (looting of stores), disorderly conduct and carrying concealed weapons." New York's police department took an aggressive approach to "put down any new uprising," as it was called: "roving emergency squad cars, patrolmen marching in pairs every few hundred feet and mounted men in groups of two and three at strategic points" indicate the extent to which law enforcement occupied Harlem after the outbreak of violence. Officers were placed on rooftops to counteract sniping and target rioters on the street; "motorcycle squads carrying patrolmen armed with riot guns" stormed down 125<sup>th</sup> Street and Lenox Avenue (March 21 1935).

New York police officers succeeded in containing the outbreak of further violence. "Last night the district was generally calm, but still tense," wrote a *Times* reporter. "Three emergency trucks rolled down Seventh and Lenox Avenues and down 125<sup>th</sup> Street at intervals and radio cars and motor cycle cars maintained steady patrol." A group of African Americans "kicked in the plate-glass window of a grocery" owned by a white man at the corner of Seventh Avenue and

121<sup>st</sup> Street. A brick was thrown through the window of a beer garden at 132<sup>nd</sup> Street and Lenox Avenue. “Negro proprietors had large white-washed signs on their windows announcing that ‘This shop is run by COLORED people,’ notes *The New York Times*. “Several white store owners took the cue and covered their windows with signs announcing that ‘This store employs Negro workers’” (March 21 1935). By Friday night, the death toll doubled: August Miller, a 57-year-old white man from the Bronx, died after receiving a “fractured skull” amidst the rioting at 126<sup>th</sup> Street and Lenox Avenue (New York Times March 23 1935); then on early Saturday morning, a third fatality: Andrew Lyons, a 37-year-old African American, died at Harlem Hospital from internal injuries suffered during the violence (New York Times March 24 1935). An insurance survey showed that “697 plate glass windows in 300 business establishments were destroyed” during the Harlem riot at a cost of more than \$147,000 to insurance companies. Windows were shattered from 114<sup>th</sup> Street up to 143<sup>d</sup> Street, and from Fifth Avenue to Eighth Avenue (New York Times March 30, 1935).

Mayor La Guardia’s response to the Harlem riot of 1935 left much to be desired in the African-American community, yet when compared to the behavior of others mayors who led cities under siege by riot, La Guardia’s leadership can also be commended. The leadership situation in New York is therefore complicated, but as we shall see, when compared to the white leadership of Detroit, La Guardia’s performance might even be considered exemplary. Capeci notes that La Guardia “neither reprimanded nor dismissed” those city commissioners most severely castigated by the riot investigation, “[n]or did he authorize release of the commission’s report.” La Guardia even “disregarded certain recommendations, most notably the creation of a citizens’ committee to investigate the police,” writes Capeci. Nevertheless, he “was sincere about improving the living conditions in Harlem.” He requested that Professor Alain Locke of Howard University “evaluate the material” produced by his commission (Capeci 1977:6). Mayor La Guardia made concerted efforts towards racial reform in health and civil service hiring practices. Though he “did not implement all of Locke’s recommendations,” he did press for action. By August 1936, “significant programs were already in progress,” according to Capeci: the Harlem River Houses, the Central Harlem Center building, the Women’s Pavilion at Harlem Hospital, and two Harlem schools were completed by 1940 and progress was made in reducing discrimination. The number of African Americans working as nurses and attendants in the Hospital Department “doubled and that of black physicians and medical board members tripled,”

which are impressive numbers, but Capeci doesn't indicate what those numbers were to begin with, hence we don't get a clear picture of increase from his analysis. Importantly, however, is the issue of medical segregation; these new hires "were being assigned to hospitals whose staffs had previously been all or nearly all white." African Americans began "receiving better employment opportunities in the civil service," and "received more serious recognition" for mayoral appointments, hence representation in power increased, at least in terms of its visibility (Capeci 1977:7).

The Harlem riot of 1935 "brought to the surface aggressive, resentful feelings" that had been building for some time. Like the white-initiated riots of previous eras, this riot was an expurgation of collective resentment directed against white society; unlike these earlier 'race riots,' however, Harlem's riot "was a hostile outburst 'against racial discrimination and poverty in the midst of plenty,'" writes Capeci. "The public hearings of the Mayor's Commission and, later, the state commission offered black society for the first time a captive white audience, a sense of unity, and a hope that something positive was to be done. The riot also informed whites that the 'colored problem' was no longer sectional or regional. In fact, the New Negro was more of an urban than a rural product" (1977:43). In the 'race riots' of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, "whites were the aggressors. If blacks took to the streets, it was in retaliation. The Harlem riot of 1935 represented the first time that blacks initiated the violence" (Brandt 1996:45).

African-American educator Nannie Burroughs declared in 'Declaration of 1776 the Cause of the Harlem Riot' that the event was not a 'race riot,' but a 'human revolt.' *The New York Times* had described the riot as a 'rampage' ignited by 'bands of trouble-makers,' while the *Washington Post* characterized participants as 'bands of hoodlums' who 'raged through the streets.' "Burroughs' word choice counters such media descriptions," writes Ann Mason. By "rejecting the word 'riot,' and replacing it with 'revolt' (and later using the term 'uprising'), she begins to change the perception of the Harlem Riot from one of senseless destruction and violence to one marked by purposeful action" (2008:145). 'Day after day, year after year, decade after decade, black people have been robbed of their inalienable rights,' Burroughs declared. 'That 'long train of abuses' is a magazine of powder. An unknown boy was simply the match' (cited in Flamm 2017:37). Burroughs references "the refrain from the Declaration of Independence, 'the long train of abuses,' to support her charge against the nation: White Americans tolerates injustice when it is committed against African Americans; it is the

unmitigated deluge of injustice in all facets of social life that spurred black men and women to riot. “Re-read their prophecy,” she warns, “their justification for such natural, human resentment after patient suffering. It is written in every American history. They declared that ‘when a long train of abuses and usurpations pursuing, invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty to throw off such a government, and to provide new guards for their future security’” (Mason 2008:150).

In the months following the riot, Mayor La Guardia took definitive steps to improve Harlem’s public services. Nat Brandt identifies several of these projects: “A woman’s pavilion was opened at Harlem Hospital; a district health clinic in congested central Harlem was begun; plans for two new schools in Harlem were made part of the city’s 1937 budget; and ground was broken that year for a housing project in the area for some 575 low-income families.” La Guardia declared he was “carrying out a definite program,” despite what his critics might say (Brandt 1996:47). But the problem was bigger than anything La Guardia could do with public works; the issue was injustice. No one saw this more clearly than Alain Locke, who noted that riot was not caused by the incendiary incident, nor by the leaflets distributed by the Young Liberators and Young Communist League, but the deep “sense of grievance and injustice” swelling on the streets and in every cramped Harlem apartment. Locke concurred with the conclusions written by the Mayor’s Commission on the riot, and he cited them directly: “The blame belongs to a *society that tolerates* inadequate and often wretched housing, inadequate and inefficient schools and other public facilities, unemployment, unduly high rents, the lack of recreation grounds, discrimination in industry and the public utilities in the employment of colored people, brutality and lack of courtesy by police” (Locke 1936). The Greater New York Federation of Churches echoed this sentiment when it cautioned against scapegoating Communists for the outbreak of violence: “Until the white race, which controls all the phases of life in this city, recognizes its full responsibility, this suffering will go on unabated, a shameful stain upon our corporate life,” asserted its general secretary, Dr. Robert W. Searle; “until then will the almost helpless Negro be the victim of exploitation by those who care not for him, save as a means to the ends of confusion and disorder” (*The New York Times* March 22, 1935). Despite the white paternalism evident in this statement, its indictment of white America—or at least white New York City—is noteworthy; it challenges the very structures whites use to continuously exploit African

Americans (i.e., ‘controls *all phases of life* in this city’), an allegation that will get far more scrutiny with the release of the Kerner Commission’s report a little more than 30 years later.

### *A Second Great Migration*

Labor shortages in rapidly industrializing cities led to a Second Great Migration that was “much vaster in scope” than that which occurred during World War I. “The lure of work attracted not only an estimated four hundred thousand blacks from the rural South, but also a comparable number of southern whites,” writes Nat Brandt. “They flocked to industrial cities like Detroit, where the materials of war were produced, or to seaports like Baltimore, where enormous quantities of war goods were shipped overseas” (1996:128). The New Deal engendered hope in the black community. For the first time in 70 years, since the presidency of Abraham Lincoln, “a president appeared genuinely concerned for black Americans.” And even if Franklin Roosevelt was nowhere near as dedicated to racial equality as his wife Eleanor, the New Deal’s “impact on black life was significant,” writes Capeci. At least Roosevelt’s programs included African Americans, even if the impact was “not as immediately or materially beneficial” as they were for whites (Capeci 1977:42). Yet Roosevelt subdued the importance of race relations always in favor of the war effort. He “evaded the issue of an antilynch law for fear of alienating southern Democrats, whose votes were vital to the passage of New Deal legislation,” and he only reluctantly signed Executive Order 8802; his approach to the Fair Employment Practices Committee “was dominated by a concern for southern reaction” (Capeci 1977:###).

Black Americans represented under 3 percent “of all workers in war production” as of March 1942—and at that point, war production had already been increasing for two years. But between 1942 and 1944, African-American employment in defense industries “almost tripled, and the total number of black workers increased by a third, from 4.4 million to 5.9 million,” notes Brandt. “At the same time, the income of blacks was catching up with white income; it rose dramatically, from about 40 percent of white income to about 60 percent. By 1944, the average black worker was making \$37.77 a week,” while the “average white worker was making nearly \$50 a week” (1996:126). Collective violence disrupted war production in cities throughout the United States. There were riots in manufacturing cities like Newark, New Jersey and Chester, Pennsylvania in the north; Mobile, Alabama and Beaumont, Texas in the south; and Los Angeles, California in the west. This violence “often brought an abrupt halt to defense manufacturing. All work shut down when whites protested the hiring or promoting of blacks,

when blacks were placed in production departments or made plant guards, or when white workers demanded separate toilet facilities” (Brandt 1996:137). The U.S. Labor Department reported that during a three-month period in 1943 (March through May), nearly 102,000 days or work were lost to racial bigotry (Brandt 1996:138).

In the early 1940s African Americans were portrayed as entirely subservient to whites in popular culture. Black actors and actresses such as Stepin Fetchit, Ethel Waters, Hattie McDaniel, Butterfly McQueen, Eddie (Rochester) Anderson “played the roles of servants.” One African-American woman wrote to the *Amsterdam News* about a theatre performance she attended in which the only black girl played ‘one of those Aunt Jemima roles’: ‘I would like to see Negroes in parts which do not make people continue to think us fools’ (Brandt 1996:121). The Office of War Information conducted an analysis of African Americans in film, and in early 1943 concluded, ‘in general, Negroes are presented as basically different from other people, as taking no relevant part in the life of the nation, as offering nothing, contributing nothing, expecting nothing.’ Blacks appeared in 23 percent of the films released during the period studied, the OWI bureau reported, and in 82 percent of them they were shown as ‘clearly inferior’” (Brandt 1996:124). But as Nat Brandt explains, the “other side of the coin was the total absence of black characters in a movie” (1996:122).

On December 29, 1940 in one his fireside chats, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called America the ‘Arsenal of Democracy.’ FDR pledged that U.S. industry would produce the military supplies necessary to help Great Britain defeat Nazi Germany. And Detroit played the biggest role in the expansion of this great American arsenal. Detroit “quickly became the destination of migrants searching for defense work. Between June 1940 and June 1943, more than 500,000 persons entered the city,” notes Capeci. “Of these, 50,000 were AfroAmericans who came during the last fifteen months of the period” (1977:68). By June 1943, “Detroit was home to nearly two million people, one in ten of whom [was] black” (Brandt 1996:144). “Strain, hostile beliefs, and precipitating incidents mobilized Detroiters of both races,” write Capeci and Wilkerson in *Layered Violence*, their profile Detroit rioters of 1943. “Against the background of historical cleavage, inadequate policing, and ineffective channels of redress,” blacks and whites assaulted and killed one another in Detroit (1991:147).

In late 1941, before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that December, the U.S. Employment Services surveyed industries around the county to determine “how many new jobs

would be available in the coming six months.” The report concluded that more than 282,000 job openings would become available. “But of that total, 144,583 jobs—slightly more than half of them—were barred from the outset to blacks, no matter whether the manufacturers were located in a northern or a southern state, or whether the jobs were skilled or unskilled. The manufacturers simply would not consider hiring black workers” (Brandt 1996:73). “But not the Government’s urging nor even the threat of war could persuade many employers to drop old habits of thought,” writes Lester B. Granger of the National Urban League who published an investigation of the war defense industry in 1942. “Persisting in ideas handed down from a plantation economy, employers still regard Negroes as a wholly unskilled rural group” (1942:73). Discriminatory hiring practices were widespread throughout the United States in war production: In Buffalo, the Curtiss-Wright and Bell aircraft plants “did not hire blacks on any production jobs.” In Kansas City, Missouri Standard Steel declared, ‘We have never had a Negro worker in twenty-five years and don’t intend to start now,’ and North American Aircraft said African Americans would be hired ‘only in custodial jobs.’ The Douglass Corporation of California was the only company manufacturing war planes that “employed even a handful of Negro production workers.”

Granger’s study reveals systematic exclusion in war manufacturing across the United States.

Similar reports of racial discrimination piled up regarding Sperry Gyroscope of New York; Pratt and Whitney of Hartford, Connecticut; Budd Manufacturing of Philadelphia; New York Shipbuilding Corporation in Kearny, New Jersey; the Buick, Chrysler, and Packard auto plants in Detroit and Flint, Michigan; Stewart-Warner, Majestic Radio, Studebaker and White Motors of Chicago; Bethlehem Shipbuilding of Los Angeles; and both Julius Heil and A. O. Smith of Milwaukee; and hundreds of other large manufacturers in every part of the country (Granger 1942:74)

Production managers gave various reasons for their refusal to hire black workers. Some of the responses were overtly racist (e.g., “they are racially unequipped for skilled work” and “don’t like Negroes and don’t want them around”), while others aimed to justify policies of exclusion (e.g., “Negroes never applied” and “no trained Negroes are available”); other excuses simply shifted the blame to race prejudice among the workers (e.g., “whites and blacks can’t mix on the job” and “the union won’t have them,” Granger 1942:74). Granger stated that the “whole pattern of racial discrimination in defense industry lay clearly exposed: The employment gates of an estimated 75 per cent of the defense industry were closed against all Negro labor. Exclusion of skilled Negro workers was even more widespread. Absence of any real defense training for Negroes in most southern cities and discrimination against Negro trainees in most northern cities *reduced this group’s chances to find jobs in the future*” (Granger 1942:75-6; emphasis added).



RECIPROCAL RIOT IN DETROIT, JUNE 1943:  
FROM ARMED SELF-DEFENSE TO PROACTIVE BLACK VIOLENCE:

Beaumont to Detroit: 1943

Looky here, America What you done done— Let things drift Until the riots come	Cause everything that hitler and Mussolini do Negroes get the same Treatment from you.
Now your policemen Let the mobs run free. I reckon you don't care Nothing about me.	You jim crowed me Before hitler rose to power— And you're still jim crowing me Right now, this very hour.
You tell me that hitler Is a might bad man. I guess he took lessons From the ku klux klan.	Yet you say we're fighting For democracy. Then why don't democracy Include me?
You tell me mussolini's Got an evil heart Well, it mus-a been in Beaumont That he had his start—	I ask you this question Cause I want to know How long I got to fight BOTH HITLER—AND JIM CROW.

- Langston Hughes in *Common Ground* (Winter 1943:104)

The white folks marched up and down Fenelon Avenue with clubs, rifles, and knives. The white folks marched up and down Nevada Avenue, clamoring against African Americans scheduled to move into the building the following day. The Sojourner Truth Settlement, a 200-unit federal housing project intended for defense workers, was under siege. Hundreds of white folks from outside the immediate neighborhood joined in solidarity, partially the result of a recruiting effort launched by local residents, requesting immediate assistance to prevent black occupancy from becoming a reality in the Sojourner Truth Settlement. "We need every white man," the flyer proclaimed. "We want our girls to walk on the street not raped," reads the last line (right). And did those white folks respond: at dusk, more than 150 "white pickets" patrolled the streets, and as the march continued, someone slid a wooden cross from the back of a pickup truck. The cross

was erected on the lawn in front of the housing project and set ablaze as whites continued to march, waving their heavy clubs, spewing racist vitriol. It appears the fiery cross appealed to many Detroit whites, for the protestors “were augmented by hundreds more at dawn,” according to a report in *The New York Times*. Police arrived to find “nearly 1,200 persons,” heavily armed with shotguns, rifles, and other weaponry, “ready to do battle in the street separating the project from a row of dwellings occupied by white persons.”

February 28, 1942 was moving day, and “prospective Negro tenants had their household goods loaded into trucks and ready to move,” in spite of ominous threats. The first can of tear gas did not succeed in dispersing the protestors, nor did the second. Detroit police officers “tried three times without success” to scatter the crowd with tear gas—and then gun shots rang out, “two of them penetrating a house where a child lay sleeping.” The cork had popped, and the protest erupted into white violence (March 1, 1942).

Detroit produced 35 percent of the United States’ “entire ordnance material” in June 1943 (Capeci 1977:98). In *Layered Violence*, their profile of those who engaged, Dominic Capeci, Jr. and Martha Wilkerson note the existence of economic stratification among those arrested in the Detroit riot of 1943: “Long-standing east siders apparently fought for opportunities for advancement, while the younger less-established among them might have drawn blood because of daily exposure to ghetto conditions. In other words, recent in-migrants lashed out at the abnormality of their position, and more rooted residents (depending on age and status) reacted against commonplace racism and socialization in a Northern, industrial municipality” (1991:59). Blacks and whites “clashed regularly for stakes in the rapidly changing, promising world” called the ‘Arsenal of Democracy,’ write Capeci and Wilkerson. In a little more than one year, between the Sojourner Truth assault and the summer of 1943, Detroit’s metropolitan population ballooned past 2 million; approximately 450,000 white newcomers and 35,000 southern blacks flooded the city, eager for work in war production, an infusion that “overtaxed its already inadequate living



Source: Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University

conditions and social services” (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:146). That “blacks were underrepresented on Detroit’s police force” is an understatement; in fact, Detroit’s police department was overwhelmingly white: Of 3,600 officers, 40 were African American. The department also “had a reputation among blacks for being both racist and brutal” (Brandt 1996:145). Racial disparity in arrests made during the riot is not surprising, given this data.

Detroit’s African-American population swelled to nearly 150,000 persons at the beginning of World War II, comprising 9.2 percent of Detroit’s more than 1.6 million residents (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:146). The situation placed a tremendous strain on housing in the city. A 1944 study revealed that it “would have required 19,000 additional dwellings to house all black families in less crowded units” (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:181), indicating the extreme crowding that impacted those living in Detroit during World War II. Housing discrimination was rampant, and most “new buildings, private and government-sponsored, were white-only” (1991:182). African Americans who had lived in the city for several years “doubled up with black migrants, in apartments, garages, even stables” due to intense discrimination and high housing costs resulting from exploitative practices in the real estate industry. Amidst a war for democracy, African Americans “faced increased indignities” in Detroit. “Blacks resented discrimination in restaurants, segregation in housing (already in short supply because of the war), violence by police, and mistreatment of their sons serving in Southern military camps,” write Capeci and Wilkerson (1991:146).

Conflict in public spaces also reveal the extent of racial hostility in Detroit—particularly white resentment for African Americans using *their* facilities. “In racially-mixed areas black fought for much coveted playgrounds and athletic fields, a significant prelude for the disorder at Northwestern High School in 1940 and, later that summer, the disturbance at Belle Isle,” which came to be known as ‘Nigger Island’ among some white Detroit residents (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:188). Conflict aboard public transportation also provides evidence on the extreme relational distance separating black residents from whites. “After mid-1942, racial altercations escalated; by then blacks were operating 30 percent of all DSR [Detroit Street Railway] vehicles and constituted heavy percentages of passengers. Nerves frayed, particularly in and about the ghetto, and ‘incidents’ grew more frequent. Younger blacks led the way, sometimes with drawn knives, often damaging streetcars. DSR white employees and passengers also provoked retaliation along racial lines,” explain Capeci and Wilkerson. A “climate of hate” permeated the transit system:

“whites repulsed by close physical contact with blacks and troubled by the erosion of their own superior status; blacks alienated by white contempt for their humanity and enraged by the opposition to their socioeconomic aspirations” (1991:188).

White flight from urban areas “contradicted the myth of progressive integration, and councilmen and policemen represented a near lily-white government” (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:158). In fact, in the weeks leading up to the riot, “Detroit youths increased their activities in ‘startling’ and ‘more vicious’ ways.” African-American men “running in gangs attacked innocent, mostly white victims.” Media coverage of black crime only intensified the belief among whites that African Americans could not be neighbors: “Black adult offenders also raised public concern. They constituted alarming percentages of police statistics and dominated offenses against the person, including homicide, assault, rape, and robbery. They attracted sensational news coverage that reinforced white fears and often ignored the fact that most victims were also black” (1991:187).

#### *Reciprocal Riot: Detroit, 1943*

Belle Isle park, located on the Detroit River, offers city dwellers a picturesque recreational space full of picnic groves, paddle boats floating along lazy brooks, even a stretch of beach for residents to escape the summer heat. The expansive park also had a massive casino that, in its heyday, attracted large crowds with entertainment and gambling. A large bridge connects the park with the city at the intersection of E. Grand Boulevard and Jefferson Avenue. The afternoon of Sunday, June 20, 1943 was warm, and “there were nearly 100,000 people on the Isle, the majority of whom were Negroes.” Aaron Fox and Raymond Thomas traveled to Belle Isle intending to swim, but the line was too long, so around 3:30 p.m. the 17-year-old black youths met with Frank and Fred Neal, twin brothers who were also 17, and Kelly Lately, 14, who had come to the park with LeRoy Howell, 13. They wandered to a playground “where a number of colored youths were shooting dice,” and there they met Charles (Little Willie) Lyons. Lyons was a bit older, 20, and he had come to the island with H. D. (Handsome Harry) Minnifield, 17, and also African American (Rushton et al. 1944:1-2). The opening violence of the Detroit riot of 1943 would be retaliatory in nature: “Aaron Fox and Charles Lyons talked of the Eastwood Park episode in which they had been involved. They agreed it would be a good idea to: ‘Go fight and do like they done to us at Eastwood Park.’ Lyons suggested to the crowd of colored boys there at the playground that they: ‘Take care of the Hunkies’” (Rushton et al. 1944:3).

Willie Lyons gripped “a stick wrapped in paper,” squeezing hard as he approached the white boy near the swings. Lyons reared back and swung, striking the boy over the head. He told him to get his ass off the island. The white boy ran. According to the report written by Rushton and colleagues, there were several white men seated on the grass in the vicinity. “Lyons struck the feet of one of these white men, telling him: ‘Time to go home. Get going.’ The white men left. This colored group then began canvassing the island for white boys” (Rushton et al. 1944:3). The initial group of eight African-American youths grew to ten with the addition of Fred McClelland, 16, and John Wilson, 18. They “were looking for white boys to beat up, to even the score of the Eastwood Park incident” when they came upon “several white picnickers.”

Fox and Lyons ordered these whites to leave before taking their food (1944:4). Alfred Peterson, a 16-year-old African American who witnessed another racially motivated incident unfold around 8:00 p.m. “at the skating pavilion near the Casino.” Earl Blaylock, a 16-year-old white youth purchased some hot dogs after “watching freighters passing in the Canadian channel.” Blaylock walked out the back door, where three lines “long lines of colored people” stood waiting, so he was “forced to walk through all three lines.” According to the report by the Detroit Police Department dated July 3, 1943, Blaylock encountered “ten unknown colored men” who surrounded him after he exited at the rear of the building. Several black men surrounded him: ‘you pushed through rough,’ one of them stated, before demanding an apology. Earl Blaylock replied that he’d be happy to apologize, “if there was anything to apologize for,” but he had done nothing wrong. The snarky response elicited a blow that hit Blaylock “on the right jaw, knocking him down cement steps leading to a small lagoon, where the canoes come up to the skating pavilion, but not into the water.” Blaylock got to his feet and began to run toward the skating pavilion when he was struck again, “over the right eye,” a punch that knocked him to the concrete in front of the pavilion. Earl Blaylock was the first riot victim hospitalized at Detroit Receiving “for lacerations and contusions of the head” (Rushton et al. 1944:5).

Down the street from the casino, another incident unfolded just a few moments later. James Wilson, an 18-year-old African American youth, “pushed or was pushed against” a ten-year-old white boy who had accompanied Anna Peterson, a white woman. Rushton and colleagues write that when Peterson realized the boy had been pushed, “she reached out to place him on the bus, pushing Wilson away.” Events further escalated once the passengers were on the bus. Wilson walked up to “Mrs. Peterson, struck her on the shoulder.” Wilson claims that Mrs.

Peterson called him a ‘God-damned nigger’ after he struck her, to which he responded that Peterson was a ‘mother fucking son of a bitch.’ “Wilson attempted to strike Mrs. Peterson again, but was prevented from so doing by Mr. Peterson and an unidentified colored man, who assisted in maintaining order until the police arrived and placed Wilson under arrest” (Rushton et al. 1944:5). The denial of entry to public accommodations nearly led to racial violence not more than an hour later. Shortly after 9:00 p.m. there occurred “a disturbance at the ferry dock when a group of colored boys tried to prevent some white people from boarding the ferry boat. There was considerable pushing and jostling of the crowd.” The boat’s attendant “closed the gate, stating to the crowd, both white and colored: ‘There is plenty of room for everybody, and when you can get on the boat properly, I will let you on’” (Rushton et al. 1944:6). Nothing further is mentioned in the report, suggesting that this attendant—a third party to the conflict—appears to have ameliorated tensions, at least to the point of avoiding bloodshed.

Mattie Mae (Redcap) Byndon left the Casino around 9:15 p.m. and walked to the playground, where she recognized Lyons, Fox and the rest of the group of young black men who were targeting whites in retaliation for denying black teens from entering Eastwood Park five days earlier. Byndon witnessed the group beating Gus Niarhos, 14, and Clyde Fields, (age not identified), both of whom were white. Rushton and colleagues describe the assault: “The two white boys had been strolling near the swings when the colored group approached and asked: ‘Where are you going?’” and immediately attacked them. After knocking Niarhos down and kicking him, Charles (Little Willie) Lyons asked Niarhos for his money, stating: ‘I ain’t got on car fare. Give me some money.’ Niarhos gave him two dollars. The colored boys then ran off. (Rushton et al. 1943:6). Rushton and colleagues call these boys “the colored mob.”

Mattie Mae Byndon would momentarily be involved in the violence later as she crossed the Belle Isle Park bridge toward Jefferson Avenue. “There was momentary quiet,” according to the report, “until the Byndon girl, walking with her friends, pushed against Eleanor Giusto,” a white girl who appears to have been 17 years old. Rushton and colleagues described the incident: Margaret Hart, a 17-year-old white girl, accosted Mattie Mae Byndon, calling her a ‘black bitch.’ ‘You mother-fucking bastard,’ Byndon snapped back, striking her with a fist, which Ms. Hart returned. Several young black men “attacked Miss Hart,” according to the *Dowling Report*, “knocking her down and kicking her” before fleeing down Jefferson Avenue (Rushton et al. 1943:7). Crowds of people milled about the intersection of E. Jefferson and E. Grand Boulevard,

with “heavy traffic” jamming the streets. Whites venturing down E. Jefferson Avenue stopped, with many joining in the violence, and amidst this escalating combat, African Americans were heavily outnumbered by whites. The mob around the bridge had increased to more than five thousand, and the street fighting was “spreading west, to Helen Avenue, east to Field, and north to Lafayette East” (Rushton et al. 1943:8). The violence ignited on Belle Isle and then spilled into a neighborhood located approximately three miles from the park.

The second and more deadly phase of rioting began at the Forest Club, located at 700 E. Forest, in the “heart of the Negro section some five miles from Belle Isle.” Rushton and colleagues cite the Forest Club incident as “the principal cause of the tragedy which followed” (1943:10). Approximately 700 African Americans had attended a dance at the Forest Club, “one of the larger recreational centers” on the evening of June 20. By this time Aaron Fox’s rumor had spread and Leo Tipton, an employee of the Forest Club Ballroom, made the following announcement shortly after midnight: “This is Sergeant Fuller. There’s a riot at Belle Isle. The whites have killed a colored lady and baby. Thrown them over the bridge. Everybody get their hat and coat and come on. There is free transportation outside.” According to the report, “[p]andemonium broke loose!” Transportation was not freely available for all, however, and cars driven by white motorists were stopped at the traffic signal at the intersection. Rushton and colleagues describe the scene:

The whites [were] taken from behind the wheel, and the vehicle appropriated. Simultaneously, the crowd commenced to throw stones at the passing vehicles and street cars. A white motorcyclist traveling east on Forest was struck by a stone. He fell off the motorcycle. Another stone struck the motor causing gasoline to spurt, setting fire to the cycle. At about 12:10 a.m., Tamble Whitworth called the police reporting the first rioting outside the Belle Isle area. Three cruisers had been dispatched by the Canfield station by 12:40 a.m. to Hastings and Forest, but the officers were unable to cope with the situation. Thereafter numerous police arrived, but the rioting was by then out of control (1944:11-12).

Black folks exited the ballroom and “moved up and down Hastings Street, indiscriminately stoning white-operated automobiles and white-owned business places” (Rushton et al. 1943:12), indicating both the proactive nature of black violence and intense collective resentment.

It was dangerous to be caught on Hastings Street in Detroit during the first hours of June 21, especially for whites: “Patrolman Stewart Marchant received serious head lacerations when hit by a brick at Forest Avenue.” John Williams, a motorman for the Department of Street Railways (DSR) was assaulted on two separate occasions “as his trolley twice crossed the intersection at Hendrie Street.” Henry Huddleston, a middle-aged white male, received “cuts and

fractures” when he was assaulted, at approximately 4:00 a.m., on Grand Boulevard; Henry Smolinsky received similar treatment on Alfred Street at 8:00 a.m. Black violence was directed upward, against whites who enjoyed the privileged status in Detroit society, and proactive black violence “made it plain that full-scale race war was all too possible,” explain Capeci and Wilkerson. “Throughout the remainder of the first full day of disorder, whites within reach of blacks experienced similar assaults” (1991:95). Detroit Police actively responded to the violence on Hastings—and as with earlier riots, especially those in the south, sometimes the officers became active participants. James Townsend Lee left his work on Hastings at around 12:15 a.m. on June 1: “I went back to Hastings and Forest, as I got to the intersection some police officers drove to the curb and said to me, ‘Where are you going nigger?’” Lee replied that he was going home, and then “two more carloads of policemen drove up. These officers got out of their car and beat me,” Lee recalled. “They hit me over my right eye with their night sticks, they kicked me in the groin, from which I am still suffering from the blow.” Detroit Police officers continued to beat James Lee down Hastings: ‘Why don’t you run nigger?’ one officer asked, before another interceded. ‘We damn near killed that nigger, let’s go down and get somebody else [sic]’ (Walter Reuther, box 1, folder 1). “One of the most important factors in any race riot is the local police,” noted Thurgood Marshall in his report for the NAACP, and “the Detroit police ran true to form. The trouble reached riot proportions because the police of Detroit once again enforced the law under an unequal hand. They used ‘persuasion’ rather than firm action with white rioters while against Negroes they used the ultimate force: night sticks, revolvers, riot guns, sub-machine guns, and deer guns” (Walter Reuther, box 1, folder 35).

At approximately 4:00 a.m. on June 21<sup>st</sup>, young white men “gathered around the Roxy and Colonial theaters, stoning the cars of blacks that passed along the thoroughfare, which separated black ghetto and white west side” (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:9). Charlotte and Woodward avenues were soon the site of white retaliatory violence; mobs began “stoning colored-operated automobiles,” and thereafter, violence against African Americans spread until about 11:00 p.m. that night. John Bell was returning from work at the Ford River Rouge Plant:

I was driving north on Woodward Avenue and was attacked at Woodward and Eliot streets by a mob of about 100 whites. As I slowed my car near the intersection, where a red light had held up traffic, several persons began to throw bricks, stones, and missiles at me. The mob surrounded my car. As I started to get out I was hit by a rock. They hit me in the back of the head with some blunt instrument, which required three stitches at the hospital. They also struck me over my left eye, requiring three stitches. The mob was beating and knocking me to the ground every with every step I ventured to take, but finally I succeeded in getting to John R. street. (Walter Reuther Library).



John Bell ran across a Detroit “scout car with three officers” as he fled and attempted to relay his experience. “The officers didn’t take any interest in my store,” he told the NAACP, “they didn’t take my name, address, or any details. They just said that they would go see about it” (Walter Reuther Library). Archie B. Crawford, another black man caught driving down Woodward Avenue during the first morning of violence, was “[p]ulled from his Ford and beaten unconscious.” He awoke “to find the vehicle lying on its roof, missing a wheel” (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:97). African-American motorists “endured the shock of being terrorized and beaten,” write Capeci and Wilkerson. In fact, Detroit Police Department data show “fewer whites than blacks were injured while their automobiles were incurring damage at the hands of east-side mobs,” and the property loss “only intensified the trauma of disorder” (1991:98-99). Figure 3 (below) shows a group of white men and boys who have just overturned a car (left); police can be seen approaching in the background, apparently interacting with a man in a white hat. Later, the same car is engulfed in flames (right) as firemen attempt to extinguish the blaze:

### **White Rioters and Third-Party Intervention in Detroit, 1943**



Source: *The Detroit News*

Percival Leroy Prattis, for 25 years the editor at one of the nation’s oldest African-American newspapers, the Pittsburgh *Courier*, eloquently described police intervention in Detroit: “What were the police doing when Negroes were being beaten in the Negro district? Arresting Negroes. What were the police doing when street cars were stopped by the mob and Negroes mobbed and beaten? They were arresting Negroes. What were the police doing when automobiles bearing

Negroes were stopped, turned over and demolished and their occupants beaten? They were arresting Negroes.” Prattis fumed over the refusal of police to offer African Americans equal protection under the law: “It is crystal clear that in no American community is the police power going to be used against the majority from which the mob comes to protect the minority from which the victims come. That much Negroes ought to face” (cited in Swann 1971).

The Detroit riot of 1943 was a reciprocal riot, the rarest of riot events, but also the type most people would commonly associate with the meaning of the term ‘race riot,’ given the bilateral nature of its collective violence. In other words, groups of whites and groups of blacks operated simultaneously in Detroit in June of 1943, united against the other in collective racial violence. And for each group, violence was *proactive*, not merely reactive or retaliatory. This is the critical feature of collective violence that gives its *reciprocal* form. Most of the violence committed by whites took place on Woodward Avenue and its immediate vicinity. Police Commissioner John H. Witherspoon reported to the Common Council that from 12:00 noon until 6:00 p.m. on June 21, the riot “was confined to smaller groups of from 25 to 100 which consisted of severe beatings by groups of whites of one or two negroes and groups of negroes beating a few white residents.” “White gangs controlled Woodward Avenue, halting traffic to drag blacks from trolleys and automobiles, beat them viciously, sometimes senseless, overturn and incinerate their cars—all pay-back for east-side attacks,” write Capeci and Wilkerson. “They roamed about, with little interference from bluecoats, whose numbers never exceeded 1,000” (1991:10). Rushton and colleagues report that by this time, “257 store lootings were reported to the Canfield Precinct alone” and “18 cars owned by negroes were upset on Woodward.” They also claimed that property damage reports “disclose the entire absence of looting by whites”; furthermore, arrest records “reveal that white rioting took the form principally of assaults upon the persons of negroes, rather than the destruction of their property” (1944:14). However unlikely it is that whites resisted all temptations to loot during the crisis, the point is nonetheless important: Whites were interested in assault and murder rather than merchandise.

The Detroit riot of 1943 was a *reciprocal riot* because the violence spread in multiple regions of the city and was bi-directional. When African Americans assaulted white Detroiters, destroyed white-owned property, and appropriated that property for their own consumption, they struck in an ‘upward direction’ against white power and economic exploitation. When white residents assaulted black Detroiters and destroyed black-owned property, they struck in a

‘downward direction’ against black encroachment upon existing economic, cultural, and social relations. Arrest records indicate that spatial differences in riot behavior: “More blacks were arrested between noon and midnight on Hastings Street and within a quarter mile of their residents, while more whites were apprehended from 6:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M., along Woodward Avenue, and more than two miles from their homes.” There were two riot ‘staging grounds’: African Americans “rioted early and largely inside the ghetto or along its edges, contesting whites who recorded more activity later around Paradise Valley’s eastern, southern, and western boundaries,” write Capeci and Wilkerson. After the outburst of interracial violence on Belle Isle late Sunday evening, “blacks took the initiative in the east side. Then whites countered, demonstrably so after 6:00 P.M. on June 21” (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:68-9). The pattern is thus one of bi-directional violence. After an interracial skirmish produces inflammatory rumor, *proactive black violence* spreads from Belle Isle along Detroit’s east side. Then, once white residents hear of the disturbance—which to that point was limited to the African-American ghetto maintained by white policies of exclusion—they mobilize for retaliatory violence.

Governor Kelly requested help from the army at 9:20 p.m. on June 21, and “within two hours, ended the day of bloodshed.” Swift, impartial, and firm intervention from third parties restrained the rioters and quelled the disturbance. Military and police units “cleared the streets with fixed bayonets and tear gas. A mob in Cadillac Square, along Woodward Avenue, was dispersed by the 701<sup>st</sup> Battalion, which then patrolled the area, “combining with the 728<sup>th</sup> Battalion from River Rouge Park to scatter rioters of both races.” Eight military companies of 1,210 soldiers managed to restore order “without firing shots” (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:15). On Tuesday, June 22, “Detroiters awoke in an occupied city.” After the arrival of the 1<sup>st</sup> Provisional Battalion, nearly 1,900 soldiers were “bivouacked in armories and public fields.” Mounted tanks patrolled the downtown area. More than 2,000 Michigan State Troopers swept into the city. Sporadic episodes of violence continued through the end of the day.

The Detroit riot of 1943 lasted for 2 days and the “consequence of disorder staggered all imaginations.” Thirty-four people were killed and there were 676 officially reported injuries; estimates indicate more than \$2 million in property damage (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:87). City officials claimed that white residents suffered most from the racial violence; at 12:00 p.m. on the first day of violence, Mayor Jeffries asserted that, when compared with African Americans, ‘twice as many whites’ had bene hurt). Records at Detroit’s ‘Receiving Hospital’

show that between Sunday and Monday night, 222 whites were admitted for treatment, as were 211 African Americans, yet closer inspection shows that African Americans “suffered overwhelmingly and disproportionately.” Black Detroiters “comprised less than 10 percent” of the city’s population but “accounted for nearly 50 percent of the injured.” African Americans “made up greater numbers and percentages of those hospitalized for gunshot wounds, stabbings, and beatings, and those who died from their injuries” (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:94).

Black- and white-owned property was targeted for vandalism and looting. Practically every store owned by a white person on Hasting Street, “the boulevard of Detroit’s Negro district,” had been attacked and looted. The destruction on Hasting “stretched for three miles up and down the street,” according to *The Times*. “In some blocks store dummies lay like dead persons in the gutter,” with clothing and other merchandise strewn about along the sidewalks. “Not a shoe, not a slipper remained on the shelves” inside Ben’s Shoe Store; the floor “was ankle deep in crushed shoe boxes, discarded oxfords, and hundreds of No. 17 coupons” (NYT June 23, 1943). White merchants bore the brunt of disorder along Woodward and Jefferson avenues. Three quarters of all property damage “came to dry goods, grocery, and liquor stores in almost equal proportions.” And the owners of property were white: an astonishing 98 percent of stores damaged during the riot were owned by whites. These merchants were viewed as outsiders who leached resources from an already poor community since “more than 65 percent of all merchants lived outside the ghetto, mostly in northeast Detroit” (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:99).

African Americans posted signs and otherwise identified their establishments as black-owned businesses during the riot in order to steer looters toward white-owned establishments, especially those most despised for exploitation within the community. Police reported that “hardly a store run by a Negro had been touched in the three-mile area of Paradise Valley overrun by the mobs,” according to *The New York Times*; several of these stores “had ‘colored’ written in soap or crayon on the windows or doors” (June 28, 1943). The public identification of property ownership was a tactic used frequently during the urban rebellions of the 1960s, as we shall see, one that evolved out of Detroit’s reciprocal riot in 1943. Police Lieutenant Albert Hartsig recalled touring the riot zone in the upper east side, a predominantly African-American neighborhood, the day after violence had been suppressed. Several of the houses he passed had signs reading, ‘This is a colored home; do not break in.’ These homes were untouched, according to Hartsig, “while others which bore no placards were wrecked and plundered” (June 23 1943).

The participants in the Detroit ‘race riot’ of 1943 were “transitional figures” in the history of American racial violence. Capeci and Wilkerson explain that there were class differences by race among those who rioted: African Americans who rioted largely “worked at unskilled jobs”; while white rioters also worked unskilled jobs, “there were many more in semiskilled and skilled occupations” (1991:55). Policies of exclusion in those occupations prohibited African American workers from entering those fields, which partly explains the class differences by race in those who participated (and were caught, leaving a trail for later study). Capeci and Wilkerson note that race and gender shaped patterns of participation:

Blacks committed more felonies than whites, and did so within the ghetto. Men went armed, especially between noon and midnight, which represented both manly behavior and in many cases protection for oneself. Women looted stores during the same time frame, manifesting assertive behavior, but a form culturally accepted for females. Their offenses and places of arrest are similar to those encountered in 1960s riots. Conversely, roaming white misdemeanants ‘disturbed the peace’—more accurately, fought with blacks—on Belle Isle or along Paradise Valley borders, a characteristic form of white aggression and black response in earlier communal disorders. Their efforts to penetrate the black community, usually between supertime and sunrise, often carrying guns, exposed perennial, bloodthirsty motives. (1991:55)

Black rioters acted “as individuals rather than in groups,” a pattern of behavior that “set them apart from white rioters. African Americans behaved largely in a defensive nature,” especially as the violence spread from Belle Isle to the city (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:57).

Evidence of police bias during the riot is clear: Detroit’s police targeted African Americans and practically ignored whites engaged in violence. There were 1,274 arrests documented during the riot, according to the Detroit Police Department’s Bureau of Records: Officers arrested 77 white persons, or 6 percent of the total offenses recorded during the riot, while 800 African Americans were arrested, accounting for more than 62 percent of offenses; the remaining 341 offenses, 27 percent of the total, were committed by unknown perpetrators. The final five percent was accounted for by law enforcement, known as *justifiable homicide*: eighteen Black men were killed by “justifiable shooting” and/or “accidental shooting” (Rushton et al. 1943:Exhibit 25). Twenty five of the 34 persons killed during the Detroit riot of 1943 were African American, the majority of them by police officers, leading Thurgood Marshall to reflect on the disparity in the behavior of law enforcement:

It is true that some Negroes were looting stores on Hastings Street and were shot while committing these crimes. It is equally true that white persons were turning over and burning automobiles on Woodward Avenue. This is arson. Others were beating Negroes with iron pipes, clubs, and rocks. This is felonious assault. Several Negroes were stabbed. This is assault with intent to murder. All of these crimes are matters of record; many were committed in the presence of police officers, several on the pavement around the City Hall. Yet, the record remains, Negroes killed by police – 17; white persons killed by police – none. Eighty-five percent of persons arrested were Negroes” (Walter Reuther, box 1, folder 35, pp. 2-3).

## COMPENSATORY REBELLION, PART II: HARLEM AND THE NEW SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF RACIAL COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE

Between 1930 and 1940, more than 145,000 black migrants came to New York City. African Americans represented 6 percent of New York's total population, roughly 458,000 (Capeci 1977:32). The Second Great Migration led to conflict much like the first. The National Urban League estimated that 750,000 African Americans participated in the move out of the rural south and into the industrial centers of the north and west between 1940 and 1944 alone; this comprised "one-sixth of the total migratory movement" (Capeci 1977:58). But because New York was not a major war production center, it was not a "major migratory target." Sociologist Charles S. Johnson "estimated that between 1940 and 1943 the city's black population was reduced by 25,000 persons," perhaps because Urban League officials began "urg[ing] black residents to consider going elsewhere to find employment." This did not mean that the African-American population remained largely stable, however; on the contrary, "migrants constantly entered the metropolitan area," but finding employment opportunities in short supply, "they departed, only to be replaced by other migrants who repeated the process" (Capeci 1977:58).

Employment opportunities for black workers were limited in New York, especially when compared to those in other cities: "Unlike the expanding heavy industries in Buffalo, Detroit, or Los Angeles, which received an abundance of government orders, the small manufacturing businesses in the New York City area acquired few," writes Capeci. "Outside the war production zone, but not considered a distressed area, New York City was in a tenuous economic position, receiving few government contracts and little federal aid" (Capeci 1977:61). African Americans occupied a far greater percentage of persons on relief during the Great Depression than did their white counterparts. "During the first week of September 1935, 43 percent of Harlem's black families were on relief. Throughout the state that year, two-and-a-half times as many blacks as whites were on relief because of unemployment," writes Capeci, and in "the next two years, the city's black residents continued to be displaced from employment faster than whites, but were re-employed in positions supplied by the Emergency Relief Bureau's employment service at only half the rate" (1977:35). In 1937 the New York State Employment Service (NYSES) recorded that 40 percent "of all gainful AfroAmerican workers" registered as

unemployed, “while the corresponding percentage for all other groups was 15,” and because “fewer blacks registered, their unemployment was even greater than the NYSES indicated.” Economic inequality was further extended by the *nature* of black employment opportunity, which was limited to domestic and unskilled jobs as private employers “discriminated openly” (Capeci 1977:35).

New York City was not a war industry center, and thus “federal price and rent controls were absent.” Black Harlem residents were already “paying unreasonable prices for inferior foods and inadequate housing while being the least employed,” hence they “suffered the most during much of the war prosperity,” writes Capeci. “Between 1940 and 1943, prices in black communities were higher and increased more rapidly than elsewhere in New York City,” hence when it came to housing and other items associated with the cost of living, African Americans were also “victimized by an inflationary economy” (1977:64). “Economic injustice was a spur to participate in the riot,” writes Capeci. Lester B. Granger of the Urban League stated that African Americans in Harlem were rioting ‘against white-owned property and white-owned businesses’ (1977:135). Exploitation in the form of higher rents for shoddy apartments and higher prices for inferior food and goods created a well of collective resentment from which to draw motivation for performing violence, particularly since whites were responsible for most of the gouging. The only entrepreneurial paths open to African Americans “are those of pruning himself and burying himself—businesses which continue to be his only by virtue of race prejudice,” wrote author Carl Offord. White racism inspired myriad methods of exclusion from specific types of employment, from unions, and from business-owning opportunities; the owners of capital “held attitudes that restricted black people to positions symbolic of their inferior status,” even in New York City (Capeci 1977:37). The Bureau of Labor compared the “poorer half” of the population by race and concluded that the African American poor “must live on an income which is only 46 percent of that achieved by the poorer half of the white population” (Capeci 1977:38).

New York City’s white leadership “was atypical in its concern for the welfare of black citizens,” and it was also noted for “its receptiveness to national organizations,” like the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the National Negro Congress, the National Urban League, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.” All of these organizations “maintained headquarters in the city and were active in local affairs” (Capeci 1977:44). These kinds of cultural relations—interactions between African American leadership

organizations and the white-dominated power structure in the city—are the primary factor explaining the differences in racial violence between these two cities. Detroit in 1943 had nowhere near this level of interaction, and it shows; one read through the report authored by La Guardia’s Commission in 1935 and the one authored by Mayor Edward Jeffries’ commission in Detroit reveals compelling differences. While the La Guardia commission presented a scathing indictment of the discriminatory treatment in the city which led to the outbreak of violence, the Jeffries commission concluded its report by attacking black leadership for what they viewed as its failure to keep their people in line. Similar criticism was not levied against white leadership for the behavior of its people, indicating the double standard imposed by officials in Detroit.

Walter White of the NAACP “occasionally influenced the civil rights decisions of La Guardia and Lehman,” explains Capeci (1977:44). In fact, when White arrived in Detroit to document the riot, “La Guardia requested information about his observations, and “[u]nlike many black clerics elsewhere, the ministers in New York City, as exemplified by Powell in Harlem and the Reverend Thomas Harten in Bedford-Stuyvesant, played significant roles in the struggle for racial equality” (1977:45). A culture of protest defined Harlem’s landscape: “Meetings, labor parades, soap-box oratory, and boycotts were in wide use. Emphasis was clearly on mass participation, on providing the average citizen with a sense of pride and unity,” and by 1940, even “the middle-class oriented NAACP” had adopted some of these mass tactics. Civil disobedience “became the logical outgrowth of previous tactics,” as manifested in A. Philip Randolph’s plans to march on Washington (Capeci 1977:45).

Black folks also became increasingly aware of white colonialism, the subjugation of people of color around the globe. Empathy for the plight of people in other oppressed nations flourished as black Americans saw their struggles for justice in those of African nations, particularly Ethiopia. A sense of “international racial solidarity” was on the rise, which only increased the cultural distance separating blacks from whites. “To people of color everywhere, freedom and a universal sociopolitical change seemed to be in the offing,” writes Capeci. “In New York City, black editors and columnists considered the war ‘a world revolution.’ Some black residents associated their freedom with that of colonial peoples and advocated the end of imperialism” (1977:55).

Black leaders with nation-wide name recognition were active on the local stage in Harlem, creating a political culture unlike that found in other cities. In the late 1930s, A. Philip



Randolph and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. led mass protest demonstrations in Harlem. Randolph and Powell “were instrumental in the formation of the Greater New York Coordinating Committee for Employment, which claimed it represented more than two-hundred organizations that had fifteen thousand members” (Brandt 1996:49). The Harlem Labor Union “picketed both stores and utilities,” writes Nat Brandt. “Still other demonstrators staged rent protests against landlords for raising rents or took part in boycotts of stores along 125<sup>th</sup> Street, carrying signs that read ‘Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work’” (1996:50). Adam Clayton Powell, the son of Abyssinian Baptist pastor Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., whose “congregation of ten thousand” was the “most prominent in Harlem.” Powell had charisma and grew in reputation as a civil rights leader during the Great Depression; he succeeded his father as pastor at Abyssinian in 1938, and in 1941 he became the first African American elected to city council. In 1944 Powell became “the first black representative from New York State” elected to the United States Congress (Flamm 2017:33).

New York City attracted a different type of migrant, both black and white. Its landscape presented different economic opportunities than more industrialized cities, thus New York’s ‘pull’ forces attracted a certain kind of person; jobs are typically the primary factor involved in the decision-making process that precedes any relocation, though there are ‘push’ factors as well, such as lynching and a host of other kinds of extralegal violence that existed on a widespread scale in the south. Black-white social race relations were quite different in New York due to the prevailing economic conditions that shaped patterns of in-migration:

New York registered no large permanent in-migration and, therefore, experienced less racial competition for living facilities and social services. While neither city received adequate federal assistance to improve these fields, Detroit suffered more because of its phenomenal growth as a war industries center. Similarly, intolerance was present among northern white residents of both cities, *but New York contained few white southern migrants* whom some held responsible for the Detroit riot. As a result, Harlem did not experience the numerous, increasingly intense interracial clashes that climaxed in predictable riot at Detroit. Interracial clashes were on the rise during the war in New York, and many, like La Guardia, were concerned, but the issues generating most resentment were more directly related to the national situation. (Capeci 1977:173)

There were fewer ‘local’ issues in New York City that sparked racial resentment (the Stuyvesant Towers controversy being the most prominent), whereas in Detroit, where in-migration from the south was more intense, white supremacist leaders were actively involved in segregating and subordinating any African American migrants. The effect of migration streams for racial violence, certainly motivated by economics and job opportunities, cannot be understated when comparing and contrasting the forms of violence that evolve in different cities.

Residential segregation in New York City was strictly enforced as “blacks of every economic class” lived in “specified neighborhoods.” Violent methods were sometimes used to ensure African Americans did not move into neighborhoods designated for white residency only, as were more “subtle measures.” Capeci notes that residential segregation “was so effective that the state commission could find *no section in New York State* where residential segregation was not practiced” (1977:38; emphasis added). New York’s Housing Authority built 14 “low-rent public housing projects for 17,000 families” between 1935 and 1943, yet housing remained inadequate. “Such as especially true in black communities, even though 15 percent of all NYCHA tenants were AfroAmerican” (Capeci 1977:65).

African Americans in Harlem wove a culture of protest and lived in a social landscape much different than that available to other black folks living in New York state. “When you got out of New York City, discrimination was just as bad if not worse than in the South. The city was a little better,” explained Arnold de Mille, an African-American journalist who worked for several black newspapers in Harlem. “In fact, the city was a helluva lot better” in terms of black-white cultural and social relations: “Blacks in the 1930s voted in New York, served on juries, and could protest without fear of retaliation. Although confined to a ghetto like every other black community in the country, Harlem’s citizens, all in all, still had a measure of freedom not shared by most blacks in most other cities in most other states” (Brandt 1996:51).

The summer of 1943 was filled with “a sense of profound anger and frustration” for black folks trying to squeeze out a living in white-owned Harlem. Stories in the *Amsterdam News*, the *People’s Voice*, and the *New York Age*, Harlem’s weekly newspapers, captures the feeling of resentment, so strong because injustice could be found in nearly every facet of social life: “there are articles about job bias in war industries, about the black longshoremen loading explosive munitions at a New Jersey dock who were refused admittance to a nearby restaurant, about complaints of being called ‘nigger’ and ‘boy’ at an air force training base in Minnesota, about the advertisement placed by the Ku Klux Klan in a South Carolina newspaper, about the beating of a black clergyman by a train conductor outside of Atlanta because the minister refused to leave an observation car reserved for whites,” writes Nat Brandt. “The feature editorial in the *Amsterdam News* is calling on the Federal Bureau of Investigation to do something about lynchings in Mississippi and Indiana. And, in answer to a threatening letter from a KKK leader, the city’s lone black councilman, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., warns that New York’s black cannot

be bullied: ‘There is a different kind of a Negro here’” (Brandt 1996:5). And resentment wasn’t limited to discriminatory hiring practices nationwide nor the refusal of white politicians to take forceful stands against lynching and other forms of violence. In November 1943, Powell gave a sermon in which he condemned the city’s response to the crisis of living in Harlem: “In the past twenty-five years the population of Harlem has increased five-fold, yet facilities for recreation, education, and health haven’t even doubled. Into this ghetto have been crowded people living in century-old tenements, making less money but paying higher rents and higher prices for foodstuffs than any other group in the city” (Brandt 1996:166).

La Guardia’s handling of the Stuyvesant Town reveals the complexity of his decision-making. “On the eve of the riot-torn summer of 1943 and after several years of effort, he contracted with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company” to construct a “quasi-public housing project in lower east Manhattan,” writes Capeci. The Metropolitan company had “traditional discriminatory hiring practices” (1977:13). The mayor felt it was “more important to commit private enterprise to public housing than to jeopardize that effort by insisting on non-discriminatory tenant selection,” notes Capeci: “He hoped eventual litigation would ensure against discriminatory practices” (1977:14). La Guardia’s record on civil rights was “generally solid,” according to Capeci, but his handling of Stuyvesant Town “reveals that the Mayor’s understanding of the struggle for equality had limits”; he “lumped all discrimination, hate and prejudice together without perceiving the uniqueness of racism or comprehending what it meant for black society” (1977:14-5). Perhaps most important is that La Guardia sought only the counsel of conservative black leadership, not those considered more radical, “and only on issues involving race relations.” His caution “isolated and alienated him from important segments of the black community,” thus he entertained only “black leaders who, like himself, believed that overly aggressive tactics were harmful to the racial struggle” (Capeci 1977:16). Though Mayor La Guardia did seek the opinions of particular African-American leaders, his “administrative style and personality also restricted his approach to civil rights” (Capeci 1977:17). He “permitted commissioners to investigate charges of discrimination in their own apartments,” for example. Thus, in “his desire to govern completely,” La Guardia made “costly errors,” argues Capeci. Had he “been less trusting of his own administration, he could have been more effective in combating institutional racism” (1977:17). He was “incapable of handling criticism,” and he “jostled constantly with journalists, whom he accused of slanting the news.” These leadership traits

“prevented him from appreciating or utilizing the constructive ideas and abilities of his critics,” writes Capeci. “Pride and achievement deluded La Guardia into believing that progress was greater than it sometimes was. Yet La Guardia contributed to the quest for equality. Even though his emphasis on gradualism reflected the period in which he lived, his struggle for racial justice reflected the morality he believed in, and it was in advance of the times” (1977:17).

Growing resentment stemming from an uninterrupted history of racial injustices contributed heavily to the outbreak of racial violence in 1943. In Harlem there was resentment over racial discrimination in law enforcement *and* the hiring practices of the NYPD. There were only 155 African-American patrolmen on a force that totaled nearly 18,000 officers (Brandt 1996:36); of these, 6 were sergeants and 1 a parole commissioner (Capeci 1977:145). There were far too few black police officers, according to many Harlem residents, and those who were hired on the force had limited opportunity for advancement. As Capeci notes, though the NYPD “handled the riot excellently,” their performance during a 24-hour event could not “erase the years of poor police-community relations, which were a factor contributing to the disruption” (1977:145). Then as now, views on police conduct toward the African-American community stir controversy: “Police brutality and police leniency are not mutually exclusive; police can treat individuals brutally and at the same time be lax in enforcement throughout a community, as had been the case in Harlem. To La Guardia, the charges were contradictory, and as such he took neither of them seriously.” Mayor La Guardia “did not seem to understand that the police reputation among blacks might have been an important impediment,” so he did not act with any determination for racial reform in law enforcement practices; instead, he “defended the NYPD just as he defended all the municipal departments” (Capeci 1977:144-45).

The Langston Hughes poem “Beaumont to Detroit: 1943” (reprinted at the front of the previous section) brilliantly captures the resentment African Americans felt over a democracy denied. Black bodies were good enough to die for democracy overseas and when they returned home, they were subjected to the same abuses and humiliations of old. Maltreatment of African-American veterans “prompted deep resentment” in the black community nationwide, and, as Walter White informed Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, the rioting of 1943 was ‘born of repeated, unchecked, unpunished, and often unrebuked shooting, maiming, and insulting of Negro troops.’ Black citizens “felt the riot was ‘born out of resentment of the evil treatment given our men in the service’” (Capeci 1977:146).

*Compensatory Rebellion: Harlem 1943*

The Braddock Hotel had a reputation for prostitution, and it was regularly under police surveillance as a 'raided premise.' Marjorie Polite registered at the hotel, located at West 126<sup>th</sup> Street, around 7:00 p.m.; she was about to leave after "complaining of unsatisfactory accommodations" when she became allegedly angry over an unreturned tip. Patrolman James Collins was called to the scene, and he arrested Polite for disorderly conduct after she refused to leave the premises and "verbally abused the officer," according to Capeci (1977:100). Mrs. Florine Roberts, an African American from Middletown, Connecticut who happened to be staying at the Braddock while she visited her son, Robert Bandy, came to Polite's defense and demanded her release. Robert Bandy, Roberts' son and a soldier in the Army's 703<sup>rd</sup> Military Police Battalion in Jersey City, then came to the aid of his mother and "remonstrated" Collins. According to the official police report, Bandy threatened Collins, and apparently for no reason Mrs. Roberts and her son proceeded to attack the officer. Bandy hit Collins during the struggle and ran. Collins commanded the soldier to halt, and when he did not, the patrolmen fired his revolver. Bandy claimed that Collins was about to deal him a blow over the head, but he caught his nightstick midair. The officer shot him, according to Bandy, because he refused to return the weapon. After both men were transported for treatment to Sydenham Hospital, rumors swept through Harlem, rapidly creating an incendiary environment. Large crowds began to assemble at the Braddock Hotel, the 28<sup>th</sup> Police Precinct headquarters, and the hospital; at one point, an estimated "3,000 persons congregated at 28<sup>th</sup> precinct headquarters threatened the officer responsible for Bandy's alleged death" (Capeci 1977:101). The first window broke sometime around 10:30, and the 'crashing sound of falling plate-glass' could be heard for hours.

Riot spread rapidly from its center at 125<sup>th</sup> Street: "the disorder encompassed the area from 110<sup>th</sup> to 145<sup>th</sup> streets on Eighth Avenue, from 110<sup>th</sup> to 140<sup>th</sup> streets on Seventh Avenue, and north as far as 136<sup>th</sup> Street on Lenox Avenue" (Capeci 1977:101). But La Guardia effectively "sealed off" the riot zone: "Traffic was diverted around the entire area of West Harlem, from 110<sup>th</sup> to 155<sup>th</sup> streets between Fifth and Eighth avenues." In addition to isolating the riot area, La Guardia also "saturat[ed] the district with police," and at approximately 1:05 a.m., the mayor "made the first of five radio broadcasts to New York City residents" (Capeci 1977:103).

Space always plays a critical role in the performance of violence. The city's landscape shapes human interaction in ways that contour racial collective violence when it does erupt. In

Harlem 1943, the targets of attack shifted as the event unfolded—just as they did 80 years earlier in the New York City ‘Draft Riots’ (i.e., from attacks on drafts offices and symbols of federal power to a massacre of African Americans). This time, however, blacks were on the offensive in an area where they vastly outnumbered white people. Once large crowds gathered in protest, “intense outbreaks of window-smashing (sic) aimed at symbols of oppression occurred, followed by large-scale looting.” The city’s high degree of residential segregation, the diverting of traffic, and the behavior of New York’s law enforcement officers all influenced by Harlem’s *compensatory rebellion* took such a different form than the *reciprocal riot* in Detroit:

Targets were primarily determined by the riot area’s ecology. The targets, therefore, were white policemen—of whom more than sixty were injured—and white-owned property. In the outlying areas of the riot, most notably at West 125<sup>th</sup> Street and St. Nicholas Avenue, a small number of white pedestrians and trolley passengers were attacked by black youths. This was at the far western border of Harlem, a contested neighborhood that the Young Citizens’ Committee on Race Relations identified as a spawning ground for white ‘conflict gangs.’ Although the NYPD and ecological factors contained interracial clashes during the riot, more would have occurred had white people been more accessible. (Capeci 1977:129)

That last point is crucial. White folks were not as ‘accessible’ as they were in Detroit, and the routing of traffic away from the disorder meant that whites would not travel through an active riot zone in their cars. In Detroit we saw whites stop blacks driving automobiles, expel them from the vehicle, beat them mercilessly, then overturn the car before setting it on fire. This kind of performance was not possible on Harlem’s riot stage—La Guardia’s plan for intervention and the behavior of law enforcement likely prevented such an outbreak from forming.

White culture was very different in New York than it was in Detroit. “La Guardia’s mail clearly reveals that of those whites corresponding on the riot, the overwhelming majority were sympathetic to black residents,” according to Capeci. “This is supported by unity pledges and rallies of numerous citizens, the press coverage of the riot, and the efforts of most community leaders. More important, once disorder began no whites attempted to enter Harlem or other ghettos to assail black residents” (1977:133). The riot in Harlem did not feature white-initiated disciplinary violence, nor did it feature white retaliatory violence, as Capeci notes. The white response on the streets and in the press was also quite different, indicating the extent to which the social distance separating African American residents from whites in New York City was far *less* extreme than the breach between the races in Detroit.

The New York Police Department reported 6 fatalities, all African American, and an additional 185 injuries (most of whom were black) suffered during the riot. Reported injuries are

likely far lower than the actual number injured in the riot as many participants may have been reluctant to seek medical assistance for fear of being identified in the disorder. *The New York Times* reported 400 “wounded or injured, and hundreds of stores and shops” wrecked, producing an estimated \$5,000,000 in property damage. More than 550 African Americans were arrested, generally on charges of rioting, looting, and assault (Capeci 1977:102). The fire department did not divulge exact figures, but according to one estimate, 32 fires were set during the violence. Nearly 4,500 plate-glass windows were smashed; shards of glass scattered on streets for miles.

There can be no doubt that Mayor La Guardia’s preparedness for what was to come in August 1943 owed a debt to the March 1935 riot; nevertheless, La Guardia’s actions even before the outbreak of violence demonstrate the critical importance of responsive leadership. The mayor sent two NYPD officers, Edward M. Butler and Emanuel Kline, were “sent to observe” the Detroit riot; though their conclusions were biased against African-American rioters, the report they produced did not spare the police: “Due to a lack of leadership, the patrolmen may not have used the best judgment in certain instances.” Yes, the phrases ‘may not’ and ‘certain instances’ are equivocations from police officers writing about other police officers. Nevertheless, the report made 17 suggestions, and Capeci reports that on a June 28 meeting at Gracie Mansion, La Guardia met with several black leaders and expanded those suggestions to 24. A plan for third-party intervention was developed: patrolmen were accompanied by superior officers, operating in at least pairs; they would use force ‘only when necessary’ and shoot only as ‘the last resort.’ Tear gas would only be used as a last resort. Bars were ordered closed; the sale of alcohol was prohibited. Pawn shops and gun stores were guarded with extra security, as were schools and fire-alarm boxes. Traffic was diverted away from the area when rioting broke out in an effort to contain the violence. “Remembering the wanton mob attacks on black persons in Detroit, police would protect passengers of buses, cars, and trolleys,” writes Capeci. When New York’s riot arrived on August 1, these recommendations “were implemented quickly and efficiently” (Capeci 1977:118). This kind of preparedness for containing violence is essential when the outbreak does arrive. Leadership in local and state law enforcement agencies is paramount when it comes to driving the official response, and as we have seen throughout this book, the behavior of law enforcement is a critically significant variable when it comes to predicting the intensity and severity of a riot event. In most situations, that leadership begins with the city’s mayor, who is responsible for the Chief of Police; a chain of command exists, and if this chain is not

calibrated to function without racial prejudice, the explosion of violence may go unchecked, with disastrous consequences.

Nat Brandt tells the story of how Walter White, then secretary of the NAACP, became involved in responding to the Harlem riot of 1943. White had returned home to the apartment he shared with his wife Gladys in Harlem's Sugar Hill neighborhood. He had three speaking engagements that day, and "he did not want to be disturbed even if 'President Roosevelt or Cleopatra called.'" White was asleep "only a few minutes" when the phone rang. A member of the NAACP staff informed Gladys that "there was a full-scale riot in central Harlem. Despite her husband's admonitions, she immediately roused White." Before he could rush out the door, the phone rang again. This time it was Mayor La Guardia, calling from City Hall. "He was about to rush up to the Twenty-eighth Police Precinct and wanted White to join him there as quickly as possible," writes Brandt. "He was summoning every black leader he could to an emergency meeting" (1996:189). La Guardia also asked Roy Wilkins to join he and White "to tour the community. According to White's account, the mayor 'rushed on bands of rioters, ordering them to cease and desist, and most were too startled by the sight of the red-faced mayor to do anything but obey. It was a miracle nothing happened to him' (Brandt 1996:193). All traffic was diverted from the riot zone. "No buses or trolleys, private cars or trucks were permitted between Fifth and Eighth Avenues and from 110<sup>th</sup> to 155<sup>th</sup> Streets" (Brandt 1996:193). Walter White recalled riding up Eighth Avenue during the evening in a truck with speakers mounted to its frame. The throngs 'were densest and angriest' along Eighth Avenue, and 'as the huge vehicle nosed its way through crowded streets,' he and Ferdinand Smith repeated this plea to assuage tensions: "The rumor is false that a Negro soldier was killed at the Braddock Hotel tonight. He is only slightly wounded and is in no danger. Go to your homes! Don't form mobs or break the law! Don't destroy in one night the reputation as good citizens you have taken a lifetime to build! Go home—now!" (Brandt 1996:194).

The New York Police Department "had every conceivable unit on hand" in responding to the violence, "including emergency and riot squads, motor cycle and mounted men, radio car crews and detectives." Mayor La Guardia and Police Chief Valentine mobilized 6,000 police officers—approximately one third of the city's entire police force—who blanketed Harlem with patrols on street corners, in apartment hallways, and on rooftops. Police wore "air-raid helmets" to guard against missiles hurled into the street." Mayor La Guardia's response was prompt and



assertive: “Staying on the job virtually all night Sunday and all day yesterday, and canceling a trip to Washington, the Mayor made several visits to Harlem police headquarters,” explained *The Times*; he “toured the riot district and held frequent conferences with police, Army officials, and Negro leaders,” but ultimately decided outside intervention was unnecessary (*The New York Times* August 3, 1943). In Detroit, “a weak Mayor hid while Negroes were beaten on the steps of City Hall itself,” wrote Walter White, but La Guardia was ‘in the thick of the trouble, often at great personal risk’ (Brandt 1996:208). La Guardia “was not indifferent to the plight of black residents,” unlike Mayor Ed Jeffries in Detroit (Capeci 1977:174). Perhaps just as significant as the attitude of leadership is the preparedness of leadership, and in this the difference between Detroit and New York was glaring. La Guardia “had prepared the NYPD psychologically and physically in riot control, something that no other mayor had done before the 1960s” (Capeci 1977:175). La Guardia’s response was not entirely satisfactory, for sure, but there can be no doubt it was far superior to that of Jeffries and other leadership—both prior to his time, and in some cases (as we will see), in later years as well. The NYPD’s “immediate, restrained response minimized the loss of human life, prevented the riot from going out of control, and, in the long run, reduced the amount of property damage,” Capeci claims (1977:102).

New York also had a strong collective response from various organizations in helping to reestablish order following the most intense violence. “More than 530 air raid wardens, 165 members of the New York Urban League’s Harlem Citizen Volunteers, and 20 members of the City Patrol Corps patrolled the heart of the riot district—Seventh and Eighth avenues and 125<sup>th</sup> Street—during the evening of August 2 and morning of August 3.” There were approximately 1,500 volunteers, all Harlem residents, which, as Capeci notes, “indicates the significant role blacks played in restoring order” (1977:108). In Detroit, disorder lasted 24 hours; in New York, the rebellion lasted 12 hours, and it “was contained in Harlem, which was a major reason why large scale interracial fighting did not occur” (Capeci 1977:116). Dominic Capeci argues that in Detroit “indiscriminate brutality prevailed, while in New York looters drew gunfire only for threatening officers with bodily harm or for resisting arrest.” Six African American men were killed in the Harlem riot; of these, four were killed by white police officers, two of which “were clearly cases of self-defense,” while the other two cases, “in which the same patrolman shot looters fleeing from a grocery store, were questionable” (Capeci 1977:116).

## CONCLUSION

The riots of World War II “represent a transition from the interracial or communal riots of earlier years to the property-oriented or commodity upheavals of recent times,” notes Capeci (1977:169). The riot framework presented here uses the direction of violence in social space as its focal point of analysis rather than limiting it to targets of violence. Because African Americans attacked white-owned property and white police officers in Harlem, the riot features upward collective violence—the dominant pattern is of a lower-status group targeting and assaulting a group with higher status responsible for economic exploitation. But as Capeci notes, more than 60 police officers were injured during the Harlem riot of 1943, and on the western boundaries of the city, some white motorists were attacked; we cannot ignore those features of the event and continue to call it a ‘commodity riot.’ The riot was compensation for continued injustice, compensation in the form of commodity theft; white persons would pay for past grievances, rather than physical assault against white citizens. Pawnshops, jewelry stores, grocery stores, delicatessens, and liquor stores were primary targets of African Americans seeking compensation for continued exploitation at the hands of white merchants, capitalists who regularly overcharged for goods and committed egregious usury practices against black residents. Hence I propose the label *compensatory rebellion*, a term that more accurately reflects the social nature of violence more than the term riot. “The best evidence that there was no race riot in Harlem is contained in the fact that no white civilian was arrested or injured,” explained Police Commissioner Valentine (*The New York Times* August 3, 1943b). Even Walter White, secretary of the NAACP, issued a statement which stressed that it “cannot be too clearly emphasized that this was not a race riot in any sense of the term” (*The New York Times* August 3, 1943c). The Harlem riot of 1943 may not have been a ‘race riot,’ it may not have featured fierce street battles between groups of white and black residents, but this does not negate the fact that the Harlem riot of 1943 was most certainly *about* race. As the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. asserted, disorder in Harlem grew out of “blind, smoldering and unorganized resentment against Jim Crow treatment of Negro men in the armed forces and the unusual high rents and cost of living forced upon Negroes in Harlem” (*The New York Times* August 3, 1943c). In other words, the looting and property destruction grew out of collective resentment, that bitterness resulting from denied opportunity in a country dedicated to principles of equality.

President Franklin Roosevelt missed an opportunity to send a strong message regarding black-white social relations during 1943. Since presidential intervention “might alienate more white workers and spark additional racial conflict, inaction best served the war effort” (Capeci 1977:152). The idea that action might provoke conflict—thus action must be prudently delayed until a further date when ostensibly it won’t provoke racial conflict—is a common refrain heard by African Americans basically since Emancipation. And all too often, even ‘well-intentioned whites’ remain silent or abstain from direct action: “Roosevelt, like most white Americans, believed that progress in race relations could not be forced, but required a gradual process of education,” writes Capeci. The president favored a more moderate approach, and in conciliating southern democrats, he “disapproved of a national committee on race relations that might alienate whites. Ironically, Roosevelt did not seem to realize that such a body would foster the education that he judged so important” (Capeci 1977:154). Roosevelt responded to crisis in race relations slowly and reluctantly. Historically, white politicians have been far too willing to defer issues of racial equality until some future date, always unspecified.

The riots in Detroit and New York in 1943 had “similar powderkeg backgrounds,” according to *The New York Times*—including intensive migration that resulted in the “overcrowding of Negro districts,” racial discrimination in both the armed services and war industries, African Americans demanding both economic and social equality, and the rise of “radical agitators preying on these conditions”—but there “the similarity ended, however. Whereas gangs of white hoodlums organized in Detroit to hunt down individual Negroes who ventured out of the Negro district, thus emulating Negro gangs in Negro districts, nothing like this occurred in New York” (August 3, 1943). Just 8 years after racial violence ripped apart Harlem, Langston Hughes published perhaps his most famous poem, “A Dream Deferred” (1951). I knew nothing of the Harlem riot when I first read the poem; now it resonates with new meaning: What happens to a dream deferred? / Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun? / Or fester like a sore— / And then run? / Does it stink like rotten meat? / Or crust and sugar over— / like a syrupy sweet? / Maybe it just sags / Like a heavy load. / *Or does it explode?*

# Chapter 7

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# Rebellion as Compensation

## **Rebellion as Compensation: Black Militancy in New York and Los Angeles, 1960 - 1965**

The Negro Revolt, like most rebellions, was a fusion of hope, frustration, and solidarity. Rebellion depends on frustration at the status quo but a belief in the possibility of change. Above all, it requires the summoning of collective energies and resources and the development of shared consciousness and identity. In northern cities in the early 1960s, all these ingredients were present, but to different degrees.

- Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty* (2008:290)

Historian Gerald Horne explains that riots occur in “the context of an elaborate train of social, economic, and political events,” and historically, “riots have been a fundamental aspect of the political culture of the United States” (Horne 1997:41). Increasing income and wealth inequality (i.e., the economic domain); the growth of black nationalism, on the one hand, and white conservatism, on the other (i.e., the cultural domain); and the intensification of racist attitudes, spawned by suburbanization for whites and social isolation for blacks (i.e., the social domain) converged in both New York and Los Angeles during the ‘long, hot summers’ of 1964 and 1965. In the face of intense prejudice and discrimination, black people in the north and west drew on previous social ties and “developed extensive social networks.” The shared struggle against white supremacy “provided the basis for substantial organization to advance the collective interests of the black ghetto” (Feagin and Hahn 1973:33).

Waves of migration from the South had significant social consequences that directly contributed to the outbreak of riot violence. As black migrants fled rural southern agriculture for industrialized cities in the north, they were often forced to live in areas with the oldest, most dilapidated housing in cramped yet costly rental quarters. “Newly arrived black residents in a northern city were not free to locate at any place in the community,” explain Feagin and Hahn; “their choices were severely limited by the prevailing discrimination, both individual and institutional, that divided the city into distinctive black and white areas” (1973:31). Geographic residential segregation was a defining feature of urban life, with important social consequences that helped precipitate violence. Black migration to the north and west led to a concentration of African Americans in “tightly bound areas,” which in turn promoted social interaction. Whether born in the north or south, all African Americans were confronted with similar problems. African Americans living in large cities “constantly come into contact with, and to some considerable

extent are dependent upon, agencies and institutions primarily managed by middle-class whites,” wrote Sears and McConahay. “Schools, employment agencies, landlords, police forces, hospitals and clinics, welfare agencies, places of employment, local government bureaucracies—all are, in most large American cities, controlled primarily by middle-class whites” (1973:51).

## TWO REBELLIONS, ONE CITY: NEW YORK ERUPTS FOR A THIRD TIME IN THIRTY YEARS

Patrick Lynch, the 34-year-old building superintendent of an apartment complex, decided he would water his flowerpots before the summer heat really got scalding. Located at 215 East 76<sup>th</sup> Street, the six-story white brick apartment house was across the street from Robert F. Wagner Junior High School, where summer school was in progress. Lynch spoke with a thick Irish accent, and he apparently had been having some trouble with the summer school kids. It was quarter after 9:00 in the morning. The details of the opening confrontation that sparked the third rebellion in New York City in three decades are contested, but on Thursday, July 16, Lynch claimed he asked a group of African-American teenagers congregating on the sidewalk below if they would move. Lynch claimed the teens refused his request. Shirley Robinson, a 14-year-old African-American student in the Wagner summer school program, gave a different version of events: ‘He didn’t want anybody standing on the sidewalk on that side of the street, so he began spraying the water on everybody,’ she said. ‘There were about seven kids near the stoop of the building and when he started spraying water, somebody yelled, ‘Say mister, look out!’ The superintendent then said—and I heard him—“I’m going to wash all the black off you” (Jones July 17, 1964). Then some of the youths threw bottles and trashcan covers at Lynch, who ran into the building. The barrage caught the eye of James Powell, a 15-year-old African American student waiting across the street, in front of Wagner, for summer classes to begin.

‘I saw the superintendent spraying a bunch of colored kids,’ explained Mrs. Beulah Barnes, an African-American nurse, ‘and as the kids moved back, he went after them with more water.’ Barnes saw James Powell run into the building in pursuit of Lynch, but he ‘didn’t stay two minutes. Robinson claimed that, contrary to the account provided by police, Jimmy Powell ‘didn’t have any knife’ when she saw him enter the building, and when he exited, ‘he was even laughing.’ But Powell wouldn’t be laughing much longer. Lieutenant Thomas Gilligan had a

distinguished record on the police force, had even been named ‘Hero Cop’ for his bravery in apprehending a suspect on a rooftop in 1958. At 36 years old, Gilligan was 6 feet tall and weighed 200 pounds. He also happened to be a resident of Stuyvesant Town, a “middle-class, virtually all white apartment project” that was under attack from the Black community ever since La Guardia first permitted the project to move forward, despite its racist rental policies (Flamm 2017:13). But when James Powell darted across the street toward Lynch, Lieutenant Gilligan—in a neighborhood radio shop wearing civilian clothes on his day off—raced after him carrying a small black revolver. ‘I saw that,’ recalled Barnes, perhaps surprised to see the revolver brandished in public by a man not wearing a uniform. Powell ran from the building and the plain-clothes lieutenant ‘shot him twice,’ explained Beulah Barnes: ‘then the boy fell to the sidewalk, and this man stood there for maybe 10 minutes just staring at the body.’ He never ‘had any words’ with Gilligan, she said (Jones July 17 1964). One of the bullets passed through Powell’s “right forearm near the wrist, then tore into his chest, cutting the main artery just above the heart and stopping in the lungs.” A second bullet tore “through his abdomen and out his back” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:6). Though eye-witness accounts varied, District Attorney Frank Hogan, said the “most frequent account” was that Powell “fell to the sidewalk on his hands and knees,” at which point Gilligan, “still on the steps, pointed the gun down on him and fired two more shots at Powell’s back” (1964:8).

Jimmy Powell was 5’6” and weighed 122 pounds. Many New Yorkers wondered whether that kind of force was necessary to subdue the teenage boy who lived in the Bronx—even if he did flash a knife, as police claimed. But on that balmy Thursday morning, police arrived to find a throng of nearly 300 students gathered around Powell’s body, and so they ordered them to the other side of East 76<sup>th</sup> Street. The students complied, but eventually they moved back across the street and were again ordered away. This happened a third time before a news service photographer mounted a car for a better shot of the crowd. “His arrival influenced what happened next,” explained Shapiro and Sullivan (1964:7). The students were grieving, the crowd grew, and “young girls became hysterical, tears streaming down their cheeks.” Suddenly, one of the girls called to the police across the street: ‘Come on, shoot another nigger!’ (Jones July 17 1964). Then students began to launch any accessible object; rocks, bottles, and metal garbage can lids all served as projectiles in an attack upon law enforcement. Amidst the growing panic, police radioed for reinforcements, and 75 officers arrived, wearing steel helmets and carrying

nightsticks. After dispersing the crowd, several black youths tore apart a newspaper stand on a nearby subway platform. James Powell would have been a sophomore at Samuel Gompers Vocational High School in the Bronx that fall.

Demographic change transformed New York City neighborhoods after World War II. The mechanization of agriculture only intensified, and the collapse of cotton labor “led to an exodus of millions of sharecroppers from rural areas.” The movement “continued unabated after World War II,” writes historian Michael Flamm. “By 1950 more than one million African Americans lived in New York—a 30 percent increase since 1948.” Nearly half a million black migrants arrived in New York during the 1950s, “only to discover that the federal government and local banks preserved residential segregation by ‘redlining’ neighborhoods and restricting loans.” White out-migration accompanied the influx of African Americans, as “more than a million” departed for the suburbs on Long Island, in Westchester County, and in New Jersey; many more would have fled had the Lyons Law not restricted municipal employment to city residents (Flamm 2017:45). Harlem’s population actually declined 10 percent during the 1950s, mainly, as Flamm notes, “because poor blacks were moving to other ghettos like Bed-Stuy in Brooklyn. But middle-class African Americans were also fleeing Harlem in the 1950s, like Dr. Kenneth Clarke, the African-American psychologist famous for the ‘doll study’ that influenced the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. “The departure of middle-class professionals like Clark coincided with the loss of decent-paying jobs for working-class residents” (2017:47).

Deindustrialization also arrived in New York during the 1950s. Manufacturers began moving their companies south in search of cheaper labor. Automation transformed the service sector, and African Americans were disproportionately affected in its wake, “leading to fewer opportunities for those with poor English or dark skin, little experience or limited skills” (Flamm 2017:47). Shapiro and Sullivan explain how automation radically eliminated jobs for Harlem residents, particularly in the service sector: “Every new automatic elevator, coin-operated food-vending machine, and floor-scrubbing machine takes jobs from unskilled workers, and those workers are very apt to be Negroes, who, generally, are the last to be hired and the first to be fired” (1964:26). Policies of exclusion structured participation in both labor unions and apprenticeship programs. African Americans remained barred from working in the skilled trades, who refused to accept black members.



Black residents of Harlem often paid more rent than whites, despite the fact that nearly “half the housing in Central Harlem was substandard compared to 15 percent in the city as a whole,” notes Flamm. “Residential segregation led to higher rates of population density and left residents with fewer options about where to live.” African Americans “owned or managed only 4 percent of Harlem businesses,” and for black adults, “the unemployment rate was twice as high as for the rest of the city. Among young men eighteen to twenty-four, it was five times as high for blacks as for whites” (Flamm 2017:48). Though the number of people living in Harlem had *doubled* since 1940, “the number of apartments had not increased despite the construction of the Riverton Houses, a large middle-income housing development created by Met Life in response to the protests over Stuyvesant Town” (Flamm 2017:46). African Americans were squeezed in a 3.5-square-mile area, at a rate of 200 people per acre. Hidden behind Harlem’s beautiful brownstones were hazardous living conditions: “Outside, there may be a nice finish to the house, with nothing to mar its appearance except the windows, some of them broken, some of them showing ragged curtains,” explain Shapiro and Sullivan, reporters who covered the violence. “Inside, the plaster is falling, wires are exposed, stairs are dangerously shaky, garbage litters the halls, the basement may be filled with water which threatens the foundations, and rats may retreat slowly and defiantly before an intruder. These are rooming houses. Entire families of five or six live in each room, sharing one bath and one kitchen on each floor (1964:23).

Residential confinement only intensified the collective resentment felt for whites who continued to prevent black folks from moving freely within the city. Dr. Charles H. Roberts, the chairman of Mayor La Guardia’s 1935 Harlem riot commission, was 91 years old at the time of the 1964 riot; he noted that nearly 30 years later, Harlem residents still generally feel that ‘advantage is being taken of them because they are colored and segregated, because they ‘don’t know how to go about’ getting fair treatment or equal rights. ‘When a neighborhood is segregated,’ Roberts added, ‘you can do a whole lot of things that hurt.’ And Harlem was hurting. In 1964, Dr. Kenneth B. Clark’s Haryou (Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited) studies showed that juvenile delinquency in central Harlem was “running more than double the rate for the city as a whole.” Central Harlem also had higher rates of drug addiction and venereal disease than the rest of the city; its murder rate was six times the city’s, and infant mortality was double the city rate. The education system was in a state of crisis: ‘The schools have lost faith in

the ability of their pupils to learn,' asserted Haryou, 'and the community has lost faith in the ability of the schools to teach' (Kihss July 20, 1964).

Cultural organizations present opportunities for the development of Black insurgency, and in Harlem, the "most influential groups" were the civil rights organizations and the Nation of Islam. The Urban League and the NAACP were the only groups with "any lengthy history," and according to Shapiro and Sullivan, "their thunder has largely been stolen by the activist groups, rather than those middle-class institutions, like the NAACP, "dedicated to legal battles and persuasion" (1964:32). The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was one such group. Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, whose members were often called 'Black Muslims' by whites, espoused "a doctrine of separation from the 'blue-eyed white devil.'" They were credited with the expression 'whitey,' were "militant and considered dangerous by many," yet they were also preaching "the message of moral discipline and self-help" (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:32).

During the summer of 1964, 17-year-old Lew Alcindor participated in a Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited (HARYOU) journalism workshop located at the YMCA. Alcindor would later become world famous as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, but at the time he was keenly aware of the sense of exploitation felt in Harlem prior to the explosion of violence: "Who was gouging the neighborhood on groceries, clothing, and rent?" he asked. "White people. Who controlled the jobs that these guys playing craps on the stoop couldn't get? And who was making money selling them wine? Landlords, storeowners, pawnbrokers—white people" (Flamm 2017:118). New York's black population has always "challenged the boundaries of simple dichotomies," explains sociologist Janet Abu-Lughod, and it has greater diversity in black culture as a result: "Contrary to the situation in Chicago, for example, where to be poor, or rural origin, and dark-skinned were more tightly correlated, the congruence between phenotype and nativity broke down in New York. From the beginning a sizeable number of 'blacks' were of foreign origin (largely Jamaican, but also from other Caribbean islands)," she explains. "Indeed, many of the political leaders and entrepreneurial elite of the black community were drawn from this subgroup. Second, native 'blacks' varied widely by superficial appearance. Especially after the Civil War, the freedom of the city drew ambitious newcomers of mixed parentage." Black New Yorkers had always "varied by class, ethnicity, accent, ancestry, and increasingly, after 1965, with an influx of Haitians and Dominicans and even Africans, by language. (Abu-Lughod 2007:164-5)

Junius Griffin was hired at the *New York Times* in 1964, the fourth African-American reporter at the paper, which, “like every other daily in the city had few African American writers on staff,” states Flamm, “a practice that would start to change during the summer of 1964.” Prior to 1964, ‘there weren’t that many stories about Harlem that the *Times*—or, for that matter, any other white newspaper—deemed newsworthy,” recalled Arthur Gelb, the *Times*’ deputy metro editor (Flamm 2017:71). James W. Sullivan stopped in at a bar on 125<sup>th</sup> Street during the riot and struck up a conversation with the bartender, a middle-aged black man. His remarks reveal the intensity of competing cultural forces at work in Harlem, especially on the young people:

They got all these influences working on them. They got the civil rights groups, they got the nationalist groups, they got the churches and they got the newspapers. The civil rights groups feed them ... well, they feed them shit! The nationalists feed them shit; the churches feed them shit. And those newspapers. . . . I’m pretty well off. I got a job. I live all right, I’m happy. But I pick up the paper and start reading it, and all of a sudden I find myself saying, ‘those dirty rotten bastards! They can’t do that to us!’ No wonder these kids get mixed up in that shit.’ (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:186-87; Flamm 2017:154)

The bartender makes several points on African-American culture in Harlem, including the impact of many organizations with competing ideological leanings and the influence of a press consistently reporting on injustices committed against black folks. These cultural networks feed and cultivate collective resentment against ‘whitey,’ the pejorative increasingly applied to white folks in black neighborhoods.

Louis Lomax, producer of *The Hate That Hate Produced*, a documentary about Elijah Muhammad and the National of Islam, commented on the tension felt by African Americans in New York City: ‘He is losing faith. The Negro on the streets of Harlem is tired of platitudes from white liberals.’ Flamm argues that a “sense of invisibility and inadequacy” only aggravated frustration, “because while Harlem simmered and suffered in the shadows, the national media spotlight shone brightly on the civil rights struggle in the South” (2017:50). The intense feelings of antipathy among younger African Americans toward whites (and older black leaders) was on full display the Sunday during the riot at the Levy and Delany Funeral Home at 132<sup>nd</sup> Street, where more than 1,000 mourners listened to a eulogy for James Powell. Bayard Rustin mounted a sound truck parked in front of the funeral parlor. “A cascade of boos descended upon Rustin,” writes Flamm. “The man who had orchestrated a peaceful demonstration of a quarter million at the Lincoln Memorial less than a year earlier [the March on Washington in 1963] could not convince a few hundred Harlem residents to follow his direction now.” Cries of ‘We want Malcolm X’ rang out from the crowd. The scene was “a symbolic showdown between two

versions of the freedom struggle, two visions of social protest,” and it was clear that the times were changing; different generations within the civil rights movement clashed as they confronted the “entrenched challenge of northern racism and segregation” (Flamm 2017:102).

Crime in New York was on the rise in the years before the riot. The New York Police Department reported that “every category of violent crime experienced a double-digit surge between June 1963 and June 1964. Rapes and robberies soared by 28 and 26 percent, respectively. Assaults rose by 18 percent and murders—usually a statistic beyond dispute because of the presence of a body—increased by 17 percent. Not since 1953 had the crime rate swelled so dramatically across the board” (Flamm 2017:56). To some, like Powell, rising arrest rates were only proof of police racism; regardless, complaints of police corruption were widespread in Harlem. “Life is not expensive here,” observe Shapiro and Sullivan. “The homicide rate is six times as high as the average for New York City. Policeman at the precinct level will tell you that the murder of a Negro by a Negro costs the offender about eighteen months at most” (1964:29).

The aggressive and insulting nature of police interaction in Harlem was “a major cause of racial tension in Central Harlem,” writes Flamm. “But it is difficult to determine how widespread or prevalent it was” (2017:61). *The New York Times* conducted a survey of African Americans on police brutality in the spring of 1964: “More agreed that there was no police brutality (20 percent) than ‘a lot’ (12 percent). More than half of those surveyed believed that it was not common or routine; 85 percent had never witnessed a single act of police brutality, compared to only 9 percent who said they had. For most African Americans the main problems were jobs and housing, followed by crime and education (Flamm 2017:61). What is certain is that police were widely despised in Harlem: “Inspector Kruszewski gives a stock reason when he says the hatred is caused by the fact that police are the only visible sign of the white power structure and these victims of deprivation and discrimination tend to take out their frustrations on police.” This “latent hostility” is perhaps “traceable to the times that ignorant or unthinking cops gave them the ‘move on’ or ‘what are you doing in this neighborhood, buddy’ treatment.” The white “policeman’s estimation of the Harlem Negro in general is not high,” and so conflict in relations proved frequent (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:41-2).

It wasn’t until 1970 that the full extent of corruption became public “when the Knapp Commission held hearings and heard testimony from dozens of witnesses, many of whom

vividly described decades of bribes and payoffs in Harlem,” explains Flamm. Inspector Paul Delise, a veteran on the force of almost 30 years, testified about a bribe he had been offered while patrolling Harlem as a mounted officer in in the 1950s. Outside a pool hall on 116<sup>th</sup> Street, Delise was about to arrest a drug dealer; the dealer removed a wad of bills from his pocket and offered the payout to Delise, who promptly reported the attempted bribe. A squad car arrived, and according to Delise, the officers suggested he accept the money. ‘You son of a bitch. How can you suggest something like that? Delise snapped. ‘We’re all doing it,’ retorted the officer. ‘We kick these guys in the ass, we take their works from them, we put ‘em on a subway train, and whatever they have in their pockets is what we take’ (Flamm 2017:59). The Knapp Commission found ‘corruption to be widespread,’ likely because ‘the nut’ was so very lucrative: payouts ranged from \$400 in Midtown to \$1,500 in Harlem, “which was known as the ‘Gold Coast’ because it offered so many opportunities for bribes and payoffs.” There were the ‘meat-eaters’ of the force, “those who actively sought” bribes, and there were the ‘grass-eaters,’ “those who passively accepted what came to them.” The commission concluded that young black New Yorkers, raised in the ghetto amidst vice more pronounced than anywhere else in the city, must ‘regard the law as a joke when all their lives they have seen police officers coming and going from gambling establishments and taking payments from gamblers’ (Flamm 2017:60).

### *Compensatory Rebellion in Harlem: Act III*

At 8:00 on Friday morning, July 17, CORE demonstrators began marching in front of Robert Wagner. ‘Killer cops must go!’, they chanted. The rally began with about 75 protestors; they were confronted by 50 policemen carrying nightsticks. By noon, there were about 200 people carrying signs outside the school with messages like ‘Stop Killer Cops!’, ‘We Want Legal Protection,’ and ‘End Police Brutality.’ Several of these pickets were interracial, with whites and Puerto Ricans participating (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:13). Tensions had reached their limit as the thick summer air surged up from the scorching pavement, and when police sealed off the block in front of the West 123<sup>rd</sup> Street police station, between Seventh and Eighth Avenue, “the shouting, keyed-up crowd spread out in angry groups in the surrounding neighborhood.” Policemen fired shots in the air, intending to disperse the crowd, as gunfire “echoed through streets littered with overturned garbage cans and broken glass,” write Paul Montgomery and Francis Clines in *The New York Times* (July 19, 1964).

The first store window to fall was located on 125<sup>th</sup> Street. Several more followed, the shattered glass like a signal for the compensation to begin. Black men and women of all ages raced to get their hands on the goods; clothing was ripped from mannequins in store displays and commodities of all kinds, including furniture and home appliances, were sent sailing into the street. Policemen patrolled the streets, revolvers drawn. By 1:00 a.m. the Transit Authority had extra police officers standing guard at most Harlem subway stations and fire engines were used in an attempt to “block off streets in the riot area,” but the situation was far from under control. Waste baskets were set afire, the flames shimmering against the darkness as people ran up and down the streets, almost as if they were in a carnival. Molotov cocktails rained down from rooftops to the streets below, and on Lenox Avenue, between 125<sup>th</sup> and 126<sup>th</sup> streets, “police fired at people who were throwing bottles and bricks down at them from roofs.”

### *Day 2*

The temperature reached 92 degrees by 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, July 18, but that measurement was taken in Central Park. “Up in Harlem, in the old brownstones and the tenements, the temperature must have been well over 100 degrees,” write Shapiro and Sullivan. “The heat had collected in the masonry of the buildings so that the Negroes there could almost bake in their beds” (1964:43). The rioting was renewed following a CORE rally, when about 250 protestors marched south on Seventh Avenue to 123<sup>rd</sup> Street, where they demonstrated in front of the 28<sup>th</sup> Precinct: “Young men and women pushed their faces up close to those of the patrolmen and chanted, ‘Murder, murder, murder.’ To the tune of the civil rights song, ‘We Shall Not Be Moved,’ the crowd sang, ‘Murphy is a bastard, he must be removed’ (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:47). Chris Sprownal, chairman of Downtown CORE—the East River, Downtown, and South Jamaica chapters of CORE came together for the rally—told the crowd that though he belonged to a nonviolent organization, he personally was not nonviolent: ‘When a cop shoots me, I will shoot him back,’ Sprownal declared at the rally. ‘That’s right, brother,’ the crowd responded. ‘Blood for blood’ (Montgomery and Clines 1964).

The CORE meeting broke at 8:35 p.m. with the Reverend Nelson C. Dukes of the Fountain Springs Baptist Church leading a crowd of about 100 protestors to the 28<sup>th</sup> Precinct station house. After failing to break into the station, the protestors began “taunting the policemen,” about 20 altogether, according to precinct captain. ‘Murphy must be removed,’ they shouted. ‘Killers, murders,’ they cried. ‘Murphy’s rats’ (Montgomery July 20, 1964). Several

patrolmen rushed to the rooftops wearing steel “air-raid-warden-type helmets” as bottles came crashing to the street (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:47). Officers moved to disperse the crowd outside the precinct station. “The rain of bottles and debris increased,” writes Montgomery. “Dozens of policemen poured out of the station, buckling on holsters as they ran. One was struck on the head by a bottle and was sent to the hospital.” Police officers pushed half the crowd down the street toward Eighth Avenue, where a barricade was installed, while the other half was herded toward Seventh. The Eighth Avenue crowd dispersed, but the Seventh Avenue crowd remained. Then a bus rolled up with 48 TPF officers who rushed to restore order. Barricades were erected at both avenues and 123<sup>rd</sup> Street was finally cleared between them. An emergency truck pulled across the street, blocking Seventh Avenue; the massive searchlight revealed a crowd of about 500 forming below. Black men and women began crowding cars as they moved down Seventh, and those with white passengers were selected as targets. One group saw a vehicle with a white couple approach; they began “pounding on it with their fists,” as an older black man smashed the headlight with a beer bottle (Montgomery July 20 1964).

A convertible slowed to a stop at the corner of 124<sup>th</sup> Street and Seventh Avenue. The first club pounded the hood; another smashed the rear window, and the sound of shattered glass enticed others to join the destruction. The car’s headlights were busted out, and a crowd of African Americans swarmed the vehicle, beating it with clenched fists in an expurgation of rage. The passenger, a blonde white woman, was injured during the assault, according to Robert Leuci, an officer with the Tactical Patrol Force who recalled asking her ‘if she was all right’: ‘Her voice was weak and trembling. I remember the way she turned away, wiping her eyes and her face with her forearm. Her hair was a bloody mess and it hung across her face. I had never seen such wide-eyed fear on the face of anyone, nothing like the fear on that woman’s face.’ Harlem was now a warzone, its intersections under siege: ‘Bottles and bricks were exploding everywhere,’ Leuci remembers. ‘Some cops were hit, some went down, some of us shot above the car into the night’ (Flamm 2017:84). Harlem made for a challenging landscape in riot control; it’s four- and five-story brownstones provided launch zones for missiles of all kinds, including bricks, bottles, and Molotov cocktails. “To protect themselves from aerial bombardment, officers fired their pistols at the roof line in hopes of forcing their assailants to retreat,” explains Flamm (2017:85).

Two blocks up Seventh Avenue at 125<sup>th</sup> Street there was another rally in progress. By 10:00 p.m., nearly a thousand people swarmed about the intersection, according to Inspector

Thomas V. Pendergast. Any officer in the street was “thoroughly vilified,” write Shapiro and Sullivan: “Voice after voice after voice hurled the lower-class Negro’s favorite epithet in adjectival form: ‘mother fuckin whiteys’ (1964:49). Voices also raised chants against police brutality: ‘Killer cops must go,’ shouted the crowd. ‘Police brutality must go. Murphy must go.’ But it was only after police managed to clear 123<sup>rd</sup> Street by pushing the protestors toward the avenues that the rioting began anew (Montgomery and Clines 1964). The first shots of the night were fired at 125<sup>th</sup> Street and Lenox Avenue, around 10:30 p.m., when a young African-American male “hurled a bottle of flaming gasoline at a squad car, and a sheet of flame spread on the street,” explained Montgomery. “A patrolman was burned, and his four companions emptied their revolvers into the night air. The shots sounded like strings of firecrackers, except that there were flashes from the pistols” (July 20, 1964).

Garbage, bottles, and other accessible projectiles poured down upon the Tactical Patrol Force at 123<sup>rd</sup> Street and Seventh Avenue. Officers fired their weapons haphazardly as the sound of crunching metal and shards of glass rang out through the sirens. “They crouched and fired volley after volley into the air, aiming just above the roofs,” wrote Paul L. Montgomery in *The New York Times*. “The night became acrid with gun-smoke,” and the crowd jeered while a police officer yelled into a bullhorn: ‘Go home, go home,’ the captain pleaded, his face red with sweat. ‘We are home, baby!’ the crowd hollered in return (July 20, 1964). TPF officers arrived as bricks rained from rooftops. Every member of this force was “under thirty years of age, at least six feet tall, trained in judo and riot control, and full of esprit de corps.” Chief Taylor gave the order “to clear the madhouse intersection,” write Shapiro and Sullivan. “Working in squad-sized flying wedges, a sergeant at the point and all the men waving their clubs and yelling ‘Charge!’ they plowed through the crowd, breaking it into small segments, then driving the segments away from the intersection” (1964:50). TPF was successful in dispersing the crowd, but now the mass broke into “small clusters of twenty or thirty against which tear gas and smoke grenades were less effective. The groups then scattered,” writes Flamm. “Any hope of restoring order evaporated as violence and vandalism spread in every direction, although mostly uptown to 135<sup>th</sup> Street” (2017:84). The group of protestors that was barricaded near the 28<sup>th</sup> Precinct went south on Seventh Avenue, “pulled fire alarms, set fire to rubbish baskets, and chased any whites they met, beating some” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:50). Fire alarms pierced the air and the engine sirens answering the alarm only added to the chaos unraveling in Harlem.



A second mob ventured north from 123<sup>rd</sup> Street, and this one was the most destructive of all. Just after midnight, a fierce volley of shots rang out from the northeast corner of 125<sup>th</sup> Street and Seventh Avenue. Squad cars began racing down 125<sup>th</sup> Street to Lenox Avenue, sirens wailing. Hundreds of Harlem residents poured down 125<sup>th</sup> Street following the sirens, “shouting wildly as rock ‘n’ roll music floated down from a third-story dance hall” (July 20 1964). The crowd’s activity could, in fact, be traced by its path of destruction left in its wake: the rioters traveled up toward 125<sup>th</sup> Street, turned right to Lenox Avenue, then turned north again, “leaving a trail of broken windows and looted stores clear to 135<sup>th</sup> Street” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:50). Most Harlem store owners had the foresight to put gates down to protect the windows, but “the mob hooked chains to the folding gates, then pulled them off the windows with automotive power” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:51). Some residents brought crow bars to pry the gates. The corner of 125<sup>th</sup> Street and Lenox Avenue was a “disaster area,” the streets littered with trash, broken glass, and all kinds of debris. “Screaming crowds occupied each corner, pushing toward a ring of police cars and patrolmen crouched behind them,” writes Montgomery. “The police fired volley after volley into the air and over roofs as the crowd raced wildly back and forth.” As police reinforcements began to arrive, officers charged into the mobs on the street corners; it was evident several had reached their frustration threshold: “Anyone who did not move immediately when charged was set upon and clubbed (July 20, 1964).

On Saturday night, July 18, “special measures” were underway to thwart the spread of violence. Traffic was being blocked on most of the avenues into Harlem. Buses were being rerouted to avoid Harlem, and Transit Authority policemen were being sent to the subway stations to secure them against the mobs” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:51). “Precisely who gave the order to fire weapons and when is not known,” notes Flamm (2017:86), but between 10:30 Saturday night and dawn Sunday, hundreds of police officers converged on Harlem, “firing volley after volley of warning shots into the air” (Apple Jr. July 21 1964). More than 2,000 rounds of ammunition were expended on Saturday night alone, according to R.W. Apple of *The New York Times*. “Never before had gunfire been used on such a large scale to quell a racial riot in New York City” (July 21 1964). Patrolmen were ordered to shoot over the heads of crowds that refused to disperse; they were also permitted to fire over the heads of individual African Americans thought to be hurling bottles and bricks from the tenement buildings. The use of gunfire as a dispersal tactic was “unprecedented” for New York police—in both the 1935 and

1943 riots, police officers were ordered “not to draw their weapons unless either they or civilians were in clear and immediate danger. The 1964 police response was also a departure from standard procedure: the first response had been a demonstration of force and an order to disperse; if this was ineffective, nightsticks were the next technique of riot repression, followed by tear gas. Firearms had been authorized “as a last resort” only, according to Apple; that is, until Police Commissioner Murphy greenlighted the use of gunfire in Harlem in 1964. Hundreds of officers from other boroughs were called to the scene, with the official count for Saturday night reported at five hundred, but it was probably much higher because, “as a matter of policy, the department never released specific figures.” Murphy “ordered every on-duty TPF member from Manhattan and Brooklyn to Harlem,” but he did not request “full-scale mobilization,” fearing violence might spread to other areas of the city (Flamm 2017:87).

Mounted police were not used as a riot-control tactic because they were deemed “too vulnerable to rooftop bombings and Molotov cocktails.” Tear gas was not adopted as a tactic to disperse crowds “because a grenade thrown in the street would not stop rooftop activity and would inevitably send gas into tenements to cause suffering among nonrioters, including children.” As Shapiro and Sullivan note, the “problem” facing the police was that they were fighting “on two levels: street and rooftop. The problem was never really solved. Helicopters were brought in to watch the roofs and report activity there, but otherwise the previous night’s tactics remained in use” (1964:70). Mayor Robert Wagner “charted a compromise between what the radicals and conservatives demanded. Neither appeasing the lawbreakers at any cost nor preserving the peace at any price were politically acceptable options for the moderate mayor,” explains Flamm. “He was also determined not to bring in the National Guard—an ‘absolute last resort’ and ‘the last thing in the world I wanted to do’—because it was not trained to handle the situation, as the results in many other cities would make abundantly clear” (2017:179).

Shortly after 12:30 a.m., a policeman crouching behind a patrol car on Lenox Avenue, north of West 125<sup>th</sup> Street, yelled over to his partner: ‘Are we shooting at them?’ he asked, as a “blur of debris, racing mobs and gunshots” erupted along the avenue. The squad car was “peppered with bricks,” and both officers took aim; they “emptied their revolvers at a nearby roof” (Clines July 20, 1964). Police officers attempted to clear the streets amidst widespread panic. ‘The idea is to make a lot of noise—run right at them yelling; that usually breaks a crowd,’ explained one sergeant who had just dispersed a crowd using the technique. Officers

chased a throng of African Americans south on Lenox Avenue, firing “scores of shots over the heads of the mob.” ‘Charge!’ the officers shouted, as they raced past a trash fire in the street. It was like warfare between the state, whose representatives were practically all white, and its subjugated citizens, who were black: “Most of the Negroes raced into buildings—where the police were reluctant to pursue,” writes Francis X. Clines. “A few of the mob stayed to argue, and one young man pushed back at a policeman, screaming: ‘Leave me alone!’ He wrestled with a patrolman, and two other policemen moved in with nightsticks and hit him on the head. That and dozens of similar incidents were witnessed by persons milling in the streets and by thousands more who watched from tenement windows” (*The New York Times* July 20, 1964).

It was after 2:00 a.m., and officer James Dexter heard a bottle smash to the ground, only a few feet away. Then a brick. Before long, according to the police, a barrage of bricks and bottles crashed to the street from the tenement above, and Dexter, a patrolman for the 26<sup>th</sup> Precinct, was firing his weapon in defense. In the battle, Dexter shot and killed Jay Jenkins, a 41-year-old African American with an arrest record containing crimes that ranged from receiving stolen goods to carrying a concealed weapon. Jenkins “had been pelting a group of policemen with bricks from a roof at 40 West 127<sup>th</sup> Street,” according to police (Apple July 20 1964). By 3:00 a.m., shortly after Jenkins was murdered, the police ran out of ammunition and “sent an urgent request for more. Boxloads of .38-caliber rounds were sent by truck from the police pistol range at Rodmans Neck, the Bronx” writes Francis X. Clines. The bullets were loaded on a “makeshift ordnance truck manned by two armed men with a shotgun and a machine gun” and transported to Harlem (*New York Times* July 20, 1964). Police Commissioner Murphy reported that at least 31 people were injured during the night of violence, including 12 police officers, but the actual figure was undoubtedly much higher. “At the height of the rioting,” wrote R. W. Apple Jr., “the path leading to the emergency entrance of Harlem Hospital, Lenox Avenue at 136<sup>th</sup> Street, was spattered with blood. Many of the patients told stories of harsh treatment at the hands of the police” (*New York Times* July 20, 1964).

### *Day 3*

When dawn broke shortly after 5:00 a.m., the daylight revealed what had transpired the night before. There were broken windows and ransacked stores. Streets were littered with shards of glass, spent cartridges, and trash. “Most startling were the gates which merchants had put across their windows the night before and which now snaked crazily across the sidewalks amid the litter

on Lenox, 125<sup>th</sup>, Seventh, and Eighth,” write Shapiro and Sullivan. One African American was killed. According to Police Commissioner Murphy, 12 policemen had been injured, 30 civilians were arrested, and 22 businesses had been looted. One hundred and ten people “considered their injuries serious enough for hospital attention” (1964:62).

Jesse Gray, the influential Harlem rent strike leader, called a rally for Sunday, July 19, at the Mount Morris Presbyterian Church. ‘We’re about to witness in New York City what we have heard about in Mississippi,’ he declared after emerging on the stage with a bandage over his cheek, a wound he claimed to have suffered at the hands of a policeman the night before. ‘Somebody has said that the only thing that will solve this situation in Mississippi is guerrilla warfare. I’m beginning to wonder what will solve the problem here.’ ‘Guerilla warfare!’ the audience responded with enthusiasm. ‘We have one of the most corrupt, rotten police departments in this country,’ he continued. ‘Murphy is nothing but a crumb-snatcher and a stoolie. Last night, the police looked better than German Storm Troops.’ ‘Nazi’s!’ the crowd shouted in response. ‘Nazi’s—that’s what they are’ (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:74). Gray called for “100 skilled black revolutionaries who are ready to die” in the fight against “the police brutality situation” in Harlem: ‘This city can be changed by 50,000 well organized Negroes,’ he declared (Griffin July 20, 1964). A tall black man watched nearby as two white-helmeted patrolmen scanned the crowd. ‘Murphy’s Gestapo,’ he muttered. On 125<sup>th</sup> Street, an African-American veteran talked about his combat experiences in the Pacific. ‘I fought the Japs in World War II who were my friends. But I didn’t know it then,’ he noted. ‘This time we’re fighting our enemy.’ He then pointed directly at a white man: ‘You’re no good,’ he shouted. ‘You never have been, and you never will be’ (New York Times July 20 1964). The ‘Police Department in Harlem is 99 percent white,’ Grey harangued. It is a force ‘deeply rooted with hatred and racism,’ he declared, with “loud and extended applause” (Griffin July 20, 1964).

James Powell’s funeral was held at 8:00 p.m. at the Levy and Delaney Funeral Home, located on Seventh Avenue. The police were massed behind barricades at the intersection, and by the time the service was to begin, more than 1,000 African Americans were gathered outside, in addition to the 150 in the memorial. “Just before the funeral began, bottles began crashing to the street,” writes R.W. Apple, Jr. of *The New York Times*. “Suddenly there were shrieks from the corner of Seventh Avenue and 132d Street, and patrolmen, waving nightsticks, charged into crowds that were pouring out from behind the barricades” (July 20, 1964). Three buses loaded

with Tactical Patrol Force agents arrived on the scene. Bricks and bottles were launched as projectiles; chunks of mortar ripped from rooftops were heaved down below against the invading force, down at 130<sup>th</sup> Street. A Molotov cocktail fell into the street, “its flames leaping up” before several officers “lowered their guns to shoot to kill, and two young men fell wounded as the police charged. Gunsmoke began to hang heavy over the avenue as police tried to break up the crowds and to drive the brick-throwers back from the roofs.” As they did the night before, NYPD officers diverted traffic from the riot zone, but “small battles waged through playgrounds, housing projects, over to Eighth Avenue and to Lenox and down south of 125<sup>th</sup> Street” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:81). Apple explains that the pattern of violence involved “missiles and gasoline-filled bottles thrown at the police,” followed by shots returned. Three people were wounded by gunfire and three police officers were also wounded; several white newspaper reporters were beaten, including Tuck Stadler of radio station WINS, who was “burned by a lighted cigarette ground into the back of his neck” (July 20 1964).

Protests continued into Monday, July 20. A. Philip Randolph, president of the Negro-American Labor Council and a resident of Harlem for 50 years called for rioters to end their destruction on Monday afternoon, July 20. ‘Violence and bloodshed is not the remedy. It will destroy our community and hurt and set back the Negro cause,’ Randolph declared. ‘It only plays into the hands of our enemies. It could elect Senator Goldwater, who voted against civil rights legislation, President, which would be the greatest disaster to befall Negroes since slavery.’” Randolph reasoned that since the Federal government had passed a civil rights law, African Americans should “declare a moratorium on demonstrations,” test the law peacefully, and agitate for its enforcement (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:87). But the old guard no longer appealed to the younger generation of African Americans who desired direct activism—including the use of violence—in place of the middle-class, NAACP-style approach, which involved legislative battles and patient protest. Outside the United Nations, a group of 200 protestors, both black and white, “displayed posters similar to police ‘wanted’ flyers, featuring a picture of Lieutenant Gilligan, topped by ‘Wanted For Murder’ and, below, ‘Gilligan, The Cop. Lieutenant Thomas Gilligan of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:89). The posters were signed ‘Harlem Defense Council,’ and young protestors began to parade with these signs along 125<sup>th</sup> Street.

On Second Avenue police fired shots into the air to disperse a group of about a thousand people. “Chanting crowds marched and countermarched along the streets,” write Shapiro and

Sullivan. By 10:00 p.m., the riot violence had mostly shifted to “the block of 125<sup>th</sup> Street between Eighth Avenue and St. Nicholas Avenue, which contains New York CORE headquarters, several African Nationalist offices, [and] the Harlem Labor Center” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:90). Fire engines rolled in and blocked 125<sup>th</sup> Street between Amsterdam Avenue and Fifth Avenue; Lenox and Seventh Avenues between 116<sup>th</sup> and 135<sup>th</sup> Streets were also blocked. Except for the police cars that whipped along on their way toward another alert, the street was free from pedestrians. Sam’s West Side Bar, across from the St. Nicholas Houses project, was the center of activity by 1:00 a.m.: heavy gunfire rang out everywhere, “forty rotating red lights lined up neatly north of 126<sup>th</sup> Street,” squad cars screaming as they “roared in every direction” (1964:99). Bricks launched from rooftops “hit the pavement with a force that broke them into flying fragments, a little like artillery shells” (1964:101). Police raided the bar.

More than 81 civilians were injured during the four days of disorder in Harlem; thirty-eight police officers were also injured, and according to the official count, 185 persons were arrested. More than 112 businesses were damaged, vandalized, and looted (Kihss July 23, 1964). “The roving gangs that used crowbars and other tools appeared to have broken into only businesses owned by white persons,” noted Junius Griffin. Merchants estimated that during two nights of rioting they suffered more than \$50,000 property damage, with the most extensive damage inflicted on Lenox Avenue between 131<sup>st</sup> and 125<sup>th</sup> streets (July 21, 1964). Many of Harlem’s merchants never reopened their doors, and six months after the riot ended, “the commercial heart of 125<sup>th</sup> Street had almost seven times as many vacancies as a year earlier” (Flamm 2017:195).

On Monday, July 20, Acting Mayor Paul R. Serevane announced a grand jury would review whether to press charges against the police officer for murdering James Powell—Mayor Wagner was in Palma, Majorca, a Spanish island in the Mediterranean, at the time of the riot—and that the police department would deploy additional African Americans officers into Harlem. Serevane stated that Deputy Mayor Edward F. Cavanagh Jr. would review how the police department handled charges of brutality from citizens. “The moves by the city administration were in part a response to proposals made by two different Harlem groups in City Hall conferences on easing the tensions in the nation’s largest Negro area,” explained Peter Kihss. “An intensive program of recruiting more minority group members for the police force was also announced” (July 21, 1964). Monday drifted into Tuesday that July in New York when a call

went out over police radios: it was a 10-41, “an appeal for reinforcements,” from Bedford-Stuyvesant, in Brooklyn. A CORE rally had unraveled to violence, and now the NYPD “faced a new front in a widening conflict” (Flamm 2017:142).

### *Rebellion Spreads to Brooklyn*

It was panic that drove the White community in Bedford Corners and Stuyvesant Heights to begin moving away during the late 1930s, a process of outmigration that continued to gain steam in 1940s and early 50s, a flight from African Americans that turned the neighborhood “from an almost all white area to a Negro slum” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:118). Bounded by Flushing Avenue in the north and Eastern Parkway to the south, with Broadway to the east and Washington Avenue to the west, Bedford-Stuyvesant “consisted of about one hundred square blocks in north central Brooklyn.” And as African Americans moved into the area, residents of the “formerly white neighborhoods in Brownsville, Crown Heights, and East New York” fled to suburbs on Long Island and New Jersey. “In Brownsville, for example, the Jewish community shrank from almost 175,000 in the early 1940s to fewer than 5,000 by the late 1960s.” Bed-Stuy was “the largest and poorest black community in New York by 1964” (Flamm 2017:155). White racism and fear of falling home values fueled this rapid residential transformation.

Bed-Stuy surpassed Central Harlem in population by 1960—and 86 percent of its residents were African American or Puerto Rican. Whites followed federally subsidized home loans for “veterans who wished to move to the segregated suburbs” (2017:156). Black migration into Brooklyn was “driving out the white community,” and it spread “north in Williamsburg, northeast to Bushwick, southeast to annex Brownsville, south to swallow up nearly half the area once considered fashionable Crown Heights, and west to link up with Clinton Hill and Fort Greene” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:104-5). In Bedford-Stuyvesant, the average family income in 1964 was around \$3,000, well below the New York City average and the federal government’s minimum standard ‘for health and well-being.’ “Brooklyn factories had traditionally employed large numbers of unskilled and undereducated workers in their packing, shipping, and mailing operations,” writes Flamm. “But machines now threatened those jobs, which accounted for 70 percent of black employment in the borough.” The unemployment rate for men was already 17 percent, “more than three times the city average” (Flamm 2017:157).

In 1963 Dr. Sandy Ray, the president of Empire State Baptist Convention (with 400,000 members), led “equal-employment demonstrations at Downstate Medical Center. The

demonstrations, through the spring and summer, resulted in the establishment of JOIN [the office of Job Opportunities in Neighborhoods], and more important, in the first dent in the lily-white front of craft unions” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:122). During the early 1960s, “Brooklyn Negroes had had a taste of leadership in the civil rights fight, and they wanted more,” according to Shapiro and Sullivan. The Reverend Milton Galamison of the Shiloh Baptist Church was “particularly active” in filling the leadership vacuum. Having exposed “the real discrimination by neighborhood patterns of New York public schools,” he “formulated the Citywide Committee for Integrated Schools” and in February 1964 “called for a citywide school boycott” (1964:123).

Bedford-Stuyvesant may have had the oldest buildings and most decrepit buildings in New York City, at least according to a 1948 survey conducted by Con Ed: “More than 90 percent of them predated 1919 and were in horrible condition,” but “most were owned by white landlords who had little concern for their tenants” (Flamm 2017:157). Slum clearance and public housing contributed to “changing the racial composition” of Bed-Stuy: “By 1964, nine public housing projects with almost 50,000 (mostly black) residents were located in the Bed-Stuy ghetto, whose total population had climbed by then to an estimated 400,000. Racial antagonism was “at the heart of police-community relations” in Brooklyn. “Many of us have been stopped by the police and yes, many frisked for no other reason than that a Negro in a certain neighborhood ‘seems suspicious,’ wrote Barbara Benson in the *New York Times*. ‘Let no one be deceived,’ Benson declared: ‘Many Harlem police are sadistic in their administration of the law, insatiable in their beatings, unable to discern men from children, and irrational in their fear of the black man” (Flamm 2017:167).

It was early Tuesday morning, July 21, after 1:00 a.m. The Brooklyn chapter of CORE was holding a rally at the corner of Nostrand and Fulton avenues. CORE’s speaker was still pontificating, but nobody appeared to be listening. “In the crowd the chant of ‘go, go, go, go,’ arose,” write Shapiro and Sullivan. “From elsewhere came the counterpoint, ‘killer cops must go.’ The chants were timed so that the word ‘go’ in each sounded simultaneously as a beat” (1964:129). Estimates suggest 1,000 people were in attendance at the rally, and the crowd grew increasingly aggressive. African-American police officers were taunted: shouts of ‘Uncle Tom’ were directed at them, along with the mocking chant, ‘black cop, black cop.’ When one demonstrator cried, ‘Let’s get the Jews before this is over,’ a “loud cheer arose from the crowd, according to *The Times* (July 22, 1964). CORE members “sensed the pressing danger” but were



unable to convince the people to disperse. Then the first bottles came, arcing over the heads of the crowd and shattering at the feet of police. More than 20 officers fought against the crowd, and another 60 were called in as reinforcements. Bottles continued to rain down, and that was all it took. The police charged; the riot had spread to Brooklyn.

Nostrand Avenue appeared like a war zone. At one point during the evening, police left their patrol car in pursuit of a band of rioters. Someone in the crowd noted their absence, “deliberately smashed the closed window of the car and tossed in a Molotov cocktail,” write Shapiro and Sullivan. “By the time police got back, the car was burning furiously. It was a total loss” (1964:132). After the bars closed at 4:00 a.m., the intensity of disorder only increased: “Up and down Nostrand, all along Fulton into the dawn, burglar alarms provided a high-pitched irritating accompaniment to the sound of breaking glass and running feet, occasionally punctuated by screamed curses and the soft, unpleasant thunk of a wooden nightstick striking flesh” (1964:133). Plate-glass windows in at least 20 stores were shattered along Fulton, between Nostrand and Bedford avenues, and at least 25 persons were arrested, most on charges of burglary and felonious assault, according to a report in *The New York Times* (July 22, 1964). The violence sputtered out by 7:00 a.m., and strangely, by 8:00 ‘you would have thought nothing had happened,’ according to Inspector Walter Clerke, the chief officer Bedford-Stuyvesant. ‘People walked past broken stores without so much as a look. Everybody went about his business’ (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:134).

On Tuesday night the police mobile communications headquarters arrived at Fulton and Nostrand, drawing power from a source in a nearby light pole. “The police had radio, but they had no telephones,” explain Shapiro and Sullivan. “Police headquarters consisted of two pay phones.” (1964:146). And just after sunset, the looting began. Police reported that at least 40 stores had been damaged and looted along Fulton Street, Marcy Avenue, St. John’s Place, Nostrand Avenue, and side streets. One young African American male was arrested for tossing a Molotov cocktail at a group of policemen stationed at Franklin Avenue and Fulton Street, according to *The Times* (July 22, 1964). Ophelia Bryant, a resident of Herkimer Street recalled what she witnessed as she stood on her porch, just south of Fulton at Nostrand and Bedford: “While the cops were down at Nostrand and Fulton, people would go on up Bedford and Herkimer. They started stealing, taking things like chairs and linens,” she explained. “A lot of people came by with TV sets and they came up the street. And then more came by with more TV

sets, and radios, and beautiful chairs, red velvet things and whisky by the quart. They were selling whiskey for \$3 a quart, good Scotch. I think everybody on Herkimer Street was drunk (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:149). Bryant's description illustrates how Black collective violence is performed in the service of *compensation*; in other words, property is damaged, allowing access for riot participants to steal material goods that compensate for a history of exploitation at the hands of whites. Many of the targets were deliberately chosen, the result of collective resentment stemming from this history of economic abuse; others were chosen simply because the individual desired what was behind the glass. Regardless, both the property damage and the looting function as compensation, paid by 'whitey,' as payment for injustice; in fact, punishment had multiple levels, for most of the losses suffered "were not covered by insurance, and so were assumed directly by the merchants." Insurance companies made it "exceptionally difficult, and exceptionally expensive, to get insurance in the ghetto" (1964:153). On Wednesday morning, July 22, merchants were already outside boarding up their store. Others hung signs like 'This is a black store' or 'Negro owned.' The Brooklyn NAACP released a 'Cool It Baby' handbill, indicating how black collective violence functioned as rebellion, an attempt of the powerless to gain recognition:

Cool It Baby  
The Message Has Been Delivered  
We have been screaming for jobs, decent schools, clean houses, etc.  
for years. Some folks just wouldn't listen.  
We've been telling them that all hell was liable to break loose unless  
Negroes saw real progress. Some folks just wouldn't listen.  
Today everybody's listening—with both ears.  
The Message Has Been Delivered

### *Day 2*

'Tonight you'll get a chance to put into practice what you learned about riot control,' declared Captain James Quenton as he briefed the TPF squad. They were being bused into Brooklyn. 'We're being sent in to break the back of the riot. I can tell you we're looking at an estimated four thousand rioters. Use your heads, remember your training, and you'll make it through the night.' The bus was silent as the officers contemplated the mayhem that awaited. Then one of the officers began to thump his ax handle against the floor of the bus, and after several thuds, other officers joined him, creating a rhythm, a battle cry. And then someone started to chant 'kill' on every beat until every officer was chanting in rhythm: 'kill' [thud], 'kill' [thud], 'kill' [thud]. The ritual only grew louder as it gained intensity (Flamm 2017). Three TPF squads were bused to

Fulton and Nostrand, one block from Bedford Avenue, the epicenter of riot activity. Captain Quenton told his officers to ‘keep your heads and keep your guns holstered,’ but the TPF agents promptly ignored these orders; upon exiting the bus, they “immediately began to fire in response to a hail of debris, rocks, and bottles. ‘Every cop was slapping leather and firing off rounds into the surrounding buildings,’ remembered O’Neil. ‘My revolver was empty before I even made it to the cover of a doorway.’ He looked for his partner, started to reload, and saw the captain doing the same thing. So much for orders.” The three TPF squads totaled 40 officers and together they fired more than 300 rounds: “within ninety seconds [they] had calmed the area, at least for the moment” (Flamm 2017:165).

As dusk approached on Wednesday evening, the crowds gathered again on Fulton, but that night, the “cavalry” arrived. Mounted policemen “had taken over the four corners of Nostrand and Fulton,” with officers paired together and staked out along Fulton. “Police had been afraid to use horses in Harlem because of their vulnerability to the Molotov cocktail, but the lower buildings and wider streets in Bedford-Stuyvesant reduced the danger from the rooftops” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:159). There were several three- and four-story apartment buildings located over stores along Fulton Street, but police officers were positioned on the higher rooftops to prevent residents from launching projectiles at the officers on horseback in the street below. Police had control of the heights in this engagement.

There were many arrests on Wednesday night, and several injuries, but it was the rain that ended the violence and looting. “One minute, thousands clustered outside police lines at Nostrand and Fulton; mounties were making periodic excursions up and down the block to drive back marauders; cameramen were following, lighting up the backs of fleeing figures with their flash bulbs—and the next minute, the flash bulbs were lighting up only empty streets,” write Shapiro and Sullivan. “The rain began in drops, just after midnight, and by 12:15 the street was empty enough to allow some of the cops a breather.” ‘I don’t know why it is. Some of these people aren’t afraid of horses, of nightsticks, even of guns,’ said a Brooklyn cop. ‘A couple of drops of rain and they run.’ The mounted police rode out at 1:00 a.m., “all of a half block, to the yard of the Girls’ High building” (1964:172).

By Thursday evening, though the throngs returned to the corner of Nostrand and Fulton, “the mood was changed. It was lighter; the pressure was off,” despite the hotter day (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:173). For the third day in a row, the police mobilized additional forces, including

officers on horseback, and stationed them along street corners (Flamm 2017). The final toll in Brooklyn included 12 police officers injured and 10 civilians, far fewer than in Harlem, where personal injuries sustained were might higher (i.e., 38 police and 85 civilian). Property destruction was far more extensive, however: more than 556 businesses “were vandalized or ransacked, including 40 of 47 on DeKalb Avenue” (Flamm 2017:191). In New York City, for the entire six-day riot event, 1 man was killed: Jay Jenkins, a 41-year-old African American shot by police in Harlem. In six nights of unrest between Harlem and Bed-Stuy, only one New Yorker was ‘officially’ killed, which is rather remarkable considering that more than 6,000 rounds of ammunition were fired. ‘Not in the history of New York City has such a technique of open gunplay been practiced by the police,’ declared Harlem’s elected leaders in a joint statement. ‘It is a miracle that such an act did not produce more homicide and incitement to a real riot and wholesale deaths’ (Flamm 2017:95). Jim O’Neill, a TPF officer who reported from lower Manhattan, believed that the official death statistic was inaccurate: ‘The rash of floaters pulled out of the waters surrounding Manhattan, in the weeks following the riots, was obviously a very large coincidence.’ O’Neill did not give further explanation (Flamm 2017:89).

One month after the riot had ended, “damage suits totaling \$2,500,000 had been filed against the city” (Shapiro and Sullivan 1964:206). Business districts in Harlem and Brooklyn were decimated. Many African Americans began were calling it an uprising—and soon it spread to other cities in the state, with a major three-day riot event in Rochester that began on July 24. The riots “sent shockwaves across the country,” writes Flamm. “The first ‘long, hot summer’ of the decade had arrived—and with it a *new racial dynamic* that would drive a wedge between the civil rights movement and many white liberals who had supported it in the early 1960s. The image of the black rioter now joined the symbol of the black criminal, which had deep roots in American history; together, they served as both the real and imagined basis of white anxiety (Flamm 2017:2; emphasis added).

#### FIRE, BLOOD, AND BROKEN GLASS: BLACK INSURRECTION IN LOS ANGELES, AUGUST 1965

Henry Knowls couldn’t believe what he was seeing on television. “I couldn’t go along with it,” he said. “But I knew their feelings, their frustrations. I’ve had experiences myself with police. I could see where these people might react violently against policemen” (Cohen and Murphy

1966:108). Knowls was born in Texas but had lived in Los Angeles for three years while working for the Neighborhood Youth Corps; he was 25 years old and single, a former soldier and student at Northwestern University, and he still had friends who lived in the riot area. So he got in his car and drove south, arriving at about 9:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 12, 1965. "As I was making a right turn on the street where the action was centered, several Negro youths ran up to my car. They said, 'Turn your inside lights on, Blood, so we can see who it is.' This I did unquestioningly," Knowls recalled later into a tape recorder. "I proceeded very slowly up the street, trying to avoid the various sorts of debris, glass, bricks, sticks, by weaving back and forth across the thoroughfare. Large numbers of men, women and children were gathered on both sides of the street with bricks and other objects in their hands," he said. Then just up the street he noticed a car "had been overturned and set afire. 'We gon' mess over some devils,' they said. 'Don't let no gray boys get through here,' one cried. 'Paddies better stay out of here tonight.' It appeared as though they were "anxiously awaiting any car with white occupants to come driving down the street," Knowls recalled. After driving back down the street, he parked his car to mingle with the crowd. Then suddenly "a car came roaring down the street." 'Whitey! Get him!' the crowd yelled (Cohen and Murphy 1966:109). Watts had become a war zone.

Watts began as a separate agricultural community, "populated by Negroes from the beginning, but remote from the rest of the city." Social isolation was a part of the area's history: "It grew up against the bastions of the independent cities that line it on east and west, and filled up as its people were turned back from expanding into white residential neighborhoods" (Cohen and Murphy 1966:13). More than 284,000 whites migrated to LA between 1925 and 1940; just under 15,000 'nonwhites' arrived during the same period, and of this group, the majority were African American (Horne 1997:28). Black population growth in the north and west was just as extraordinary. In 1910, only 11 percent of the African-American population lived outside of the South, the former confederacy; by 1966, roughly 45 percent lived in the north and west (Bureau of Labor Statistics 1967; Sears and McConahay 1973:36). In 1910, there were an estimated 7,599 African Americans living in Los Angeles. By 1940, this figure had risen to 55,114, and by 1944, to 118,888: Watts had "doubled in size" between 1940 and 1946 (Horne 1997:31), and by 1965, it had a black population of 34,800 (1997:50).

Beginning in 1940, the African-American population in Los Angeles began increasing “at a rate three to four times faster than that of New York City” (Horne 1997:214). Los Angeles experienced a diverse and distinct stream of migration that affected social relations in the years leading up to the explosion of violence. The most prominent streams of black migration flowed from Oklahoma, Texas, and Louisiana. Oklahoma “had its own form of ‘compounded racism,’ as a number of the Native American peoples owned black slaves,” writes historian Gerald Horne. The ‘Okies’ “had their own distinct expressions of racism.” In Texas, slaves “were known for utilizing the tactic of fire against their enemies.” Louisiana witnessed “the nation’s largest slave insurrection,” in 1811, and later, “substantial slave resistance” (1997:25). As we have seen, Louisiana and Oklahoma have dark histories of anti-black violence in the maintenance of white supremacy, and it is these regions that most heavily spurred black migration to Los Angeles. California’s history produced a “peculiar” pattern of race relations, different from those found in either Chicago or New York. “California’s racial composition and its late entrance into the United States of America are unique and dominating factors,” explains Horne. In its beginning, Los Angeles was “‘thoroughly integrated since house lots were distributed to settlers without reference to racial characteristic,’” a residential pattern “largely absent in the East and South.” Until the mid-nineteenth century, California had been governed by Mexican, and as Gerald Horne notes, “Mexico City’s hostility to slavery was more pronounced than Washington’s.” Of course, this did not mean that Los Angeles did not have trouble with racism, for the city had its own past as a “hotbed of the Confederacy during the Civil War.” It meant only that L.A. “had much more of a ‘rainbow racism’ than other U.S. cities”; it was a racism “not solely or predominantly of the typical black-white dichotomy that obtained elsewhere (Horne 1997:25). Horne’s point on California’s development as a state is crucial. California was a laboratory in race relations, its ‘rainbow racism’ contributing to the development of different cultural organizations and opportunities for political participation than those found in the eastern and southern portions of the United States. By the 1960s, “many blacks came to feel that this great laboratory had produced a Frankenstein monster of bias that deserved to be discarded. LA had been subjected to enormous strain as a result of massive migration; this combined with unique racial tensions and related subjective factors produced an explosion” (Horne 1997:30)

Poverty was extreme in the Watts section of Los Angeles: “two-thirds of adult residents had less than a high school education and one in eight was illiterate,” notes Horne. “Income

levels were lower than any other section of the county except for the skid row district of downtown LA” (1997:3). African Americans were “undergoing a proletarianization process in their move from the fields of Texas and Louisiana to the factories of Los Angeles” (Horne 1997:11). Major oil fields located “no more than twenty miles from the center of city” fueled industrial expansion: “LA became the center of the oil equipment and service industry; the second largest tire-manufacturing center; the headquarters of the western furniture, glass, and steel industries; and the regional center for the aircraft, automotive, chemical, and trucking industries.” Rather than an industrial core surrounded by residential suburbs, Los Angeles “developed an administrative-residential center surrounded by an industrial suburban network.” Most working-class residents lived in the suburbs, not the city; the “scattering of the working class in fragmented suburbs forestalled the development of their political strength and, perhaps, their class consciousness” (Horne 1997:28-9). Proletarianization was “a major part of the making of Black LA,” explains Horne (1997:248). Most defense jobs were the result of government contracts, thus these jobs were subjected to anti-discrimination measures, whereas in other parts of the private sector, this was not the case. were more likely to be in place than in other parts of the private sector” (1997:248). World War II sparked demand for black labor in war industries, a development which led directly to an expansion of the black middle class; this upward mobility continued to accelerate following *Brown v. Board* in 1954. Racial tensions rose as the African-American population grew, perhaps because “newcomers would work for less,” a factor that may “help to explain why older black residents were resentful of the newcomers” (1997:34).

Jobs in manufacturing declined, partially due to automation and technological developments. The unemployment rate for African Americans in Los Angeles was 12.5 percent in 1960, “and most likely was higher,” according to Horne. Nearly half (44.5 percent) of those black families living in Watts “were at the poverty level, earning under \$4,000 annually” (1997:248). Several employment agencies “orally excluded blacks from consideration for employment, apparently feeling that such discriminatory practices were necessary to stay in business” (Horne 1997:249). African Americans were also spatially isolated, making it more challenging to secure work in LA’s industrial plants, increasingly located beyond the city: “The Douglas Aircraft plant in Santa Monica could not be reached easily from 103d Street without a car, and even then it was a long ride; it could take almost four hours to get there by bus. Reaching the General Motors plant in Van Nuys could take longer. As industry developed in LA

County—soon to be the most industrialized region in the nation—many blacks were left without work, away from high-wage union jobs.” Housing restrictions “kept blacks distant from newly emerging employment opportunities,” and in those areas where African Americans were confined, deindustrialization was eliminating jobs (Horne 1997:249).

Black folks who came to Hollywood found themselves effectively barred from “one of the most vital industries in Los Angeles,” work in film, and worse, “that same industry often libeled blacks on those few occasions when it represented them.” In 1963 the *New York Times* reported that ‘many’ of the studios ‘have no Negroes’ (Horne 1997:10). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission “asked the Justice Department to bring suit against both the studios and the unions on the basis of their failure to hire or include blacks,” notes Horne. “Though they had distanced themselves from the left in Hollywood, blacks had not been rewarded with jobs; worse, an ideological and organizational vacuum created by the erosion of left influence was being filled by an often narrow black nationalism” (Horne 1997:10). In *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s*, Gerald Horne argues that the “creation and subsequent filling of this vacuum *defines the meaning* of the Watts Revolt and, indeed, the meaning of the 1960s” (1997:10; emphasis added).

African Americans confronted systematic economic discrimination in housing and the rental market, but confinement to the ghetto in South L.A. was not the only consequence. Racial bias pervaded lending institutions, realtors, and landlords. Black Americans were essentially barred from homeownership in suburbia, a primary mechanism by which white families enjoyed upward economic mobility in post-World War II years. NAACP branch member Christopher Taylor testified before the McCone Commission, noting that in Los Angeles, most black families pay \$75 per month for old and in some cases dilapidated housing; but a white man ‘could go out to West Covina somewhere and buy a house with wall to wall carpet and all of the built-ins, drapes, and [his] note will be \$80 a month and no impounds,’ he said. John Buggs confirmed this housing discrimination: ‘not only are minority groups persons living in sub-standard housing but that, generally speaking, they pay more for sub-standard housing than does the white population for standard housing’ (Horne 1997:220). It was difficult for African Americans to obtain loans from banks, and many lending institutions “simply made the decision that the area was not worthy of receiving loans, a process denoted subsequently as ‘redlining,’” explains Horne. “When savings and loan institutions did deign to lend money in Watts and South LA generally,



often they did so at exorbitant interest rates larded with special charges” (1997:223). Racism interacted with all facets of social life. Black folks experienced economic discrimination at multiple levels, from exclusionary mortgage lending practices, exclusionary realtor practices, and exclusionary educational practices, and the cumulative burden of continued experience created a vortex of “heightened tensions” (Horne 1997:213).

As factory production accelerated during World War II, African Americans increasingly migrated out of the rural south to LA, a demographic transformation that was accompanied by an “increase union organizing efforts. Ties between blacks and Reds were strengthened and would remain strong for some time after the war” (Horne 1997:6). Los Angeles had “one of the highest concentrations of Communists in the nation,” and at its peak during the 1940s, the Communist Party claimed 4,000 members, according to Max Silver, a former party leader who testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1952 (Horne 1997:5). But class consciousness was suppressed, in Los Angeles and across the nation, during the Red Scare of the 1950s. Where “class consciousness had been suppressed, color consciousness was enhanced,” explains Horne, thus LA provided “fertile soil for the growth of black nationalism” (1997:12).

The Civil Rights Congress was formed in 1946, an organization that provided a mechanism so that people could “join together across racial lines to combat bigotry in a militant fashion” (Horne 1997:7-8). The Los Angeles chapter of the Civil Rights Congress “included a broad sprinkling of left-influenced unions with substantial black membership” (1997:7). The CRC drastically increased the visibility of African-American culture in Los Angeles; with 20 branches citywide, it had “hundreds of dues-paying members and thousands of supporters. The CRC frequently held political events, “sponsored films on racial prejudice, regularly observed Negro History Week, and organized classes on the history of civil rights struggles,” notes Horne (1997:8). The interracial nature of the CRC shows activist culture in LA was moving toward greater equilibrium in black-white cultural relations after World War II, but by 1960, interracial social relations were increasingly strained. This was in no small part due to the activities of undercover F.B.I. agents, who by 1955 had infiltrated the Civil Rights Congress, supposedly because the organization was a ‘Communist front.’ COINTELPRO, the Counter-Intelligence Program of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, “was designed to obliterate organizations like the CRC,” and by 1965, the Civil Rights Congress “had disappeared and with it the kind of multiracial activism for which it was noted” (Horne 1997:9). State repression of leftist activism

“created an ideological vacuum” in Los Angeles that would later be filled by black nationalism, particularly the Nation of Islam (NOI), ‘cultural nationalists,’ and the Black Panther party. The Nation of Islam and black cultural nationalists “assumed primacy” in L.A. during the 1960s (Horne 1997:5), and by 1965, the NOI had perhaps more influence than “the Civil Rights Congress at its zenith” (1997:12). Cultural nationalism filled this ideological vacuum.

Cultural nationalists were “often artists and intellectuals influenced by the transatlantic currents of Negritude, as well as anti-imperialists who identified with armed struggle in Africa, Asia, and Latin America but did not want to fight for their government in Vietnam or Santo Domingo—or Watts,” writes Horne. “The Black Panther party, which bloomed in the ashes of Watts, had ties to the diminished left. Its internationalism was an enhanced reflection of what its members had experienced in California that diverged sharply from the national pattern of simple biracial polarity” (Horne 1997:13). The Nation of Islam’s rapid growth in Los Angeles was heavily influenced by divisions of class, as middle-class black folks supported older organizations, such as the church and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This strand of black culture was increasingly viewed as ineffective and antiquated among younger African Americans, the working class, and the poor. Horne argues that the “sacrifices of black youth, from Emmett Till to the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, earned them a distinct place at the table, along with the NOI, cultural nationalists, gangs, the BPP, and the NAACP; to many of the youth, all appeared attractive except the last” (1997:15). Black cultural consciousness was heavily influenced—and sharply divided—by the interaction of regional background and class consciousness. Migrants from the south “were associated with the dislocation their arrival was said to bring,” and as more African Americans arrived, there were “more opportunities for antiblack racism. Unlike many in the middle class, they did not wear suits and ties daily because their employment did not require it or did not allow it. Unlike those bourgeois leaders at the apex of the NAACP leadership, they did not have deep roots in Southern California,” notes Horne. By the time of the Watts rebellion, the NAACP was scorned, “deemed out of touch with the black masses” (Horne 1997:14).

White racism increased throughout the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Los Angeles, just as it did nationally. The Ku Klux Klan “was resurrected in Southern California” during the 1920s; it was during this same period that suburbanization accelerated in Los Angeles, “and race was no negligible factor in the process,” argues Gerald Horne. “More affluent Euro-Americans”

were fleeing southern Los Angeles (1997:26). Racially restrictive covenants in property deeds sought to ensure that African Americans were confined to a specific section of the city. Watts was “hemmed in on the east by a string of nearly lily-white cities and towns—notably South Gate, Lynwood, and Bell—and on the south by Compton,” explains Horne. Compton had one African-American resident in 1930, and until the 1950s, Lynwood “described itself as ‘the friendly Caucasian city.’” The area directly north of Watts was “covered by a network of racially restrictive covenants that extended from Slauson Avenue to 92d Street.” Between 1937 and 1948, more than 100 lawsuits enforcing these covenants were brought before the L.A. Superior Court. Blacks were essentially “denied self-determination after the city of LA succeeded in annexing Watts in 1926,” argues Horne (1997:27). The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) refused loans to African-American applicants of mortgages in ‘white’ neighborhoods. The FHA’s “underwriting manual contained requirements that discriminated against blacks and made the adoption of racially restrictive covenants a condition for FHA insurance of new construction.” African Americans were essentially barred from residence “close to the aircraft and shipbuilding plants, and very few of the mass transit red cars were useful for transporting them to these sites” (Horne 1997:31). Housing segregation furthered economic inequality by circumscribing employment opportunity, as most African Americans could not access the growth in manufacturing in the suburbs, beyond South LA. Residential segregation pushed black folks “inexorably toward ghettoization, but this process was serving to create a steaming anger that had no outlet.” It fed the growth of black nationalism *and* white chauvinism, yet this had not always been the mood in Los Angeles.

Social relations were already volatile when, in the fall of 1964, Los Angeles residents considered Proposition 14, a measure on the ballot “widely viewed among African-Americans as a crude attempt to maintain housing segregation and keep blacks penned in South LA” because it would overturn existing fair-housing legislation, which was “moderate” policy itself, according to Horne. Black residents feared a “return to the bad old days of de facto racially restrictive covenants in deeds; this could mean black renters and homeowners being forced to compete for scarce stock in an inflationary market.” African Americans also feared that Proposition 14 might “reinforce school segregation, ensuring the continuation of inferior education for blacks” (Horne 1997:46). Proposition 14 engendered “statewide debate on racism and discrimination,” and sensitive issues surfaced: “Would you want your daughter to marry one? Would you want one to

live next door?” And when the debate finally concluded in November 1964, “the result was a signal of who had won and lost. Proposition 14 repealed the Rumford Fair Housing Act, a measure designed to alter entrenched patterns of bias in the housing market,” explains Horne. The bill passed with a 2-to-1 margin, and though it was ultimately struck down in court, “the message to Black LA had been sent clearly by then: their presence was not desired in many neighborhoods” (1997:224). This cultural development had devastating consequences for social relations, “deepen[ing] the anger and alienation among blacks” while also feeding the growth of nationalism. Proposition 14 illuminated the true state of social relations between blacks and whites in Los Angeles before the riot: racial tension became more pronounced, and whites increasingly fled for the suburbs, to separate schools and a social life apart. In the weeks before the rebellion, there were “random assaults on cars” driven by whites, and “a new approach toward Euro-Americans and the police was developing in Black LA. Historically, “black hatred of whites was muted and subtle in the United States, especially compared to other parts of the Western Hemisphere,” argues Horne (1997:101). But this restraint withered in the face of continued white hostility: “just as ‘white identity’ was consummated at the altar of antiblackness, ‘black identity’ was sanctified as antiwhiteness,” argues Horne; white antipathy “was so vigorous and unrestrained precisely because these angry sentiments had been curbed for hundreds of years” (Horne 1997:102).

The Los Angeles Police Department had “an organized presence” of ultra-right officers within the department. According to Michael Hannon, an officer at the Newton police station, the lunchroom ‘resembled nothing so much as a Birch Society ‘Americanism Center.’ Rightist propaganda such as Life Lines, Human Events, Dan Smoot Report, and American Opinion abounded.’ In addition, the “department allowed Fred Schwarz and his rabidly racist Christian Anti-Communist Crusade to hold meetings at stations and encouraged officers to attend” (Horne 1997:138). Chief of Police William Parker certainly “distinguished himself for his propensity to make one insulting statement after another about African-Americans and Chicanos. ‘You cannot ignore the genes in the behavior pattern of people,’ Parker noted when asked why minorities were incarcerated at higher rates; during the uprising, Parker would compare African Americans to ‘monkeys in a zoo’ (Horne 1997:137). This culture permeated the entire LAPD and created a toxic environment for black residents who regularly reported harassment, abuse, and disrespect from white law enforcement. The California Highway Patrol, the organ of law enforcement

responsible for the Frye arrest that ignited the rebellion, was “freely ‘labeled as a white organization,” according to Bradford Crittenden, an officer on the CHP. California Highway Patrol had more than 3,000 officers, of which 3 were African American, and perhaps not surprisingly, the force had a “predilection for arbitrarily stopping blacks who happened to be driving in expensive cars.” These injustices, among others, contributed to the “lack of confidence in the fairness of law enforcement” (Horne 1997:156).

Black residents of Los Angeles felt a collective resentment for white society, for white folks controlled local government. It was the white folks who ran the school board, the police, the banks that signed off on mortgages and other loans; it was the white folks who owned the stores which sold inferior goods at highway robbery prices because they could get away with exploitation, who ran social service agencies and made decisions with monumental consequences for the mostly brown and black folks applying for aid. Survey data drawn from the Curfew Zone demonstrated that in the African-American community there existed “serious grievances about police brutality, merchant exploitation, agency discrimination, poor service agency performance, local white police officials, and biases in the white-managed communications media” (Sears and McConahay 1973:68). Long festering grievances bred a hostile attitude toward white society, then, a simmering rage waiting just beneath the surface for an incendiary incident. And so in August 1965, black Americans began ‘hunting’ in the streets: white folks were now the prey, a reversal of roles in the history of racial collective violence in the United States.

### *Compensatory Rebellion in Watts*

The corner of Imperial and Avalon in the Watts section of Los Angeles had taco stands lining the sidewalk, a gas station, and several small shops. It was a hot, smoggy evening—the temperature exceeded 90 degrees on Wednesday, August 11, 1965—but by the time California Highway Patrol detained Marquette Frye shortly before 8:00 p.m., it had cooled to a mild 75. Frye was 21 years old, having just celebrating his birthday in July; at 5’7” and weighing 130 pounds, he was unemployed, a high school dropout who also had a criminal record. Marquette and his younger brother Ronald, 20, were pulled over on “suspicion of drunken driving,” and a crowd began to gather after Marquette failed a sobriety test. Rena Frye, Marquette’s mother, arrived at the scene and “began berating her son, who in turn berated the police” (Bart August 13, 1965). Officer Lee Minikus ‘twisted her arm behind her back and seemed to lift her off the ground,’ according to Marquette’s account; he ‘put handcuffs on her, causing her to cry and scream, due to the pain.’

Then another officer hit Frye ‘extremely hard on the front of my head’: it was then ‘I realized an officer [was] standing next to me with a shotgun pressed against my temple,’ he claimed. The crowd ‘got boisterous’ as a door of the patrol car was slammed against Marquette’s leg; he was then “kicked by an officer after he was tossed roughly in the car” (Horne 1997:54-5).

After the Frye’s were transported to jail, a police officer responding to the code 1199, ‘Officer Needs Help’—sent out by the arresting officers, Lee Minikus and Bob Lewis—felt someone spit upon him. A crowd of police officers “rushed into the crowd to being the culprits to justice,” writes Sears and McConahay. “They dragged a young woman in a barber’s smock, which resembled a maternity dress, from the crowd and threw her into a police car. Upon seeing this, the crowd became an outraged mob” (1973:5). Ralph Reese, an African American resident of 118<sup>th</sup> Street, told an interviewer the situation “became a real battle with the community defending themselves against an armed attack.” Black residents “had to defend themselves,” he said, because they “considered the police representative of the white class holding them down” (Horne 1997:56). A person in the crowd tossed an empty beer bottle at the police vehicles as they left the scene; a stream of rocks, bricks, and glass bottles cascaded upon the street. The Los Angeles rebellion had begun: “By 10:00 p.m. crowds were stoning passing city buses,” writes Peter Bart in *The New York Times*. More than 80 police officers “rushed to the scene and sealed off a 16-block area,” trying to control and contain the spread of violence. ‘The cops, they keep coming in here and busting heads,’ complained a “neatly dressed young man selling a Black Muslim newspaper. ‘They had it coming’” (August 13, 1965).

The shattering sound of whiskey and wine bottles created a cacophony that echoed through the streets. “Bands of rioters invaded neighboring sections, looting The Los Angeles Police Department “dispatched 80 helmeted men into the area,” and on “the theory that their absence might calm things down,” the LAPD “tried pulling back and closing off the area” (Horne 1997:56). Benjamin Perry, a retired government employee who lived on 107<sup>th</sup> Street, was at the scene when Frye was arrested. That night, as he lay in his bed, he heard sirens ‘coming down every side street and down Avalon Boulevard.’ Eventually he slid out of bed, telling his wife, ‘The King of Siam just arrived. I think I will go out and see him.’ Perry counted 25 police officers, “heard name-calling, and saw spitting.” Hostilities increased. Cars driving down Avalon were stoned. “Perry began to act as traffic cop, directing motorists down side streets so they would not be assaulted,” writes Horne. Around 9:30 p.m. ‘followers of Malcolm X arrived,’

recalled Perry (Horne 1997:58). The kids “were using the words ‘burn, baby, burn,’ and after that night, everyone in the neighborhood was using the “swing slogan,” according to a 20-year-old African-American resident interviewed by *Los Angeles Times* reporters Jerry Cohen and William Murphy. Though he wished to remain anonymous—known only as ‘Joe,’ referenced in the epigraph of this chapter—one witness of the Marquette Frye arrest agreed to speak with Cohen and Murphy. “I heard the cop yell: ‘Nigger,’” Joe recalled. “Then the people went after him. I ran with them. But the others caught him first. They beat him. Bad. I chased that cop. But the others got him first. They beat him bad. Bad.” Joe looked down at his hands while he spoke, “as if pondering what they might have done had he reached the white policemen first.” He saw cops “hitting everyone” that Wednesday night. “Girls and little kids. The cops drove up to the clusters of people and got out and started swinging their billyclubs. The little kids were there and they got hit just like everyone else” (1966:72).

Just before midnight police made a tactical decision that proved costly. They withdrew. “Instead of departing en masse, as had been the case earlier, officers left almost unnoticed in twos and threes until,” writes *Los Angeles Times* reporter Philip Fradkin; ‘only about a dozen were left’ (Cohen and Murphy 1966:75). As the police withdrew from 116<sup>th</sup> Street and Avalon Boulevard, the violence intensified: “Then the whole scene seemed to disintegrate—with people running in all directions. It was a visual thing, almost impossible to describe,” recalled Fradkin. “That was when the real riot began. Until then, the people had directed their venom specifically at the police.” Just before midnight, “the pattern of the next few days of senseless, brutal, non-discriminatory attacks emerged,” and black folks began attacking “not just the white policeman, but anyone who was white.” Rocks were flying everywhere, ‘like a hailstorm,’ according to Jack Gaunt, also of the *Times* (Cohen and Murphy 1966:76). Though there was not a central location of concentrated violence during the first night, pockets of fighting between blacks and whites broke out in several locations. A Molotov cocktail collided with a car driven by a white man then surrounded by a group of African Americans. ‘This is no place for white men,’ a young black man asserted as the motorist was “dragged out and beaten.” At a separate location, rioters surrounded and stopped a police cruiser and were so brazen that several men attempted to pull the officers from the vehicle; police reinforcements arrived in time to prevent further escalation. Black folks launched bottles and debris at police cars and any white drivers who “who ventured

or stumbled into the area but there was no looting, no burning, and no shooting” that first night, August 11 (Sears and McConahay 1973:5).

### *Day 2*

By noon on Thursday it was already 87 degrees, “an intensely bright sunshine penetrated the smog” (Horne 1997:61). The temperature would rise to 92 degrees that August 12—the coolest high temperature of the previous five days—and crowds were already gathering. Governor Pat Brown was in Greece. Lieutenant Governor Glenn Anderson was informed of the trouble in Watts early in the afternoon; he was in Santa Barbara, 90 miles north of LA. County Sheriff Peter Pitchess “was also out of town.” This did not make for effective communication and coordination among the hierarchy of local, state, and national officials that would respond to the violence. The rioting began Thursday night much as it had the night before, “with stoning and overturning of cars and the beating and terrorizing of motorists” (Cohen and Murphy 1966:94). Cars were set on fire. “Cries of ‘get Whitey’ pierced the early night air” (1966:95). The systematic targeting of white drivers signifies the intensity of collective resentment in Black LA: all white persons were suspect, guilty, and in many cases, attacked without provocation.

Robert Richardson, an African-American advertising salesman for the *Los Angeles Times*, witnessed the rioting in southeast Los Angeles for eight hours that Thursday night. “It’s a wonder anyone with white skin got out of there alive,” he wrote. “I saw people with guns. The cry went up several times—‘Let’s go to Lynwood,’ an all-white neighborhood. Every time a car with whites in it entered the area the word spread like lightning down the street: ‘Here comes whitey—get him!’” Older black folks would “stand in the background egging on the teen-agers and the people in their 20s,” then the young black folks would rush in, pull white people from their cars, beat them, and set the vehicle ablaze (August 13, 1965; see also Horne 1997:103). A white couple in their 60s were travelling in their car down Imperial Highway. The blockades had not yet been put erected. “They were beaten up and kicked until their faces, hands and clothing were bloody. I thought they were going to be killed,” recalled Richardson. “Those not hitting and kicking the couple were standing there shouting, ‘Kill! Kill!’” On Avalon Boulevard, two white men driving a convertible ducked as rocks crashed against their car; when they ducked, they hit the car in front of them. “They were beaten so badly one man’s eye was hanging out of the socket” (Richardson August 13, 1965). African-American motorists ‘kept the inside lights of their cars on—so the people could see who they were and leave them alone,’ explained Leonard



W. Moore, a 28-year-old officer for the California Highway Patrolmen. ‘Some whites came into the area out of curiosity. They were stoned’ (Cohen and Murphy 1966:101). Henry Knawls, whose experience was chronicled in the opening of this section, described witnessing “a Caucasian man being pulled from his car. One group began pummeling the man, and others proceeded to overturn his car and put a torch to it. The man was allowed to run away after he had been thoroughly beaten; he could run only with a stumbling gait, and both hands were covering his bloody face” (Cohen and Murphy 1966:110).

Around midnight the groups of black youths began looting stores owned by whites—and the carnival atmosphere enticed participants of all ages. “Everybody got in the looting,” explains Richardson, “children, grownups, old men and women, breaking windows and going into stores. Then everybody started drinking—even little kids 8 and 9 years old. That’s when the cry started: ‘Let’s go where whitey lives!’” (*Los Angeles Times* August 13, 1965). Stores were attacked methodically: “Often a number of persons would ride by a store in a car, get out, break windows, return to the car, and drive to another area. In their wake other cars would come by and begin to seize and load the merchandise.” The burning started once the looting was completed; in fact, black youth created a “communication system” wherein telephone booths were used to alert other rioters that a store was ready for looting or, ultimately, burning. Henry Knawls describes witnessing the systematic procedure rioters followed to target whites for compensation:

A brick came out of nowhere and smashed through the window of a hot dog stand across the street. Someone yelled: ‘That’s Whitey’s, tear it down.’ A number of people from both sides of the street converged on the stand and began breaking all the windows. Several men climbed into this stand and began passing out Cokes and other beverages to the people outside. After they had completely depleted the stock of wieners, Cokes and everything else of value that could be carried out, they evacuated the stand and began walking down the street toward a couple of stores. They did not set fire to this stand. As they passed a small gas station, several people wanted to set it afire. One of the people standing nearby the station told them: ‘Let it stand. Blood owns it.’ (Cohen and Murphy 1966:111)

And as each car or business establishment “shuddered from the force of an exploding Molotov cocktail,” as each new store was “engulfed by flame, onlookers chortled raucously: ‘Burn, baby, burn’” (1966:95). The hip phrase, brought to southern Californians from Radio Station KGFJ’s Magnificent Montague, elicited enthusiasm from young African Americans. And each time he used the phrase on his morning show, which reached an estimated 100,000 listeners daily, young blacks in the neighborhood responded enthusiastically’: ‘Ya-ah—burn, baby, burn’ (Cohen and Murphy 1966:83).

*Day 3*

The “authorities had lost control of South LA,” writes Gerald Horne. “It was an especially bloody and unlucky Friday the Thirteenth, as a veritable record was set in the killing of African-Americans.” What was transpiring in Los Angeles was guerrilla warfare: ‘This situation is very much like fighting the Viet Cong,’ declared Police Chief William Parker. ‘We haven’t the slightest idea when this can be brought under control’ (Horne 1997:64). John Buggs, an attorney at the Human Relations Commission, noted that “every three minutes a foray of automobiles rushed into the center [of an intersection] with sirens screaming and with red lights flashing.” Police officers would jump from their cars; in groups of ten and twenty, they rushed at the youths throwing rocks from behind street corners. Buggs described the tactics used in the streets during “the height” of the rebellion: “The kids had a plan of action. They had rocks cached in the alley to the south on Imperial Boulevard and when rushed by the police they ran into the alleys, from the depths of which they pelted the pursuing officers who promptly ran out faster [than] they had run in. The only two arrests made in these forays were two Negro girls between the ages of nine and twelve” (Horne 1997:65). There were other patterns to the civil unrest as well. Black youths targeted “the credit records” of the larger department and clothing stores; these ‘were destroyed before the place was burned,’ according to Buggs (Horne 1997:65).

By mid-morning, 3,000 people “had massed at 103<sup>rd</sup> and Compton in the Watts commercial district.” Groups of rioters “were rampaging through other Negro-area business districts” as well. Cohen and Murphy report that the rioting “had broken out far to the north of the original flare-ups, within five miles of the Civic Center, the heart of Los Angeles”: “Blocks of businesses owned by ‘Whitey’ were afire—drug-stores, markets, liquor stores, laundries and pawnshops. Before the mobs burned the latter, these shops provided the rioters with their arsenal. More than 3,000 weapons were stolen from pawnshops and sporting goods stores during the rioting, less than a third of which were later recovered. Sniper fire soon became widespread, but still no deaths were reported (1966:123). It was clear that the LAPD, the CHP, and the LA County Sheriff’s Office were having difficulty controlling the situation. At 12:45 p.m. on August 13, Lieutenant Governor Anderson arrived at McClellan Air Force base and met with National Guard leaders. By 5:00 p.m. on Friday, August 13, Lieutenant Governor Anderson signed the papers enlisting the help of the National Guard, but it took another two hours for the first thousand Guardsmen to leave for the staging areas outside the city; they were not deployed into the riot zone until 10:45 p.m. The first troops were assigned ‘sweep and clear’ operations: police

with bullhorns led the procession, warning rioters to disperse, while soldiers advanced with their bayonets 'at the ready' as they fanned the streets. Command posts were established at public schools (Cohen and Murphy 1966:165). These soldiers had no prior training that may have prepared them to handle a civil disorder of this magnitude, yet they were now on the front lines in one of the most destructive episodes of urban unrest in American history.

Lieutenant Governor Anderson also announced the creation of a 'Curfew Zone,' with borders stretching from Alameda Street on the east, Crenshaw Avenue on the west, Adams Boulevard on the north, and Rosecrans Avenue on the south: "a dusk to dawn curfew was imposed, and people were not allowed to go in or out of its exists." The Curfew Zone included most African Americans living in Los Angeles, thus it "created a genuine ghetto" (Sears and McConahay 1973:7). The Curfew Zone covered 46.5 square miles, "an area one and one half times as large as Manhattan and larger than the City of San Francisco," and during the rebellion, the area "contained a population that would have placed it among the 25 largest U.S. cities" (1973:9). According to an estimate compiled by Sears and McConahay, between 31,000 and 35,000 adults in the Curfew Zone "were active as rioters at some time during the week-long upheaval" (1973:13). But on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00 p.m., a police officer's stray bullet ricocheted off a building. In its path was 20-year-old Leon Posey, Jr., who was killed. His was the first black life lost to state-sanctioned violence during the Los Angeles rebellion.

The Clock Liquor Store was located at the southeast corner of Imperial Highway and Wilmington Avenue, and it was on fire. It was 9:00 p.m. Flames whipped against the sky, and the inside of the store appeared pink when Robert E. Ludlow arrived with Deputy Bill Lauer. The shooting began immediately, with bullets spraying from several directions. Then three men slowed to a stop in a 1956 Ford. Lauer approached the vehicle. Ludlow followed. And in an instant—he was dead: 'As I got alongside the car,' recalled Lauer, 'the driver reached out and grabbed my shotgun. I was startled. But I was determined nobody was going to take that shotgun—it was a deadly weapon. As I yanked back, the gun went off. I looked back and saw that Deputy Ludlow had fallen' (Cohen and Murphy 1966:144). A shotgun blast at close range "ripped into Ronald Ludlow's lower abdomen" (1966:145). Lauer walked over to him and asked, 'Are you hurt?' "'Yeah, I'm hurt bad,' he said. Then he fell unconscious" (1966:144). The wound proved fatal. Ludlow was pronounced dead at the hospital 30 minutes later. Ludlow was 27 years old at the time of the riot, his wife was pregnant, and he had apparently been an active

volunteer in the community; he was well liked, and his death infuriated his fellow officers, especially those who knew him personally.

The shooting of Ronald Ludlow “was a turning point,” according to Horne. “It was at this juncture that a community revolt against the police was transformed into a police revolt against the community” (1997:72). The police were joined in the streets by shopkeepers, some willing to kill to protect their inventory. Under the leadership of Police Chief William Parker, “the LAPD seemed to take to the task of hammering African-Americans with a macabre relish,” writes Gerald Horne, especially during the riot that August (Horne 1997:134). The Los Angeles Police Department remained “profoundly racist in its policies.” Black officers were permitted to work in only two sections of the city—both were in African-American neighborhoods—and all police patrols were segregated. Black officers were not permitted to patrol a white cop’s beat. ‘Racism was expected, part of the group persona,’ explained Mike Rothmiller, a white LAPD officer. ‘Shrink from it and you were an odd duck, perhaps a pink one.’ Rothmiller describes racial hatred as the ‘dominating force’ within the department; indeed, some white officers took pleasure from inflicting pain upon African Americans: ‘Bending fingers back, twisting ears, tightening handcuffs into medieval torture devices, slamming the victim’s head into the door while placing him in a vehicle’ were some of the milder techniques. ‘Sometimes they dangled suspects by their ankles from the edge of buildings’ (Horne 1997:135).

The Los Angeles Fire Department also had a reputation for discriminating against African Americans. In 1952, in a department of 2,500 firefighters, there were 8 black firemen; by 1965, though there were now 3,500 firefighters on the force, there were only about 59 black firemen (Horne 1997:76). Racial segregation was in fact maintained until 1955 in all Los Angeles fire stations. They too were treated like invading outsiders as they rushed through the streets of Los Angeles, fighting desperately to contain a spreading inferno. The most intense firefighting came at about 1:00 a.m. on Saturday, August 14; afterward, arson began to wane, indicating that the insurrection had reached its peak, though sniper activity was increasing. Four people were killed during the violence on Friday, including three African Americans and a Los Angeles police officer. In three days and nights of rebellion, African Americans “overturned and burned more than 150 automobiles and set over 100 fires.” Ambulances rushing to the area were “met with a shower of rocks and occasional Molotov cocktails.” But as the darkness lifted, two thousand National Guardsmen were preparing to move into Watts to stop the spread of violence.

#### *Day 4*

The Guard rolled into the riot zone early Saturday morning as an “orange pall of smoke hung in the sky above south Los Angeles.” The entire thoroughfare in the heart of the commercial district in Watts lay in ruins. More than 30 major fires were still raging out of control (Bart August 14, 1965). There were “blotches of dried blood on the street from cuts” suffered while looting; some of the dried blotches even contained footprints (NYT August 15, 1965). Buildings were smoldering from fires and a thick black smoke covered the skyline as convoys of troops carriers—each led by Jeeps with mounted machine guns—began entering the city. One unit opened machine-gun fire for 10-minutes on a group of African Americans who then fled up a side street. ‘They’ve got weapons and ammo,’ a Guardsmen explained. ‘It’s going to be like Vietnam.’ A National Guard spokesman said the plan was to ‘hit them and make them stop. They will pursue the bands of rioters in detachments.’ “Throughout the Negro section,” writes Bart, “crowds numbering in the thousands were chanting ‘White devils what are you doing here?’ (August 14, 1965). Rumors of armed blacks marching into the suburbs in “a bid to settle historical accounts forcibly” produced white hysteria—and a spike in gun sales (Horne 1997:79). Police sound trucks sped up and down the streets in the white neighborhoods north and east of Watts “warning residents to stay in their homes and lock their doors” (Bart August 14, 1965).

Firefighters attempting to combat the work of arsonists were often the targets of violence as they rushed on the scene. The Friendly Furniture Company factory was decimated by a fire that quickly spread to five nearby homes owned by African Americans. Another merchant described “a pack of shrieking Negro teen-agers [who] suddenly hurtled into his store.” Within minutes the store had been looted and set on fire. Firefighters were unable to reach most of these blazes because rioters “greeted the fire engines with Molotov cocktails and rocks” (Bart August 14, 1965). Black merchants tried to ride the nationalist wave by placing signs on the windows of their stores reading ‘Negro owners’ or, more fashionably, ‘Blood Brother,’ ‘Soul Brother,’ ‘Negro Blood,’ or ‘Black Blood Bros.’ Many of these stores were left untouched, even when areas around them were reduced to ashes (Horne 1997:111). African Americans targeted the most exploitative businesses for looting and arson throughout the rebellion. The 4300 block of Central Avenue, an area where African Americans were not permitted to rent business fronts, was annihilated. The “notorious savings and loan associations in South LA charged higher interest rates than their branches elsewhere did, redlined relentlessly, and treated their customers

with scorn,” explains Horne. While nearly half of the ‘high credit businesses’ were “totally wiped out, while only three out of forty ‘low credit businesses suffered damage to the same extent’” (1997:111).

Black residents performed arson as an act of compensation and targets were chosen to satisfy resentment. Lelia Hodge, an African-American store owner in South L.A., reported that “early on in the uprising she saw two black men running south on Jefferson Boulevard. The taller one was shouting, ‘The whitey has to go,’ and she was advised to put ‘Blood-brothers—Negro owned’ on her window.” These men wore arm bands and carried walkie-talkies, according to Horne, and they snorted at CORE, Dr. King, and the philosophy of nonviolence: ‘As long as the Ku Klux Klan is riding and burning, we, the Black Brothers, are going to also ride and burn’ (1997:100). “As many as 14 fires were raging on one street alone—103d Street in Watts,” reports Bart, “and it was believed not a single business in that commercial center would remain intact” (August 14, 1965). Most of these stores were owned by whites, and in fact, the Urban League’s Watts project was ‘the only unburned building left in its block,’ according to the Group Guidance Unit of Los Angeles. A restaurant owned by an African American was left standing (and was not looted), while a furniture store owned by whites located next door was burned to the ground. Los Angeles gangs used ‘signs and signals’ to pass unharmed and undetected through the riot zone, including ‘the familiar two finger, victory sign for the Slausons, three raised fingers representing the Watts Gang V and [the] familiar [circle] of the thumb and forefinger forming a zero—the sign of the Gladiators’ (Horne 1997:99).

By 2:00 p.m. there were 13,393 guardsmen on duty in the riot zone. Many of these men ‘were from places such as Redwood City and Eureka and had little or no exposure to or understanding of African-Americans and our problems,’ reported Michael Harris, a resident of Watts. The behavior of the California National Guard was repugnant, leading some black residents to describe the event as a “rampaging.” Several Guardsmen ‘seemed as if they were under a different set of orders,’ according to one analyst. ‘They rode down 103<sup>rd</sup> Street with their guns pointed directly at people.’ And the ‘worst roadblock of all’ was located at 103<sup>rd</sup> Street and Wilmington. Jimmy Walker, a resident of that area, claimed to have seen guardsman ‘drive down 103<sup>rd</sup> Street shooting out street lights and later shoot into a fast moving ’57 Chevy.’ Michael Harris, another resident, recalled 25 years later the harrowing image ‘of two of my neighbors lying dead in the street, their bodies riddled with bullet wounds as young guardsmen stood over

them, magazines emptied, bayonets affixed, looking up at me quizzically, seemingly searching for answers' (Horne 1997:161).

The riot continued to spread out and intensify. A large section of Los Angeles' African-American community was in flames: at least "20 large fires raged during the day," reported Gladwin Hill. "A four-block store area in the center of Watts that was the focus of destruction looked as if it had been hit by a tornado, with only some walls of buildings left standing" (August 15, 1965). A fire captain flew over the city in a helicopter, inspecting the devastation: 'We don't have the manpower to extinguish them,' Captain William Clutterham told the *Los Angeles Times*. 'From the air, I could see them lighting new fires by throwing inflammable liquids against the sides of buildings.' Fire Chief D.J. Brunett reported that more than 200 "fire incidents" were reported on Saturday, an improvement over the day before, when more than 350 fires were reported; the chief estimated that the property damage would be at least \$30 million. On Central Avenue, for an entire 14-block area, not a single commercial building was left standing (New York Times August 15, 1965).

Four thousand troops were now stationed in the riot zone, with another two thousand placed at other strategic points throughout Los Angeles. Snipers fired into the sky at helicopters and other aircraft circling the riot area to such an extent that the Federal Aviation Agency advised all commercial airliners to detour their routes to Los Angeles International Airport. Law enforcement forces began conducting a "series of sweeps in the riot area," explained Hill. "A scattered column of soldiers would move down a street in combat style, followed by city policemen and sheriff's deputies, with a procession of troop carriers, jeeps, police cars and buses following." One unit of 300 swept the business district at Avalon and Central Avenues on a mile stretch between Slauson Avenue and Imperial Boulevard. Another unit swept the area of Central Avenue and 103d Street, while a third detachment of about 100 officers and troops occupied Imperial and Century. Yet the riot spread north, toward the Civic Center, and west, toward Crenshaw Boulevard—an integrated district. It spread to Compton, five miles south of Watts, where "store-smashing, looting, and the tossing of gasoline bombs had resulted in 110 arrests" (Hill August 15, 1965). Violence spread to Pasadena, where Black residents stoned buildings and also looted two gun shops and a liquor store.

*Day 5*

Watts was eerily quiet on Sunday morning, August 15. The most devout (and brave) even made it to church service. Residents sat on the front porches of Spanish-style homes in the more prosperous sections. Children played as parents “watered their parched lawns” (Cohen and Murphy 1966:227). But the wreckage simmered all around them. “At one intersection a “burned out auto was overturned half across a street,” wrote Walter Rugaber in *The New York Times*. “Dozens of stores, some of them large supermarkets, were raked by fire after a thorough looting,” and some of those fires were still burning (August 16, 1965). During the 12 hours between 8 A.M. and the evening curfew, 103 fires were reported, according to the Fire Department. The death toll climbed from 22 to 31 that Sunday: seven of the nine killed were African Americans shot while looting or in other exchanges with law enforcement. “One was a 14-year-old Negro girl killed in a traffic accident while fleeing the scene of a looting,” writes Hill. “One was a 5-year-old Negro child shot by a sniper.” More than 2,255 people had been arrested since Marquette Frye was arrested for suspicion of drunk driving, and more than 762 were wounded or injured. Property loss from arson alone was now estimated at \$200 million (Hill August 16, 1965).

What began as Black rebellion quickly became “a police riot aimed principally at blacks” (1997:141). Gerald Horne concluded that a “random, racist, arbitrary violence was unleashed against the residents of South LA” during that week in August. In the armed combat, 90 officers suffered injuries, at least 2 police cars were destroyed, and 178 were damaged. Judge J. B. Lawrence of the municipal court in San Bernadino told Warren Christopher, an attorney working for the McCone Commission, that he should investigate whether ‘illegal searches or seizures or of confessions extracted by force or fraud have arisen in Los Angeles.’ The judge continued, ‘When I review a person’s criminal record for any purpose, I give no weight whatsoever to a Los Angeles felony arrest unless it is followed by a conviction, since in my opinion, it frequently means merely that the defendant was in the wrong place at the wrong time. This is said to be particularly applicable to Negroes.’ There are ‘reasonable grounds for the hostility which is felt by the lowest economic class,’ he concluded (Horne 1997:149).

National Guard troops were stationed at nearly every intersection by Monday, August 16. Law enforcement had roadblocks in place and “imposing weaponry—M-1 carbines, machine guns, shotguns—plus a preponderance of well-equipped manpower” (Cohen and Murphy 1966:216).



Traffic was banned on Central Avenue and lighted flares burned in the street yet warfare raged. Troops were assigned to fire engines, and when an alarm came in from the riot area, the trucks raced past, sirens blaring and rifles ready for combat. Police and National Guardsmen acted with increasing force as they tried to flush suspected snipers and restore order at key intersections. The week of rebellion in Watts required 13,000 National Guardsmen to suppress; in the process, more than 4,000 were arrested, 209 buildings were destroyed and another 787 were damaged with an estimated property loss “placed at about \$46 million,” according to *The New York Times* (August 22, 1965). At least 34 people were killed during the rebellion; more than a thousand suffered injuries serious enough to seek professional medical attention (Horne 1997:77). Captain J. Slade Delaney is among those who believe the official death count is low: “many persons may have died in flaming structures, and the bodies, or what remained of them, never discovered amid the massive, sooty rubble” (Cohen and Murphy 1966:163).

## CONCLUSION

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders reported that “thirty-six hours after the first Guard units arrived, the main force of the riot had been blunted” in Los Angeles, an extraordinary amount of time though not unprecedented in American history (the New York Draft Riots lasted for a similar period even after troops arrived). Almost 4,000 persons were arrested during six days of violence; thirty-four people were killed and hundreds more injured. The Kerner Report estimated that \$35 million in damage had been inflicted: “The Los Angeles riot, the worst in the United States since the Detroit riot of 1943, shocked all who had been confident that race relations were improving in the North, and evoked a new mood in Negro ghettos across the country” (1968:40). It was rebellion, violence and theft as compensation for historical injustices, despite the recent progress made with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. “You hear people say it wasn’t a race riot. Let them,” said one Black rioter. “The average person out there in the streets knew what it was and he considered it a war. A civil revolt. That’s what it was—a civil revolt. At first it was against the white police. Then—not just the police, but all whites” (Cohen and Murphy 1966:102)

The question is whether collective violence had an instrumental effect on the Black community, both within riot cities and nationally, with federal aid and other programs. Historians Michael Flamm has argued that the militarization of policing was “a collective legacy of the

1960s riots” (2017:5). Gerald Horne noted similar developments in the aftermath of the Los Angeles riot in 1965, but he also makes a crucial point regarding the positive consequences of racial violence: “out of the uprising had developed forms of organization, bonds of unity, a deftness of tactics that were to be manifested in the Panthers and related groups” (1997:67).

*Black Collective Violence: Instrumental or Detrimental?*

New York instituted a civilian complaint review board in 1954 that consisted of three deputy police commissioners. The board handled roughly 200 cases per year “and found 90 percent of them unsubstantiated” (Flamm 2017:130). New York City Police Commissioner Stephen Kennedy “created a special unit to handle urban unrest in 1959,” notes Flamm. “The Tactical Patrol Force (TPF) was an elite squad of physically imposing young men (all under thirty years old and most over six feet tall) with special training in the martial arts and unit tactics. It attracted officers with a taste for adventure and the rough side of urban policing” (2017:62). The name may have been new, but the creation of elite units trained to control mass movements and restrain violence was not; recall that even in 1863 during the ‘Draft Riots,’ the city called upon special forces to restore order (see Headley for citation). The TPF was composed of ‘ex-marines and paratroopers, all with an appetite for the things that active street cops enjoyed, the jobs that most other cops avoided as a matter of course,’ recalled Robert Leuci who had joined the force in 1962. “Aggressive policing was the only kind practiced in the TPF, and in the ghetto that created anger and antagonism. ‘They didn’t like us, simple as that,’ he remembered. ‘They felt we were intruding in their lives. And we were. TPF didn’t only patrol the streets—we went into the alleyways, the basements, onto the rooftops, through the tenement hallways’” (Flamm 2017:63).

Lyndon Johnson directed the secretary of defense to expand the Army’s “program for demonstrating techniques of riot control to the National Guard” after the riots New York in 1964. Johnson also instructed J. Edgar Hoover to ensure the FBI made riot training available to local police departments at its academy in Quantico, Virginia. “The militarization and nationalization of riot control were under way,” writes Flamm. “The president already had on his desk a recommendation to send small groups of specially trained federal troops to military bases across the country. From there they could quickly deploy to cities where the police needed and requested their intervention” (2017:250). In the fall election season of 1964, the conservative recipe for law and order was more police, harsher sentences, and larger prisons. The liberal response was to promise to address the ‘root causes’ of ghetto conditions with job training and

social programs for the disadvantaged and desperate. Nationally, President Lyndon Johnson was under fire from Senator Barry Goldwater, the Republican presidential nominee, who publicly claimed the Johnson Administration had not responded to the problem of urban violence with enough force. *The New York Times* reported that Johnson was “deeply concerned that the Harlem violence will intensify the ‘white backlash’ against the Negro,” thereby making enforcement of the Civil Rights Act more difficult; the president was also “acutely sensitive to the possible political effects of the Negro violence and of charges that he is not taking vigorous actions to provide ‘security from domestic violence’” (Kenworthy July 21, 1964).

Two anti-crime bills went into effect in New York in July 1964. The ‘No-Knock’ law “enabled officers who had obtained warrants to search private residences without first notifying the occupants,” while the ‘Stop-and-Frisk’ law “allowed the police to question individuals and gather evidence on the basis of ‘reasonable suspicion.’” Governor Nelson Rockefeller “signed both laws four months earlier despite protests from the *New York Post* and *Amsterdam News*, which contended that they would give a ‘green light’ to the most ‘bigoted or sadistic’ officers.” The NAACP argued that such ‘aggressive preventative patrol,’ which had become “a common practice in urban policing by the early 1960s,” would only result in greater harassment for African Americans walking New York streets (2017:77). Harlem expected a civilian review board, and Mayor Lindsey had promised one on the campaign trail. He fulfilled that campaign promise with an executive order, issued in May 1966, that created a Civilian Complaint Review Board. The board was composed of three police officials (including an African American deputy commissioner) and four civilians (two white liberals, a Latino activist, and a black professor). It would have its own investigators, but would still have limited power—it could only recommend to the department whether to press charges against officers. The new police commissioner, Howard Leary, who had worked with an independent civilian review board in Philadelphia, would retain the authority to make all final disciplinary decisions” (Flamm 2017:271). Several other policy changes were incorporated at the NYPD. The department banned warning shots (officers could now face charges if they used them), and in 1969, the NYPD established the Firearms Discharge Review Board—officers now had to “account for every use of their weapon (Flamm 2017:94). Nevertheless, the riot “made a reality of the white backlash,” according to Shapiro and Sullivan. “Anyone who doubts this need only to ask his local newspaper or his

congressman about the mail, the tremendous proportion of it anti-Negro, that has come in since the riots” (1964:206).

As a result of the Watts rebellion, the Federal Government allocated \$29 million to 45 improvement projects and an additional \$20 million in ‘Poverty Program’ appropriations. The County Board of Supervisors criticized the aid approach, asserting ‘it is wrong, in effect, to reward the riot area’ (Hill September 18, 1965). This reaction encapsulates the conservative reaction to rioting. A lack of respect for ‘law and order’ was behind the violence—not continued injustice, economic exploitation, and social inequality. What was required was additional funding and support for law enforcement, and harsh punishments for those who engage in lawless conduct. And so in August of 1965 the Los Angeles Police Department began moving toward militaristic policing. Surveillance from the air ‘became the cornerstone of policing strategy’ in the city: “South LA seemed to resemble a village in Vietnam, being buzzed on a regular basis by loud, whirring helicopters,” writes Horne (1997:164). In testimony before the McCone Commission, K. E. Klinger, an engineer, argued that better intelligence and technology was necessary if the state wanted to improve its response to civil disturbances. The Los Angeles Police Department needed a helicopter like the Bell 204B, according to Klinger, the very helicopter ‘being used so successfully by our armed forces in Vietnam.’ Klinger also recommended that the police department purchase aircraft to “detect and map fires using airborne infrared scanners” and other ‘electronic readout systems.’ The term ‘Viet Watts’ was “becoming more than a slogan,” writes Horne. Watts was a precursor to the ‘high-tech’ approach to urban disorder (1997:107). The militarization of law enforcement had begun.

The LAPD also began to develop an “intelligence arm in the black community” following the riots. A new squad was formed ‘to work the streets and infiltrate militant organizations,’ recalled Louis Tackwood, an African-American police informant. ‘They promised me a lot more money’ for performing this work: ‘domestic counter-insurgency has become a growth industry,’ he said (Horne 1997:164). Despite overwhelming consensus that reform was needed at the LAPD, the McCone Commission “rebuffed the idea of a civilian review board; it recommended only that division commanders and others in the chain of command not investigate complaints about their ‘subordinate officers’” (Horne 1997:165). This is the kind of change that, if implemented, could be used to argue that black-initiated collective violence had some positive structural effect on police-community relations. That a civilian

review board was not implemented in Los Angeles (as it was in New York?) is further indication that the riot would prove detrimental for black residents, even in its aftermath, because police changes were not forthcoming.

Industry had already begun fleeing south Los Angeles by 1965, and African Americans often lacked the transportation to follow as manufacturing relocated to the suburbs. A turn toward gangs and organized crime developed as concentrated poverty worsened. Many conservatives perceived the “image of gun-toting blacks” as a clear threat to the status quo that had to be met with overwhelming force; other “militant rightists responded by deserting LA in droves for Orange County to the south, which played a role in boosting this populous region into the forefront of right-wing politics nationally,” explains Horne (1997:264). The “Southern California ultraright” mobilized and gained in political strength after Watts. “The regional John Birch Society and the Young Americans for Freedom seemed to be gaining members, along with other like-minded groupings” (1997:265). The intensity of California’s Red Scare “weakened the organized left to the point of evaporation, feeding a profound California conservatism that included Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and a generation that pioneered in prosecuting the Cold War” (1997:267). The Watts rebellion ushered in an era marked by “the rise of right-wing elected officials buoyed in part by the revolt” (1997:269).

The Watts rebellion was a “milestone marking the previous era from what was to come,” argues historian Gerald Horne. For African Americans, the riot “marked the rise of black nationalism, as blacks revolted against police brutality. But what began as a black revolt against the police quickly became a police revolt against blacks. This latter revolt was a milestone too, one marking the onset of a ‘white backlash’ that would propel Ronald Reagan into the governor’s mansion in Sacramento and then the White House” (1997:16). President Johnson created the Office of Law Enforcement Administration (OLEA), an agency that provided grants to state and local police departments to fund “experimental programs, research projects, specialized training, and modern equipment—all in the name of greater professionalism and effectiveness.” The OLEA “represented a significant moment in the gradual intervention of the national government in police practices and criminal justice at the local level,” argues Flamm. “Within three years more than twenty states had received funding to purchase new equipment and provide more training for police officers, especially in riot control. Radicals would soon grow sharply critical of what they viewed as the ‘police-industrial complex’ and the growing

militarization of law enforcement (2017:260-1). Congress approved \$10 million in grant money to be awarded by the Justice Department when it passed legislation creating the Office of Law Enforcement Assistance. Los Angeles received the largest grant, nearly \$200,000, “so that the Sheriff’s Department could purchase surveillance helicopters for Project Sky Knight” (Flamm 2017:265).

In November 1966, the desire for law and order among American whites “contributed to Republican gains in the midterm elections,” notes historian Michael Flamm. Ronald Reagan upset California’s two-term incumbent Democratic Governor, Edmund ‘Pat’ Brown, attracting “national attention” in the upset victory. Reagan “benefited from widespread alarm over the Watts Riot, the Berkeley ‘Free Speech’ protests, and the soaring crime rate” (2017:275). By 1968, President Lyndon Johnson “had lost influence and the nation was firmly on the path to a more nationalized and militarized system of law enforcement.” This is because Congress “opened the floodgates to federal aid with block grants to state agencies (Title I). Police departments could now seek large grants for punitive purposes with few restrictions. The federal role in local and state law enforcement was set to reach new heights” (Flamm 2017:284). And later, under the direction of President Richard Nixon, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) “pumped billions of dollars to police departments so they could acquire modern equipment battle-tested in South Vietnam.” The Pentagon sold “armored personnel carriers, electronic movement sensors, improved tear gas, and sophisticated scout helicopters” to police departments around the country (Flamm 2017:287).

On the ten-year anniversary of the Watts rebellion, Jon Nordheimer of *The New York Times* remarked that despite early efforts, the will to rehabilitate was lost. Watts became an experimental site for testing new ideas and bold invention—a laboratory for social theory and strategies financed by the foundations and the universities and the Federal Government. But the money and manpower dried up, and so did the programs and the will of those who felt that individual risk and sacrifice could make the difference,” explains Nordheimer. “Compared with the economic and spiritual desolation that exists today, the conditions that sparked six days of looting and burning a decade ago now seem almost salubrious. For Watts today is a community that has been left behind.” Watts had an unemployment rate at near 50 percent in the summer of 1975; drug and alcohol addiction rates climbed steadily, especially among young black men, along with a “sharp rise” in suicides among young African Americans. ‘What we are seeing

today is an overwhelming mental depression, particularly among the young, that life holds no promise of opportunity for them,' noted Dr. Roland Jefferson, a psychiatrist and consultant at the Watts Health Center, also African American. 'Folks in Watts can't even get domestic jobs any more,' said Ted Watkins, director of the Watts Labor Community Action Committee. 'Kids come out of high school and can't read or write and even the menial jobs aren't available. They turn off the world like cold water, and there's a buildup in the community of violence against each other' (Nordheimer August 7, 1975).

# Chapter 8

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## A Nation Explodes



## **A Nation Explodes: Black Insurgency and the Militarization of Law Enforcement, 1966 - 1968**

The ghetto rioting that erupted in hundreds of cities represented a concerted attempt to achieve political objectives that had not been gained through other means. Such rioting does not represent simply random and senseless destruction, lacking meaning or purpose (as some would define 'riot'), nor does it represent a full-scale rebellion or revolution seeking to overthrow the national government. If the urban violence of the 1960s fits any of the neat categorizations evolved in the historical analyses of collective violence, it might best be seen as insurgency, or perhaps as insurrection against local political arrangements and authorities by those lacking the status of a formal belligerent.

- Joe Feagin and Harlan Hahn, *Ghetto Revolts* (1973:45)

Riots are much more than 'antisocial behavior.' They must be viewed both as a new stage in the development of Negro protest against racism, and as a logical outgrowth of the failure of the whole society to support racial equality. ... Americans have to turn their attention from the law-breaking violence of the rioters to the original and greater violence of racism, which is supported indirectly by the white community as a whole.

- Tom Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark* (1967:3)

Senator Barry Goldwater chose to make law and order the centerpiece of his presidential campaign in 1964, a "momentous choice," according to historian Michael Flamm, because it guaranteed Republican voters a clear alternative. The law-and-order issue helped Goldwater win the Republican nomination, but his reputation as a racist hurt his run for the White House. "Public fear over 'crime in the streets' also had not yet reached a critical level," writes Flamm (2017:21). Perhaps Goldwater's timing was just a bit off; had he run for president in 1968, after four 'long, hot summers' of urban collective violence, conservative white voters may have reacted differently to Goldwater's rhetoric, which effectively channeled rising white anxiety over the rising rate of violent crime. The "loss of security and order was merely the most visible symptom and symbol of the failure of liberalism," and in Goldwater's view, the welfare state "squandered the hard-earned taxes of the deserving middle class on wasteful programs for the undeserving poor." In turn, these programs "aggravated rather than alleviated social problems by encouraging personal dependence and discouraging personal responsibility" (Flamm 2017:22).

"There were signs of change in the rising winds of black dissent in the spring of 1965, just months before the Watts riots exploded," writes Kevin Mumford. "The new head of CORE, Floyd McKissick, signaled the new direction of the organization at the annual conference on

‘The Black Ghetto: An Awakening Giant,’” when he advocated a long-term strategy for northern cities, “stressed the new cultural identity of Black Power and running black candidates for office” (2007:96).

In Newark during the summer of 1965, police shot and killed six young African-American men. Lester Long, Jr. was shot in the back of the head with a .38 caliber bullet in the early morning hours of June 12, seconds after attempting to abscond from the back of a police cruiser. The 22-year-old was pulled over for a loud muffler, initially detained because officers believed his driver’s license looked suspicious, and eventually held for 45 minutes because officers discovered Long had four unanswered traffic violations. “Long pitched forward and was dead before he hit the sidewalk,” writes Porambo (2007:40). He hadn’t made it forty feet from the police car as the officers were waiting to impound the vehicle. Walter Mathis, a 17-year-old African American was shot to death on Christmas Eve by two off-duty police; the officers had been in a tavern when a man entered claiming several youths had mugged a man in the alleyway. Mathis was shot in the back—though police claimed he was shot in the side during a struggle—and neither Mathis nor his friends were found to have a gun or any other weapon with which they may have conducted a mugging. The police officers involved, particularly Detective John Balogh, a 9-year-veteran of the force, were not charged with any crime whatsoever. ‘It’s bad when someone deprives a person of his rights,’ said Mathis’s father. ‘This means the police can do anything to you and you can’t do anything about it. I tried to press criminal charges against Balogh but the court wouldn’t accept them’ (Porambo 2007:55). The 1965 deaths of Long, Mathis, and two other men—Bernard Rich, a 26-year-old African American shot in a jail holding cell after apparently hurling a cup of coffee filled with cigarette butts at an officer, and Charles Kendrick, a 27-year-old passenger with a criminal history, who was shot in the back of the head by police during a vehicle chase—became politicized, argues Porambo, “in that the city’s government shielded its police hirelings and preserved a philosophy of white domination.” Newark police officers knew that both the department and the city government “would support them no matter how flagrant their violations and they sensed that public opinion was also in their favor. A little brutality, it was felt, would keep ‘them’ in their place—the natural counterpart of white political dominance” (Porambo 2007:65). The ‘riot’ that erupted in Newark during July 1967, again following accusations of police brutality, must be viewed as *compensation*. It was violence performed by an oppressed people against an unjust system of social control that

functioned on multiple levels, including physical abuse and harassment from police in daily social relations, discrimination and racial profiling from officers walking the streets, and harsher sentencing in the courtroom. And this is only one end of the equation: when law enforcement is caught violating laws or engaging in even more heinous abuses of power, they are given protection and leniency. This makes the former system of injustice an even more egregious affront in the eyes of the Black community, for the scales of justice constantly appear off kilter.

“The denial of rights invites increased disorder and violence,” Lyndon Johnson declared in an August 1964 address before the American Bar Association. Those who “would hold back progress toward equality, and at the same time promise racial peace, are deluding themselves and deluding the people” (Flamm 2017:237). Rights had long been denied, of course, not just in the criminal justice system but, as we have seen, with voting rights and the right to work. Now, it appeared, African Americans were beginning to awaken to the possibilities of collective violence, to the potential of spectacle. The urban rebellions were just getting started. Violent conflict between black citizens and the white power structure reached its apex during the summer of 1967 and two major American cities, Newark, New Jersey and Detroit, Michigan, revealed a frustrated rage that was most shocking—and disturbing—for white Americans as they watched nightly news reports unfold on their television screens.

#### FIVE DAYS IN NEWARK, JULY 1967: BLACK REBELLION AND STATE-SANCTIONED TERRORISM

The crowd outside the Fourth Precinct began with about 25 people but swelled to more than 200. Black men and women denounced the police as two officers dragged John Smith from the squad car up the stairs toward the station. ‘You don’t have to drag him like that,’ somebody yelled to the officers, so they carried Smith the rest of the way to the door. Residents peered out darkened windows from the high-rise towers of the Reverend William P. Hayes housing project, which looked down on the orange-red brick of the Fourth Precinct Police Station; they were able to “observe every movement” (National Advisory Commission [1968]2016:61). John Smith was then thrown into the police station: ‘There were at least six or eight policemen there who began hitting and kicking at me,’ Smith told journalist Ronald Porama. ‘They took me to a cell and beat on me some more until I thought it would never stop. They held my head over the toilet and

one of them threw water on me from the bowl all over my head,' Smith recalled. 'Another one hit me on the head with a gun butt and I was also hit with a blunt instrument in the side.' This state-sanctioned assault continued behind closed doors until finally, 'they just left me laying there,' he remembered (see also Hayden 1967:10).

Honorably discharged from the Army with the rank of corporal in 1953, Smith's military history "can be searched in vain for an example of violent behavior, even an isolated incident," yet the arresting officers claimed John Smith punched one of them in the face before battling both in the street. Born in Georgia, Smith was a chess player who also enjoyed studying music: 'I attended Harnett School of Music in New York for a year by days and drove the cab at night,' said Smith. John Smith was a trumpet player who had worked as a factory laborer before he started driving taxi cabs. Despite requiring expensive dental work to continue his passion, the 'indescribable pleasure of playing the horn,' Smith continued to devote himself to the instrument: 'My objectives haven't changed any,' he told Porambo after he was assaulted by the police. 'I still want to play the horn, to study and develop my mind as much as possible' (2007:102). It was this man, according to Patrolmen John DeSimone and his partner Vito Pontrelli, who punched DeSimone while resisting arrest, continued the fight while being transported to the police station, again hitting DeSimone, and 'became violent again' after he was finally brought into the Fourth Precinct (Porambo 2007:104-05).

Tom Hayden, one of the founders of Students for a Democratic Society, came to the city in 1964 to establish the Newark Community Union Project, which "aimed to put into practice the theory and method of participatory democracy and to organize ghetto people to take some control" over their lives and community, "much to the dismay of the Newark police and even the suspicion of local residents," explains Porambo (2007:79). Hayden reported that several civil rights leaders—activists from CORE, the Newark Community Action Project, and the United Freedom Party—visited the precinct and demanded to see Smith; they were "incensed" after seeing his condition and "demanded" he be sent to the hospital (1967:12). It was at this point that police began to don their riot helmets, according to witnesses inside the precinct. The crowd in front of the station did not yet number more than a hundred people.

By 10:00 p.m., not a single policer officer or public official appeared before the crowd to address allegations of police brutality. In fact, Mayor Addonizio refused to "discuss a political solution to the demands of the rioters," both that night and again the following day (Mumford

2007:129). Robert Curvin was a Newark activist who would receive a Ph.D. in Political Science from Princeton in 1975. But on this night he climbed on top of a car right in front of the Fourth Precinct: 'The police have the guns,' he declared. 'The police have the weapons and everything, and you can't win' (Mumford 2007:130). Curvin believed it was a 'bad idea' to disperse the crowd without giving them some kind of outlet to vent their grievances. Timothy Still, president of the poverty program and the Hayes Homes Tenants' Council, "spoke not as an official, but in his informal role of neighborhood leader, expressing anger at 'sadists' in the precinct but urging the people to be peaceful." Finally, Oliver Lofton, a former U.S. attorney and administrator with the Newark Legal Services Project, "reiterated the need for an orderly demonstration" and promised his legal services in support of John Smith. Several other speakers addressed the crowd after Curvin. Then flames burst from a vehicle parked in the street. It was just after midnight.

Two Molotov cocktails "exploded high on the western wall" of the Fourth Precinct Station. "A stream of fire curled fifty feet down the wall, flared for ten seconds, and died," writes Hayden. "The people, now numbering at least 500 on the street, let out a gasp of excitement. Fear, or at least caution, was apparent also as many retreated into the darkness or behind cars in the Hayes parking lot. After three years of wondering when 'the riot' would come to Newark, people knew that this could be it" (1967:14). Firefighters were on their way and at 12:15 a.m. Thursday, about 25 Newark police officers "charged out of the old stone building clubbing everyone within reach" (Porambo 2007:107). At that point, 'everything just broke up,' said Curvin. 'People started running. Then the police moved out toward the projects' (Mumford 2007:130). The looting began within the hour after those firebombs exploded against the precinct wall. A group of young black kids ran around the corner on Belmont Avenue. 'They're going up to Harry's,' a mother announced with excitement before following the group. Word of their mission spread through the neighborhood. A cascade of glass shattering against the pavement signaled a new stage in the rebellion. "Burglar-alarm bells were ringing up and down Belmont and 17<sup>th</sup> within fifteen minutes," writes Hayden. "People poured out from the project areas into liquor and furniture stores as the young people tore them open" (Hayden 1967:18). The Newark rebellion had begun.

Black migration dramatically altered Newark's Central Ward during the World War II era: thirty percent of all African Americans living in Newark resided in the Central Ward in 1930; by 1950,

it was 90 percent (Mumford 2007:23) Yet as Mumford explains, “the majority of theaters, department stores, restaurants and coffee shops, swimming pools and public baths, hospitals, and the downtown YWCA (but not the black Central Ward YWCA) publicly observed Jim Crow,” despite laws against discrimination in public accommodations (2007:32-3). Newark’s Black community grew rapidly, from 45,760 in 1940 (nearly 12 percent of Newark’s population), to 75,637 in 1950 (more than 17 percent of city’s total; Mumford 2007:34).

Black-owned newspapers had a profound impact on political consciousness in the Black community, activating channels of social protest in a city not known for social activism. “The rise of a black public sphere linked the immediacy of local violations of state equal accommodations laws to the nation and national propaganda,” writes Mumford. African-American newspapers increasingly connected White racism “to the moral righteousness of the global war against fascism.” The rising popularity of Black newspapers proved to be the “final ingredient in the making of a mass protest movement—that is, the arrival of a critical mass” (2007:34). Yet after fascism’s defeat, a growing patriotism “reinforced the multifaceted black consciousness that continued to demand enforcement of equality before the law,” and in 1945, President Harry Truman issued executive order 9881, outlawing racial and ethnic discrimination in the nation’s military.

The “politics of white supremacy reconstructed the metropolitan landscape” in post-World War II New Jersey, writes Mumford (2007:50). While the first wave of urban renewal in Newark “countered segregation by dispersing residents of blighted areas” into 14 housing projects, all constructed between 1940 and 1955 in white neighborhoods. Between 1955 and 1965, however, the “very housing projects that once had achieved an integrated balance between white and black residents tipped to majority black,” and majority-white projects, such as Stephen Crane, Columbus, and Archbishop Wallace “remained white, despite the initial push for dispersal and integration. By 1966, the “old veterans housing” was indicative of the process of resegregation that swept Newark: the Bradley Court was almost 95 percent white and the Stella Windsor Wright was 98 percent nonwhite. The “rise of the Second Ghetto reflected the racial bias of the City Council and the mayor in the administration of housing” (Mumford 2007:73).

Suburbanization and white flight were not motivated exclusively by white supremacist attitudes, however; federally guaranteed mortgage loans also played a critical role (Rothstein 2018). As whites “left behind the social crises of cities and the rampant corruption in

government, they passed new laws in the suburbs that promoted the construction of more residences, prioritized low taxes and minimal regulation, and encouraged commercial projects under a more libertarian system called ‘home rule’” (2007:51). Cities lost their tax base as residents fled, leaving urban areas in a state of deterioration without recourse to confront the problems associated with poverty. A New Jersey state economic report indicated that in 1956 the suburbs “enjoyed a 37.3% increase in per capita income, while that in the inner city declined by 6.2 percent.” Suburbanite incomes increased at a rate “150 percent of the national average, while those in Newark’s “were left with only a 13.7 percent increase.” Seventy percent of the state’s lowest-income residents now lived in the urban core, according to statistics from the New Jersey Department of Labor (Mumford 2007:52).

Newark’s Black community continued to grow, again doubling in fewer than ten years, from 68,316 in 1950 to 142,600 in 1960. Meanwhile, Newark’s White community declined, from nearly 350,000 to 255,800 (Mumford 2007:65). Black men continued to face discrimination in occupations that offered economic mobility—such as sales, construction, retail trade, managers, mechanics and repairman—and continued to languish in categories like operative, laborer, service worker, drivers, and deliverymen. By the mid-1960s nearly 28 percent of African-American families reported subsisting on a yearly income of \$3,000 or less—compared to 10.8 percent of white families (Mumford 2007:102). Nearly 38 percent of white folks earned more than \$10,000 annually; by contrast, fewer than 17 percent of black families earned that kind of salary; as Mumford notes, whites “earned the highest personal incomes, and black and Puerto Rican families the lowest” (2007:64). Young black males were unemployed at far higher rates than other segments of the African American population, and these figures “skewed the overall rate of black unemployment” (Mumford 2007:103).

Black New Jersey residents also confronted discrimination in most types of housing, a system which “perpetuated patterns of geographical separation” established since the beginning of the Great Migration (2007:53). African Americans occupied between 23 and 24 percent of the 3,009 public housing units in 1950, according to a study by the *Newark News*; by 1955, there were more ‘more Negroes than whites in public housing, and the flight of white tenants showed no signs of slackening.’ In 1960, “the ratios changed from 77 percent white to 66 percent black occupancy” in seventeen public housing projects (Mumford 2007:56). Increasingly throughout the city, black residents were concentrated in “particular areas that foreshadowed the rise of all-

black housing projects and laid the foundation for the so-called Second Ghetto that had arisen not from discrimination in rentals but from the housing agencies that planned new buildings in ghettos, rather than dispersed them more evenly across many diverse neighborhoods” (Mumford 2007:57). The Veterans Administration also tolerated racial discrimination in housing loans. An investigation by the *Newark News* in 1956 “exposed racial bias in the lending practices of the VA in Essex County” (Mumford 2007:54). The survey revealed a majority of loan recipients resided in two all-white zones—areas totaling some 2,700 loans—whereas African Americans were approved only for loans to purchase property in the “core or inner city,” not the more “convenient and economically mobile suburbs. Black home buyers received 55 loans (Mumford 2007:55). By the 1960s, Newark was home to many ethnic groups, but most African Americans were segregated in the central area: the Central Ward, Broad Street, or the Lower Clinton Hill. “It was a city of two or three major ghettos, rather than a series of rigidly segregated neighborhoods,” explains Mumford (2007:71).

Though Newark’s population of 400,000 still ranked it 30<sup>th</sup> among American municipalities in 1967, the white middle class had been deserting the city in droves for two decade, and by the late 1950s, “the desertions had become a rout. Between 1960 and 1967, the city lost a net total of more than 70,000 white residents” (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968:57). Newark’s Model Cities Act application revealed the extent of suffering. Newark had the largest percentage of bad housing among the nation’s cities, the highest crime rates, and the heaviest rates of venereal disease; it had the highest maternal mortality rate among the nation’s cities, was second in infant mortality and birth rates, and ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the “absolute number of drug addicts. The city’s unemployment rate was higher than 15 percent in the Black community, and Newark was one of five cities that consistently received special assistance under the Economic Development Act (Hayden 1967). The city had extensive plans for urban renewal, highway construction, and downtown development, but for African Americans, these programs “seemed almost deliberately designed to squeeze out this rapidly growing Negro community that represents a majority of the population” (Hayden 1967:6). Hostility between white city administrators and the black community erupted into open conflict during hearings regarding the construction of the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry—in the heart of Central Ward, a section predominantly inhabited by African Americans. Several of these hearings were “disrupted by noisy, jeering crowds,” with black



protestors demanding that, should the area be redeveloped, it should be for housing, not a medical school (*The New York Times* July 13, 1967).

Black nationalism “gained new visibility” in Newark’s public sphere, likely due to it’s the location between New York and Philadelphia, two large cities with prominent black nationalist organizations (Mumford 2007:110). As Newark gained a “reputation for volatility and black insurgency,” it increasingly attracted radicals—a ‘potential hot spots,’ according to one activist. Nathan Wright, a locally based, moderate black nationalist was selected to serve as chairman during the 1967 National Conference on Black Power, scheduled to be held in Newark during mid-July (Mumford 2007:111). Escalating protest against police brutality “fostered what might be called the nationalization of the black public sphere,” writes Mumford, “leading directly to rioting. The recurrence of police brutality constantly destabilized race relations in the city and fed into the rising influence of black militancy that rejected nonviolence in favor of armed self-defense.” Because the Newark Police Department was overwhelmingly white, confrontations became “racialized political conflicts” between the police, City Hall, and a heavily underrepresented Black community.

A hailstorm sailed down from the William P. Hayes high-rise housing project, the stones chipping away at the bricks. Nearly every window in the Fourth Precinct station house was smashed. In a parking lot nearby, an old car suddenly erupted in flames, soon to be fully engulfed. When a fire truck arrived on the scene, it was pelted with rocks. The shattering windows and crunching metal, the wailing sirens and screaming residents, combined in a panic as police officers donned World War II helmets, marching against the crowd outside the Fourth Precinct. Just as Harlem’s landscape provided different opportunities for warfare than did Brooklyn, as we have seen, the terrain surrounding Newark’s Fourth Precinct provided ideal conditions for guerilla warfare. The landscape played into the hands of black youth while making it extraordinarily difficult on the police. The Hayes projects provided a “useful terrain for people making war,” explains Hayden, who was in Newark during the rebellion. “The police station is well lit, but the projects are dark, especially the rooftops a hundred yards above the street.” Through darkened apartment windows, residents can both observe and attack unnoticed. “There is little light in the pathways, recreation areas, and parking lots around the foot of the tall

buildings,” Hayden continues. “It was in this sanctuary that parents came together. It was here also that their sons could return to avoid the police” (1967:17-8).

Liquor stores on Belmont Avenue were the first targets under attack early that Thursday morning. Several shops around the corner from the Fourth Precinct were “ripped open with yells and the crash of glass.” At first, only the ‘most aggressive, the boldest of guys,’ would enter the stores, recalled Tim Still, president of the Newark anti-poverty agency. ‘The radio cars were going back and forth,’ he said, and the rioters *saw* them flying past the stores. ‘They saw them in there getting the whiskey and they just kept going. They didn’t try to stop,’ Still said, and as a result, ‘all the people saw that the cops didn’t care, so they went in, too’ (Porambo 2007:113). This was an early mistake. There would be many more in the days ahead.

### *Day 2*

Mayor Hugh Addonizio described the event as an “isolated incident” the following afternoon, Thursday, July 13. But to Newark’s black community, police brutality was not an isolated incident, nor was police disrespect, nor white official’s unwillingness to address long-standing grievances among African Americans. ‘To say it was an isolated incident, I think, was the most tragic mistake that was made following Wednesday night,’ Curvin said later. ‘In fact, one of the reasons that I felt so terribly frustrated on Thursday afternoon when I went to that meeting was to hear the mayor speak as though it was all over’ (Porambo 2007:114). Injustice was a part of daily lived existence for many (if not most) African Americans living in Newark, so several prominent members representing the city’s Black community requested a meeting with the mayor. Addonizio agreed to appoint Newark’s first African-American police captain; he would also establish a panel of citizens to investigate Smith’s arrest. Upon hearing this, one black representative stood up and declared that the mayor’s proposal sounded like ‘the playback of a record.’ He walked out of the meeting. The mayor “seemed unaware of the seriousness of the tensions” between the Black community and its white-dominated institutions—especially the Newark Police Department (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 2016:63).

Activists distributed leaflets in the neighborhood surrounding the Fourth Precinct Station announcing a ‘Police Brutality Protest Rally,’ set to begin early evening. Shortly after 7:00 p.m., James Threatt, the Executive Director of the Newark Human Rights Commission, appeared to announce the mayor’s planned response. There would be a citizens’ panel to investigate Smith’s arrest and an African American would be elevated to the rank of captain for the first time. ‘Black

Power!’ screamed one youngster in the crowd. Soon rocks were being hurled at Threatt, himself African American. Soon a barrage of missiles rendered the police station under siege. Bottles, rocks, and pieces of wood and metal soared in the air, smashing against the station walls. Again there was the sound of glass as the bombardment lasted about 15 minutes. “Then more than forty club-wielding police in riot helmets charged out of the station house,” writes Porambo. “The riot’s second night had begun” (2007:115).

Violence spread quickly, first from the station house at Livingston Avenue and 17<sup>th</sup> Street to Belmont Avenue, where looting raged for four blocks. Towards the center of the city, “seven blocks on Clinton Avenue—from Jelliff to Osborne Terrace—became a nighttime Easter Parade” (Porambo 2007:115). Springfield Avenue begins out in the suburb of Springfield and runs by the “white retreats of Short Hills, Millburn, and Maplewood,” explains journalist Ronald Porambo. “What was an avenue of transportation ends as a prison winding down into Newark’s hardcore ghetto, ‘the Strip,’ with a string of bars, liquor stores, and barbecue shops with greasy windows” (2007:3). And the violence spread along Springfield as “destruction and plunder raged in both directions,” toward the downtown district and away from the disorder area (Carroll July 14, 1967). Appliance stores were “stripped bare,” writes Carroll, and at least six liquor stores had their windows smashed and their stock looted. A toy store was “set afire by a Molotov cocktail and the blaze quickly spread to two adjoining stores” (July 14, 1967). More than 25 guns were reported stolen from a Sears-Roebuck store, along with other goods. Newark’s Fire Department reported more than 100 fires were reported on Thursday night. And every so often a police cruiser would arrive; officers would “fire their weapons over the heads of looters and rioters.”

Newark police established a perimeter around a 2-mile section of Springfield Avenue as bands of young black men and women roamed the streets. By 9:00 p.m., the main thoroughfare had taken on the atmosphere of a carnival as a sea of black folks were “indulging in a form of shopping” that had previously been reserved only for those in the upper-income brackets:

What they couldn’t carry away was hauled out in wagons, baby carriages, cars, and trucks. For the first time in their lives, there was no restriction on selection and everything was within their price range. New furniture was carried into the rundown tenements and the old sofas, chairs, and mattresses soon lined the street. No trick contracts, no installment plans, first come, first served. Cars with tow lines ripped the iron gratings from store windows and junkies cleaned out every drug store in the ghetto. Police ‘areas of containment’ became wider as the fever spread. The rioters settled for the shopping areas around Elizabeth Avenue on the south, Central Avenue in the north and, in the center of the city, Clinton and Springfield Avenues. The people seized control of their ghetto which, if only for a matter of hours, became *theirs* in fact. (Porambo 2007:115; emphasis in original)

Porambo's vivid description of rioting as shopping illustrates the financial compensation participants received during the opening stages of rebellion. This is compensation as we might normally think of it in legal terms—only it's not negotiated by an arbiter of any kind. It is compensation for past financial exploitation, whether in the form of usurious loans or overpriced goods. Compensation for police brutality, for continued injustice from the police department and court system, was yet on hold from the previous night, when black citizens attacked the Fourth Precinct and battled with police officers.

### *Day 3*

Policemen wielding shotguns battled with rioters as a fire raged at Broad and Market Streets. Rocks, pieces of cement, and other projectiles were hurled at the firemen as they battled both arson and local residents. It was after midnight, now Friday, July 14, and hundreds of black folks watched the blaze decimate a luggage store and jewelry shop in the center of downtown Newark, according to *The New York Times*. Traffic crawled through Broad and Market, where fire engines were “parked next to two gutted stores. Smoke still drifted past the New Jersey Beauty Culture School's smudged billboard” (Carroll July 15, 1967). Groups of young black men and women broke from crowd and raced through the business district, smashing windows and carrying away as much merchandise as they could gather. At 1:30 a.m., Mayor Addonizio announced a full-police alert, meaning all off-duty officers in the city's force of 1,400 must report for orders; then at 2:20 a.m., the mayor telephoned New Jersey Governor Richard J. Hughes. A second consecutive night of violence created an ‘ominous situation,’ according to Addonizio: firebombed stores, widespread looting, and gun battles between police and rioters prompted the mayor to request that Hughes send in the state police and National Guard. “Burglar alarms jangled as store windows were smashed along Springfield Avenue,” writes Maurice Carroll. “‘Kill them devils,’ some shouted at the white policemen. ‘You Uncle Toms got to come home tonight,’ another yelled at Negro policemen” (July 14, 1967).

Rose Abraham had been sleeping Thursday night, but gunfire had startled her awake, so around 12:30 in the morning she went looking for her six children. Five of them were inside; her 17-year-old son, however, was not. Rose went looking for her son. She was standing on the sidewalk when police arrived on Blum Street, just around the corner from Springfield Avenue, where some of the heaviest looting was taking place. Officers sprinted down Blum as Rose stood in front of a gray house, talking with a woman out on her porch. ‘You could hear the bullets ...

ping ... ping ... hitting off the cars,' recalled Shirley Banks, Abraham's next-door neighbor. 'I stood right on this porch and watched everything,' she said. Rose ran, but she only got as far as the middle of the street when Banks saw Rose fall to her knees. Her 17-year-old son helped her to get to Shirley's porch. 'We didn't even know she had been shot,' Banks said. 'What's that wet on her dress' (Porambo 2007:216). The bullet had hit her in the hip before driving up into her stomach. Shirley Banks drove Rose Abraham to the hospital that night; she waited six hours to receive an operation and died less than 18 hours later.

Bergen Street was dark and mostly still during those early morning hours when Tedock Bell, Jr., a 28-year-old African American who had moved to Newark from North Carolina four years earlier. Around 3:30 a.m., Bell, his wife, Edna; his mother; and his sister-in-law, Fannie Edwards walked from their front stoop down the block to Ben's Tavern, where Tedock Bell worked on the weekends. A block further up was Hoffman's Market—the grocery had its shelves liquidated and its front entranceway was completely shattered. Bell and Edwards stood and stared while his wife and mother kept walking along the littered streets. Then a police cruiser raced down Magnolia Street hill, stopping at the market. An officer hopped out and fired a warning shot into the air. Fannie Edwards fled in terror up Bergen Street. Tedock Bell just stood there in front of the store until another police car carrying four or five Newark police officers wearing white riot helmets, rushed down Bergen past Fannie Edwards. The squad car stopped in front of the market, and an officer approached Bell; the police pulled his gun from his holster and pointed it toward Bell as he moved. Edwards was too far up the street to hear the exchange between her brother-in-law and the police officer, but she saw Bell race across Bergen and into Magnolia Street. The officer pursued. Three shots were fired. 'I didn't see any reason why the police would shoot,' Fannie Edwards said later. Tedock Bell continued running even after a .38-caliber bullet which ripped through his body, leaving an exit wound a half-inch wide. He was pronounced dead at City Hospital around 4:00 a.m. 'Damn,' a neighbor who was visiting from Georgia said. 'They ain't no different up here than they are down home' (Porambo 2007:233).

Sixteen-year-old James Sanders, Jr. was caught looting at 4:00 a.m. at Sampson's Liquors on Jones Street, a block over from Springfield Avenue. The sight of police caused James to run up the block towards a vacant lot that had been boarded up. Police pursued the boy and, according to the grand jury's report, he turned while running and threw a bottle at them. "The shotgun blast that followed hit the boy full in the back, blowing him away like a large rag doll"

writes Porambo. “Morgue photographs again told the story of Double O ammunition Newark police were using in their shotguns. Seven of the nine slugs hit the boy in the back, three going right through his skinny body” (2007:220). James’ body went unidentified in the morgue for 8 days; his parents were not informed.

A convoy of state police officers arrived before dawn, and Governor Hughes accompanied them for a tour of the riot zone, along with several Guardsmen. More than 3,000 members of the National Guard arrived in Newark around 7:00 a.m.; another thousand would arrive over the next several hours, for a total of 9 battalions. The guard joined 475 New Jersey State Troopers and the majority of Newark’s 1,300-man police force (Porambo 2007:117). Guardsmen were transported in Army carriers, and as they were couriered through the city’s white sections, small groups stood on street corners shouting. ‘Kill the bastards,’ they cheered. ‘Shoot the niggers,’ others hollered. It appears the state’s governor shared some of their prejudice as well. ‘The line between the jungle and the law might as well be drawn here as well as any place in America,’ Governor Hughes told reporters, a cigarette between his fingers (Carroll July 15, 1967; Porambo 2007:118). Military forces swept through the city with .30 caliber M-1s and Reising .45-caliber automatic rifles. Guardsmen were ordered to form a perimeter around the riot zone—a 10-square-mile area between Bergen, Washington and Orange streets, and Chancellor Avenue, about one-third of the city—and by mid-afternoon, they were moving in small convoys throughout the city (Arnold July 15, 1967). By noon on Friday 137 blockades were installed, each with three guardsmen manning a post.

Thousands of black folks gathered along a “20-block stretch of debris-covered Springfield Avenue, a street lined with cheap furniture stores, bars, pawnshops and a few Moslem mosques,” explained Maurice Carroll of *The New York Times*. “When the police raced to quell one flare-up of looting along the street, bands of looters would strike at stores in another section. Gunfire was heard repeatedly in the troubled area” (July 14, 1967). Police made 900 arrests on Friday, and by the afternoon, Colonel Kelly “felt that most looting was under control and crowds were being contained” (Porambo 2007:118).

Arson was utilized as a tactic of rebellion in Newark, but it was nowhere near the scale of that seen in Los Angeles. Tom Hayden argues “the facts show that arson was insignificant in the Newark riot.” The fire department “reported 110 alarms from Thursday afternoon to Friday morning,” but the majority were false alarms. Hayden took a drive through Newark on Friday

morning, which “showed evidence of no more than twenty-five fires throughout the ghetto. There was a clear reason for this,” he argued: “most of the houses are wood-frame firetraps, and Negroes live above most of the stores that were looted. Burning would have risked the lives and property of black people. At the end of the riot, the fire department figures showed only ten ‘major’ fires” (Hayden 1967:39-40). The arson in Newark was political, according to historian Kevin Mumford, because it “destroyed abandoned structures, such as warehouses, closed stores, and homes,” but arsonists kept “fires at a distance from the residences and general population, resulting in few injuries and no casualties in the Central Ward.” More than 35 firefighters sustained injuries while battling the blazes, many due to rocks and other hurled projectiles. The Newark Fire Department reported to Governor Hughes that “unknown gunfire” was repeatedly “directed at rescue squads,” especially at main thoroughfares like Springfield Avenue in Newark and South Broome Street in Orange. “Firefighters responded to an estimated 364 real and false alarms and rescues” (Mumford 2007:131).

By early afternoon the National Guard had established 137 roadblocks throughout the city, according to the National Advisory Commission; it appeared as though “state police and riot teams were beginning to achieve control.” Governor Hughes took command of anti-riot operations and promised a ‘hard line’ in stifling the violence, but problems soon ensued. Technical difficulties, “such as the fact that the city and state police did not operate on the same radio wave-lengths,” prevented the “three-way command structure” of Newark Police, New Jersey State Police, and National Guardsmen from working as a cohesive team. African Americans would be subjected to a wave of state-sanctioned terrorism in the hours to come, mostly due to unfounded reports regarding the activity of ‘black snipers.’ The forces summoned to quell the black rebellion were nearly all white. There were five African Americans among a force of 1,200 New Jersey state troopers, many of whom were “from conservative South Jersey towns,” explains Hayden. African Americans comprised only 1.2 percent of the New Jersey National Guard in 1967; practically none of Newark’s 250 African-American policemen “took part directly in the violent suppression” (Hayden 1967:45). Early during the riot, police had orders to fire only in self-defense; by Friday afternoon, as police were engaged with snipers, “they fired wherever they thought the riflemen were hidden.” The city’s Human Relations Commission reported it had already received “dozens of telephone calls complaining of

unnecessary clubbings and beatings,” though most residents were hesitant to file formal complaints of police brutality (Robinson July 15, 1967).

Three carloads of police whipped around the corner onto Springfield Avenue around 3:30 p.m., the sirens wailing. Busted glass lay everywhere on the sidewalks. Looters ran in and out of stores, arms full of goods, some dressed in the fancy clothes they could never afford. A family stood in the upstairs of their apartment, above one of those stores on Springfield, watching the spectacle unfolding below from a window. Several officers jumped from the squad cars and hollered for the youths to halt; the sound of crunching glass could be heard as they ran off, some of them dropping the stolen property, others escaping. The police officers opened fire and a bullet tore through the kitchen window of a Mrs. D. J. Glass crashed to the floor, and a moment later, the mother’s heart sank with it: “she heard a cry from the bedroom.” Her three-year-old daughter Debbie ran screaming from the room. “Blood was streaming down the left side of her face: the bullet had entered her eye,” reports the commission. “The child spent the next two months in the hospital. She lost the sight of her left eye and the hearing of her left ear” (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 2016:65).

Robert Lee Martin had arrived in Newark only the year before with his parents and siblings from Greenwood, Mississippi. Martin had got off work at 6:00 a.m. that morning and, after getting some rest, he met his brother-in-law, Herbert Price, to see about getting some groceries. The men were on their way home—the stores were so crowded they had given up—and as they crossed Broome Street, the Price noticed three police cars approaching. ‘I just glanced over my shoulder ... like this,’ recalled the 24-year-old. ‘Some of the police were standing with their guns up in the air. The police had yellow stripes on their pants,’ he continued. Then gunshots rang out. ‘I just glanced back, you know, and there in front of me part of Robert’s head flew open and he went down. Part of his head just flew open before he hit the ground. I told that to the grand jury’ (Porambo 2007:226).

The battle on Springfield Avenue continued to rage, but things had been quiet at the corner of Broom and Mercer, where the Scudder Homes project stood. ‘It was a matter of seconds,’ said Willis ‘Bussy’ Harrison, who was standing in front of the Scudder Homes project with his two brothers, Virgil and Horace, and his father, Isaac “Uncle Daddy” Harrison, who had been born in Jamaica but had resided in New Jersey for 50 years by the time of the riot. Three



police cars roar up—and suddenly the officers just ‘got out of their cars, and started firing. There was no warning, nothing,’ said Willis. The chaos erupted just after 4:00 in the afternoon:

From behind their cars the small group of police looked at the crowd of people standing on the cement walkway not as curious spectators but as black people, the enemy. Anger and frustration took hold of the police and they opened fire. The warm air was pocked with the popping sound of .38-caliber revolvers and shotguns firing Double O ammunition. A continuing barrage ricocheted off the brick walls behind the crowd and fell to the ground like bird droppings. Those in the crowd didn’t believe the police were firing live shells—until they heard the slugs chipping at the bricks. (Porambo 2007:140-41)

Isaac was the first to get his. ‘I thought he had just fell because everyone was pushing,’ said Virgil, ‘so I picked him up and I was helping him up the steps when I got shot in the arm.’ A .38-caliber bullet ripped through Virgil’s right forearm; the 32-year-old was also hit on the side of his left knee. He walked with a limp after that night. ‘We were under fire, I would say, for approximately ten minutes by Newark police,’ recalled Horace Morris, associate director for the Washington Urban League and Isaac’s forty-year-old stepson (Porambo 2007:141). Bullets continued to chip away at the brick building. Finally, as the firing died down, Morris yelled to a sergeant that innocent people were being shot. ‘Tell the black bastards to stop shooting at us,’ the sergeant responded, according to Morris’s account. ‘They don’t have guns; no one is shooting at you,’ Morris replied. ‘You shut up, [sic] there’s a sniper on the roof,’ the sergeant hollered back (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder 2016:65). White-haired Isaac Harrison was rushed to City Hospital, “hit with five Double O slugs, four in the chest and stomach and one in the arm.” He died at 9:30 p.m.

Police returned to the Scudder Home *again*, following reports of sniper fire. “It was anger over these senseless shootings” that occurred earlier—the Harrisons and Robert Lee Martin, who had been shot by police near the same location around the same time—“that prompted gunfire from the upper stories of the projects” as police returned to the scene. Detective Toto was hit in the chest by a .22-caliber bullet as he stood “near the same area where police had fired on the defenseless crowd” and reported dead over police radio by 5:15 p.m. (Porambo 2007:143). The loss of one of their own appeared to enrage Newark police officers, for their behavior became increasingly militant as the night wore on, especially in terms of the use of deadly force: “Immediately after Toto was hit in the front of the projects, three men were murdered by Newark police in cold blood” (2007:240). Oliver Hill, 50, was the first to die, shot by a police officer while walking along Belmont Avenue. Twenty-nine-year-old Cornelius Murray was next, killed by a bullet that passed through his left chest as he stood in front of a tavern on Jones Street, just

off Springfield Avenue. Police claimed sniper fire provided a pretext for the use of deadly force; though they searched the tavern and all adjacent buildings, including the rooftops, no snipers were found, “nor any spent shells or cartridges,” according to the grand jury (2007:239). Rufus Council had just finished a sandwich at Roz’s on South Orange Avenue and was standing outside in a large crowd when squad cars came racing down Broome Street. An unmarked police car turned right onto South Orange as the officer in the back seat leveled his revolver. Council’s arms shot up and he shook his head, according to one witness, pleading not to shoot. Shot in the head with a .38-caliber bullet, Rufus Council “dropped in front of the restaurant as the police sped off like gangsters” (Porambo 2007:235).

Most of the residents on Beacon Street were sitting on their front porches. Kids were playing in the yard. Albert Black sat on his chair, watching the neighborhood in those early evening hours. James Sneed’s 1959 Pontiac was jacked up outside a three-story tenement building at 53 Beacon Street; its front brake needed to be fixed, so after he got done work, the 36-year-old Sneed “took the wheel off and got under the car.” A shot clanged into a garbage can next to where Sneed was working, which startled the man, so he “looked up and saw a state trooper with his rifle point at him.” The very next shot hit him in the right side. Eighteen-year-old Karl Green was standing on a porch outside the same building where James Sneed was working on his Pontiac. He was talking with two friends when several state troopers formed a line across the street near the corner. ‘Sure I saw the motherfuckers standing there,’ he later recalled, ‘but I wasn’t doing anything and I never thought they’d shoot.’ The troopers wore ‘riding pants with yellow stripes, like they were fucking Canadian Mounties or something, all that motherfucking, fancy shit,’ Green said. One of their bullets hit Green near the edge of his right eyebrow, hit his skull, and was ‘sticking out underneath the skin’ when he made it to the hospital, where he stayed for two or three weeks. ‘God damn if I know why they were shooting,’ he continued. ‘Yeah, man, I get mad when I think about it. I got reason to be mad’ (Porambo 2007:212). Seventy-six eye-witnesses signed a petition confirming this state-sanctioned terrorism, according to Albert Black, a witness and representative of Beacon Street residents who testified before the Human Rights Commission.

A mother, father, and their four children piled into the family car; somehow they had room for the husband’s brother to squeeze in. The seven of them headed for a restaurant to eat dinner. It was around 8:00 p.m. And it was the last dinner they’d spend together whole as a

family, because on the return trip, the husband panicked as he approached a National Guard roadblock and “ran through two barricades between Elizabeth and Hawthorne Avenues,” according to the grand jury report. Mr. Moss sped off down Elizabeth Avenue, ignoring the command to halt, and guardsmen fired two shots at his vehicle. When the family reached home, everyone began piling out of the car. Ten-year-old Eddie Moss failed to move. He had been shot through the head, killed by one of the two shots.

Widespread reports of sniper fire continued into the night. But according to Major General James F. Cantwell, Chief of Staff of the New Jersey National Guard, there was ‘too much firing initially against snipers’ due to ‘confusion’—confusion over the source of gunfire. The guardsmen viewed the operation “as a military action” and were oftentimes uncertain who was responsible for the gunfire in the first place. ‘As a matter of fact, down in the Springfield Avenue area it was so bad that, in my opinion, Guardsmen were firing upon police and police were firing back at them,” Director of Police Dominick Spina told the National Advisory Commission, attempting to shift responsibility away from his officers and towards another organization. ‘I really don’t think there was as much sniping as we thought,’ he admitted. ‘We have since compiled statistics indicating that there were 79 specified instances of sniping.’ No further information is provided from Spina, but the commission identified several problems that contributed to the widespread reports of sniper activity: “the lack of communications; the fact that one shot might be reported half a dozen times by a half dozen different persons at it caromed and reverberated a mile or more through the city; the fact that the National Guard troops lacked riot training.” The fact that there were only 303 African Americans on a force of 17,529 National Guard troops may have also been a contributing factor to the trigger-happy behavior; as one police official said, many of the troops appeared ‘young and very scared,’ since they had had “little contact with Negroes” (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 2016:66).

Governor Hughes imposed a curfew on the city at 10:00 p.m. after taking command of the riot-control operation. Newark was in ‘open rebellion,’ he said. Richard Taliaferro, 25, may have begun participating in the rebellion when, just after 11:00, a group of black men began pulling the grating off the window of the WC Liquor Store, located at corner of South 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It’s not clear whether Taliaferro was a direct participant in the vandalism or watching in the crowd, but as Porambo notes, “it made little difference.” ‘There were three cars,’ said Darnell Jones, an 18-year-old witness who saw the action from the other side of the street.

‘They came in like they were gonna blow somebody’s head off, they were shooting at everybody. They didn’t yell nothing, they just started shooting.’ Taliferro ran across 11<sup>th</sup> and cut up South 8<sup>th</sup> Street before he was hit with a shotgun blast; this did not deter the 6’2” and 220 pound man who continued to run, though “two of the four slugs passed through him.” He made it to the front stoop of a house several blocks up South 8<sup>th</sup> Street. ‘He just sat there on the steps and leaned over,’ said Reggie Brown, a 17-year-old witness. ‘He leaned further and further and fell on the sidewalk. The cop who shot him stepped over the body and looked in the alley for somebody else.’ Newark Police claimed Taliferro fired a gun at them as he tried to escape, according to the grand jury’s report. ‘There wasn’t no gun,’ said Brown; ‘nobody had guns but the police’ (Porambo 2007:221).

Another black man was gunned down in the street around the same time, just before midnight on Friday. Mulberry Street ran through downtown Newark, a dreary stretch paved with cobblestones and relatively remote from the riot zone. Albert Mercier, Sr. owned the Babalu Club on Mulberry, and he intended to pass his business along to his only son, 20-year-old Albert Mercier, Jr. Mercier also owned the Cozy Corner, another bar in the area he had purchased in 1961. But his son’s inheritance was stripped when he was shot in the back by a .38-caliber bullet which ripped clear through his body and kept on traveling after Albert Mercier, Jr. collapsed in the street. He and a friend had managed to squeeze through a small panel in a sliding door at W.W. Grainger, an electric motor company. Mercier dropped a package of merchandise he had been carrying from the warehouse upon seeing police officers approaching, at least according to the grand jury report. That the property was secured didn’t matter, nor that the scene of his death was far from the riot area. “He died because police behavior was becoming uglier as the riot persisted,” writes Porambo. “Mercier was sentenced to death for a petty crime, as were other victims, and he was executed on the spot” (2007:222). Ten African Americans were killed during the violence that Friday night. More than 100 people suffered gunshot wounds; another 500 were treated for injuries at City Hospital (Hayden 1967:48).

#### *Day 4*

By Saturday July 15, the National Guard had 173 roadblocks in place and “fourteen square miles of the riot area had been sealed off,” controlled by Newark Police and New Jersey State Troopers. Director of Police Spina received reports that snipers were firing in a Newark housing project. Spina rushed to the scene to find more than 100 National Guardsmen and police officers

“crouching behind vehicles, hiding in corners and lying on the ground around the edge of the courtyard.” In effect, the building was under siege, yet all was quiet. Spina began walking “directly down the middle of the street,” and nothing happened, but when he came to the end of the last building in the complex, he heard a gunshot. The troopers jumped, fearing they were under sniper fire. Then a young white soldier from the Guard “ran from behind a building,” and Spina confronted him. Did he fire the shot? ‘Yes,’ the soldier confirmed, “he had fired to scare a man away from a window; that his orders were to keep everyone away from windows.” Spina reprimanded the young man: ‘Do you know what you just did? You have now created a state of hysteria. Every Guardsmen up and down this street and every state policeman and every city policeman that is present thinks that somebody just fired a shot and that it is probably a sniper.’ “A short time later, more gunshots were heard, and Spina went to investigate the matter. He came upon a Puerto Rican man, sitting on a wall, and asked him where the firing was coming. ‘That’s no firing,’ the man replied. ‘That’s fireworks. If you look up to the fourth floor, you will see the people who are throwing down these cherry bombs.’ Four truckloads of National Guardsmen had now arrived on the scene; troopers and policemen were again crouched behind any barrier they could find, searching for snipers.

White pedestrians were assaulted on the streets of Newark, but certainly not with the same frequency and intensity as occurred two years prior in Los Angeles. In Newark, rioting “was aimed almost exclusively at white-owned stores, and not at such buildings as schools, churches, or banks,” notes Hayden. “The latter institutions are oppressive but their buildings contain little that can be carried off. To this extent the riot was concrete rather than symbolic.” Riot participants did not attack ‘soul brother’ stores. In Los Angeles, as we have seen, cars travelling through black neighborhoods driven by whites were stopped; these cars were stoned and the motorist beaten. Similar behavior occurred in Newark, attacks were less frequent and less vicious. “Many missiles were thrown at cars driven by whites,” notes Hayden, “but not often with murderous intent. Several times such cars were stopped, the occupants jeered at and terrified, and a few actual beatings occurred. However, no white passers-by or store owners were killed and very few, if any, were shot at. No white neighborhoods were attacked.” Interracial violence apparently was not as intense in Newark as it was in Los Angeles, and though “feelings of racial hate were released at white people,” acts of violence occurred “far less often than was suggested by the media” (Hayden 1967:33).

Just after 6:00 p.m. National Guardsmen charged up the stairs of the high-rise shouting, ‘Get back, you black niggers!’ Hayes Homes, a “mid-1950’s slum clearance project in which 1,000 human beings are crowded into twelve floors,” was located on Hunterdon Street. The building had a “smelly, unlighted stairwell, where the lightbulbs had either been stolen or broken” and a slow-motion elevator that sometimes welcomed riders with a puddle of urine. Eloise Spellman lived on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor, and she looked out her window when she first heard the shots. ‘She fell back and said, “Oh, God,”’ her 13-year-old daughter recalled. ‘She screamed and then she fell to the floor,’ her young son explained. ‘There was a lot of blood around her.’ The New Jersey State Troopers could be heard firing their weapons in the corridors before they reached the apartment. ‘They told us to get our black asses out of there,’ claimed Spellman’s 17-year-old daughter (Porambo 2007:20). Newark Police, the New Jersey state troopers, and National Guardsmen openly displayed racist attitudes towards African Americans while suppressing the rebellion; many instances of needless brutality can be documented, according to Tom Hayden who described several such scenes: Hayden notes witnessing an exchange where a Guardsman asked a witness, ‘What do you want us to do, kill all you Negroes?’ A Newark policeman chipped in, ‘We are going to do it anyway, so we might as well take care of these three now.’ “These are not isolated examples,” writes Hayden, “but a selection from innumerable incidents of the kind that were reported throughout the riots” (1967:46).

Across the street from the Hayes project, many folks stood in apartment windows watching the chaos unfolding down on the streets below. Mrs. Hattie Gainer also lived on Hunterdon Street, in a six-family tenement building. Marie Evans was Gainer’s 24-year-old daughter, and from outside on the sidewalk, she could see her mother looking from a second-story window. ‘They were shooting at the projects then and I went upstairs with my girl friend to my apartment on the third-floor,’ recalled Evans. ‘It looks like they’re getting ready to shoot up here,’ her friend warned, so Marie bolted downstairs to her mother’s apartment, where Hattie Gainer was watching Marie’s children—her grandchildren—trying her best to keep them calm. Evans heard gunfire as she raced downstairs and burst through the door: ‘my mother was laying in a puddle of blood and my kids were screaming,’ she said. ‘I kept yelling to her but she couldn’t hear me.’ Then two state troopers entered. ‘We made a mistake,’ one of them said. ‘We shot the wrong person.’ Marie Evans claimed the troopers made her and her children wait in the bathroom while they radioed for help. ‘My mother was moaning there in a puddle of blood,’

Evans recalled. ‘They weren’t trying to help her, there wasn’t no first aid or nothin’ for her, nothin’. They let her lay there in the blood until the ambulance came three hours later and then she was dead’ (Porambo 2007:21).

A block up the street Rebecca Brown’s 2-year-old daughter had also been standing at a window. Rebecca stayed home that day from her job as a nurse’s aide. At 30 years old, she had four children with her husband, Ozell, a construction worker. Ozell was late getting home from work that night; his brother had come over to stay with Rebecca and the four children. The Brown’s lived in an apartment on Bergen Street, and as Rebecca waited with her children in the front room, a window crashed to the floor. Rebecca ran to pull her child away, then more gunshots. Bullets “ripped open her abdomen,” and she later died in City Hospital. ‘They were shooting at everything that moved,’ recalled Ozell, ‘and I had a hard time getting home from work, ducking into doorways along Bergen Street.’ When Ozell reached the front doorway to his apartment building, he wasn’t permitted to enter: ‘They wouldn’t let me see her upstairs. They wouldn’t let me go up. I knew she was dead when they carried her down,’ he recalled. Ozell followed the ambulance that transported his wife’s body to the hospital. ‘I saw a guy get pulled from a car at Bergen and Sixteenth Avenue and the cops beating on him,’ Ozell said. ‘The guardsmen were riding around in jeeps saying, “Kennedy’s not with you now,” and “Let’s kill all these black bastards.” They rode by the people saying these things,’ Ozell recalled with disbelief. His apartment was sprayed with bullet holes: ‘My brother-in-law was in Viet Nam and my brother was in Korea and they both told me they weren’t allowed to shoot into huts where people may be living. We’re American citizens, how could they shoot where they didn’t know what was there?’ he asked (Porambo 2007:19-20; see also National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 2016:67).

Eloise Spellman was fatally shot in the left side of her neck while standing in the window of her 10<sup>th</sup>-floor apartment in the Hayes Homes project, on Hunterdon Street. Hattie Gainer was shot in the chest in her 2<sup>nd</sup>-floor apartment at 302 Hunterdon—at about the same time Spellman was killed. Rebecca Brown was shot in the left abdomen around the same time as Spellman and Gainer, and her home was located in that same general area on Hunterdon. ‘These three women were all innocent victims of shooting by State Police and National Guardsmen who had responded to the area because of reported sniper fire,’ the grand jury concluded. ‘Due to insufficient evidence of any criminal misconduct on the part of any identifiable individuals, the

jury found no cause for indictment in any of these three deaths’ (Porambo 2007:227-28). Ronald Porambo’s evaluation of the grand jury’s report is blistering and poignant:

Nine months after the burials of Eddie Moss, Michael Pugh, Mrs. Spellman, Mrs. Gainer, and Mrs. Brown, a grand jury came close to attributing the deaths of all five to the National Guard and the State Police. But not the responsibility, which, the presentment states, “*rests squarely upon the shoulders of those who, for whatever purpose, incite and participate in riots and the flouting of law and order in complete disregard of the rights and well-being of the vast majority of our citizens.*” References to “our citizens” masks the truth that two separate societies are involved and that in the one in which the jurors live, state troopers and guardsmen are unlikely to be walking up the streets pumping .30-caliber bullets into occupied homes. Further, the presentment’s language sanctioned a singular view that an entire population—men, women, and children—was accountable for the unlawful acts of a minority. (Porambo 2007:228)

Not a single New Jersey State Police officer nor a single National Guardsman was indicted for the murders of these innocent black citizens, and, as Porambo makes clear, that is because all of those killed were guilty for being black, for “being the same color as the rioters” (2007:228).

The Newark police combed the streets with deliberate aggression, destroying perhaps as many as “a hundred Negro-owned stores Saturday and Sunday” (Hayden 1967:49). One witness followed police down Bergen Street for fifteen blocks, watching them shoot into windows marked ‘Soul Brother’ or bash them with their rifles, reports Bigart in *The Times* (July 17, 1967). Tom Hayden spoke with a store owner who said that on Thursday night, only three white-owned stores were looted on his block; no stores owned by African Americans had been damaged. There were no other disturbances on his block—that is until well after midnight Saturday morning, when reports spread that state troopers were shooting into black-owned stores or shattering windows “with the butts of their guns” (Hayden 1967:49). Governor Hughes promised “reports of excessive behavior” by Newark police and the state troopers would be investigated—by their own investigative units, of course, not by an independent body

Four people were killed during the night on Saturday, “bringing the total to 21 as the fighting went into its fifth day,” including two African-American women who were “killed in clashes between snipers and the National Guard and police.” A black man was shot in the back and killed from behind as he ran from a looted store. “Terrorists ranged outside the ghetto and gunfire—including bursts from machine guns—resounded in downtown Newark,” writes Homer Bigart in *The Times*. The

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**NEWARK RIOT DEATHS AT 21  
AS NEGRO SNIPING WIDENS**

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Source: *The New York Times* (July 16, 1967)

total number injured had risen to 1,100. Police reported 1,600 persons had been arrested. There was also a “renewed outbreak of arson” in the city. In a press conference shortly before midnight, Governor Hughes declared the riot a ‘criminal insurrection by people who say they



hate the white man but who really hate America.’ It was time for the people of Newark to choose between the terrorists and law and order, declared the Governor (Bigart July 16, 1967).

#### *Day 5*

A Chinese man awoke to the sound of gunfire early Sunday morning; several army jeeps screeched to a halt outside his property. It was around 1:30 in the morning, July 16 when he and the rest of his family shut off the television they were watching in the backroom. The owner of Bow Woo Wong’s Chinese Laundry on South Orange Avenue, Mr. Wong had placed a sign that read ‘Soul Brother’ on the window of his establishment, at least according to the Kerner Report. Wong raced upstairs, where he witnessed soldiers and state troopers firing into stores—they were actually attacking establishments that had ‘Soul Brother’ signs displayed in their windows. “Mr. Wong hadn’t put a SOUL BROTHER sign in his store window,” explains Porambo, “but one of his black neighbors had written it on the glass for him,” and so the laundry had been unharmed, until state terrorism visited his doorstep (2007:213). Dozens of similar eye-witness accounts claimed that law enforcement officers “shot into and smashed windows of businesses that contained signs indicating they were Negro-owned,” not only on this evening but throughout the three days of peak violence (National Advisory Commission 2016:68).

Nineteen-year-old James Rutledge, Jr. entered Jo Rae’s Music Room around 5:25 p.m. with three companions. Jo Rae’s had already been looted, its broken windows boarded up. James had a knife, according to a police report (the knife was later identified as one bartenders used to cut lemons; it had been left on the counter). Little is known about what transpired once police officers entered the bar: affidavits of his companions were later proven to be lies. What was determined, however, was that James Rutledge had 39 bullet holes in his body. ‘Now I know a bullet hole when I see one,’ said Orlando Perry, an African-American undertaker who picked up the boy’s body from a funeral home being used as a morgue during the riot. ‘I’m not in a position to speak for anyone but myself. I’m not qualified to make an official announcement or anything like that,’ he said, ‘but I know what I saw. When I said there were thirty-nine bullet holes, there were thirty-nine bullet holes.’ Perry was fairly precise in his examination of the body:

Rutledge, rather tall and slim, was hit by four, possibly five shotgun blasts that ripped between thirty and thirty-five slugs into his back from less than five yards. Twenty-two of these slugs passed completely through his body. He was also hit by four .38-caliber bullets, also in the back, three of these also passing completely through his body. Two more .38s hit him in the right arm. Six other .38-caliber bullets *were neatly placed* in the rear of his skull. Actually, Rutledge was shot only sixteen or seventeen times in all, accounting for some forty-two holes in his body. (Porambo 2007:150; emphasis added)

James Rutledge was killed at the corner of Bergen and Custer streets. Testimony of ballistics experts indicated that ‘at least two revolvers and one or more shotguns had been fired,’ explains the grand jury, ‘but none of the spent bullets or slugs could be traced to any particular gun though tests were conducted’ (Porambo 2007:242). The four officers involved in Rutledge’s murder—two shotguns were used, with five shotgun shells put in his back, and two revolvers were emptied, with twelve .38-caliber slugs also hitting Rutledge—were not only free from indictment but “had been spared any embarrassment that would come from publication of their names” (2007:288). Rutledge’s death became the “first rallying cry for justice” (2007:121).

Lucille Pugh peered out her kitchen window late that Sunday night, well after 11:00 p.m. There didn’t appear to be any activity out on 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and so Mrs. Pugh sent her 12-year-old son Michael to dispose of the garbage. Michael walked down to the street, captured in the yellow light of a streetlamp, and as he was emptying the pail of garbage, a gunshot disrupted the drop. Apparently, a boy approached Michael and had “called the guardsmen some names” (Porambo 2007:22). One or more of the guardsmen opened fire and young Michael was killed, shot in the side by “a group of guardsmen standing a block away,” (Bigart July 17, 1967). Eric Mann, a teacher in the Newark school system, argued that *two different riots* occurred in the city during those six days in July: ‘One was started by black people and one by the State Police. The first riot was over in two days. It took very few lives but a hell of a lot of property. The second riot was pure retribution on the part of the National Guard and State police’ (Mumford 2007:127). Once the guardsmen were in place on the streets, “standing orders were to shoot if fired upon, because of reports of shifting sniper points from different floors in the buildings.” Though these reports were not verified, “central command sent patrols into the stairwells of public housing complexes, armed with rifles,” and “traces of sniper activity” were used to justify “further militarization. To corroborate these sightings of snipers, Colonel Kelly said that ammunition ‘casings’ were found in the stairwells of the Hayes Homes” (Mumford 2007:142).

### *Day 6*

Newark Police and the National Guard began hunting from house to house in search of snipers after gunfire killed three more people Sunday night and into Monday morning, bringing the total to 24 persons dead. At noon on Monday, July 17, Mayor Addonizio and Governor Hughes held a joint press conference where they estimated—without citing evidence—that as many as 25

snipers were active during the violence. Hughes argued that Newark's black residents were 'committing violence because they hate America.' Almost half of Newark's 23.7 square miles was "an occupied zone," writes Homer Bigart. "Something very much like war has occurred here as sniper fire from roofs and blackened windows has caused police to spray bullets into tenements and housing projects at scattered points" (July 17, 1967). Store-front gates lay twisted in the gutter as shattered windowfronts all along Springfield Avenue were boarded up with plywood. "Burned couches and timbers littered the street. And everywhere, shards of glass carpeted the sidewalk," reported Steven V. Roberts. "But mostly there was a pervasive silence that was interrupted only sporadically—by the clattering of helicopters flying above the area, by the sirens of fire trucks, by the voices echoing from the Pentacostal Baptist Church as a blue-and-red neon sign on the wall blinked, 'Signs, Wonders, Miracles'" (July 17, 1967).

Newark Police reported 25 cases of looting and several sniping incidents on Monday night. At 12:30 a.m. early Tuesday morning, a young black man was shot and killed by police at Clinton and Bergen avenues after allegedly attempting to carry a package from a store. Raymond Gilmer, 20 years old, was shot in the back of his skull with a .38-caliber bullet that exited through his forehead. 'They left his brains out there by the side of the building,' recalled an area resident. 'They were there for weeks, flies and all.' Police claimed Gilmer fired a pistol and hit a squad car before jumping into a stolen 1964 Pontiac sedan; according to their account, Gilmer abandoned the vehicle around Clinton and Jelliff avenues, attempted to flee on foot, and when he refused to halt, Newark police fired three shots. Lance Corporal John Richardson, a marine who was home on leave, provided a different account: 'Without any warning a shot was fired from the patrol car. All of the policemen got out of the car and one walked over to the body,' Richardson stated. 'He shined a flashlight on the wounded man and began to go through his pockets. There weren't any weapons, only a wallet.' Lance Corporal Richardson also noted that Gilmer *was still breathing*, yet not a single officer called for an ambulance. 'I called an ambulance myself' (Porambo 2007:231). Raymond Gilmer was the 26<sup>th</sup> and final person to die during the rebellion. Only two of the 26 persons killed during the violence were white: Fire Captain Michael Moran, allegedly killed by a sniper while attempting to battle a fire in the riot zone on Saturday night, and a police detective. White "law enforcement officers had been responsible for twenty-one homicides," concludes Porambo after reviewing all 26 deaths, and possibly 22, if Moran was actually killed by errant gunfire from police. Newark Police, New

Jersey State Troopers, and the New Jersey National Guard killed “for the purposes of terror and intimidation” during the riot, argues Hayden (1967:50). The Newark Fire Department “fought and controlled 250 fires, 13 of them considered serious,” and responded to another 64 false alarms (Porambo 2007:121). Nearly all of these fires were in business establishments—with stock losses and property damage totaling more than \$10 million. Nearly 900 businesses suffered property damage during the riots, with 25 stores classified as having been ‘completely demolished,’ and another 136 as being ‘heavily damaged.’ According to *The New York Times*, more than a thousand stores were “either damaged or looted or both,” but only three quarters of those interviewed after the violence reported having some form of insurance to rebuild and recover (August 26, 1967).

The evidence supports three conclusions regarding state intervention and the use of armed force. First, Newark Police, New Jersey State Troopers, and the New Jersey National Guard exhibited “trigger-happiness” due to a combination of factors, including “fear, confusion, and exhaustion,” but certain officers were “general and deliberate in the violence employed against the whole community” (Hayden 1967:50). Thus evidence indicates that a certain segment of law enforcement—likely officials from each of the three institutions—was responsible for brutality and murder. State troopers and guardsmen alone “fired 13,319 rounds of ammunition” in their attempt to restore order during the rebellion (Porambo 2007:122), and according to Police Director Spina, reports of snipers could be laid to these ‘trigger-happy guardsmen, who were firing at noises and firing indiscriminately sometimes’ (2007:132). The term ‘sniper,’ popularized in the press, “was at most a meager and disorganized response to wild gunfire on the part of the occupation forces [that] was subsequently blown out of all proportion,” according to Porambo. “The image of a black man, his head wrapped in a scarf, peering down the barrel of a Mauser from a tenement window is based on colorful imagination rather than truth.” *Life* magazine perpetuated the image in a “fabricated” story (2007:130). Thus a second conclusion: law enforcement and guardsmen were the real snipers, and it was their own careless gunfire that was then used to justify the use of deadly force. Porambo excoriates Newark’s entire criminal justice system in *No Cause for Indictment*, originally published in 1971, and his extensive analysis leads us to a third conclusion: “Newark police and the Essex County grand jury system seemed to institutionalize manslaughter and murder” (2007:301). Newark’s Black community

would receive no justice from the legal system and no empathy from the white public. A civil rights backlash was brewing in Newark and across the nation.

**‘IT LOOKS LIKE A CITY THAT HAS BEEN BOMBED’:  
BLACK REBELLION AND STATE REPRESSION IN DETROIT, JULY 1967**

Twelfth Street’s commercial strip runs north from West Grand Boulevard to Clairmont Avenue, a congested, unkempt district with squalid apartments above first-story shops. It was called ‘Sin Street,’ a vice district where the curious thrill seeker could get anything (Fine 2007:4).

Prostitution and violence were common on Twelfth, where median family incomes were well below the city average for nonwhites. A detailed study by the CCR [Commission on Community Relations] revealed that the median family income of whites in 1959 was \$7,050, as compared to \$4,370 for nonwhites” (2007:5). The disparity in occupational status between whites and blacks in Detroit in 1960 was clearly evident: Whereas 49.3 percent of white workers were classified as white collar, only 20.7 percent of black workers met that classification; whereas 19.9 percent of white workers were classified as professional or managerial, only 7.6 percent of the black workers were so classified. And as Fine notes, the proportion of black workers categorized as operatives (e.g., assemblers, truck drivers, etc.), laborers and service workers (e.g., janitors, waiters, etc.), and household maids or servants was *twice* that of white workers—70.2 percent compared with 35.2 (2007:7). African American workers were systematically excluded from the skilled occupations Detroit’s auto industry; for example, in Chrysler’s Detroit factories, “there were only twenty-four blacks among the 7,425 skilled workers in these plants” (Fine 2007:7).

Housing ‘was the crucial area of intergroup conflict in Detroit,’ according to Richard V. Marks, the secretary-director of CCR. “In 1943 it became official city policy to preserve the racial characteristics of neighborhoods in locating public housing projects. This policy was rescinded in 1952, after which one previously all-white project was integrated. That very little had changed, however, became evident in June 1954 when a federal district court enjoined the Detroit Housing Commission (DHC) from maintaining racially segregated projects, leasing units on the basis of color or race, and listing applicants for public housing separately by race” (Fine 2007:10). Residential segregation had actually *grown worse* in Detroit between 1930 and 1960, during which time “the percentage of blacks living in areas 90 percent or more black increased

from 15.8 to 23, and those living in areas between 50 and 89 percent black, from 33 to 61.8.” Fine notes that in 1930, “slightly more than half of Detroit’s blacks lived in predominantly white areas (50-89.9 percent white),” but by 1960, that figure had declined to 15.2 percent (2007:10). Between 1950 and 1960, 330,000 new housing units were constructed in the Detroit metropolitan area; of these new units, 3 percent were made available to African Americans. Racial discrimination in housing was widespread, thus it is “not surprising that 72 percent of Detroit’s blacks in 1960, as compared to only 17 percent of the whites, lived in the lowest-rated socioeconomic areas of the city” (Fine 2007:11). When African Americans were successful in relocating to a ‘white neighborhood,’ they were subjected to harassment and even violence.

In the months before the riot, Detroit officials began planning for “1,235 units for seniors and large families to be built in small concentrations” at different locations throughout the city. Most of the units were planned “to be built in white areas, which led whites to object that ‘forced integration by municipal action’ was an improper function of the city government.” The Common Council responded to pressure from white homeowners and “rejected two of the proposed sites.” As Fine notes, “This effort laid bare the racial implications of public housing policy in Detroit” (2007:58). Urban renewal efforts—many African Americans derisively called the government’s efforts ‘Negro Removal’—contributed to the housing problem. By March 1963 Detroit had 10 urban renewal projects underway, in addition to the Gratiot Project; more than “ten thousand structures had been demolished or were scheduled for demolition, and 43,096 persons, 70 percent of them black, had been displaced or were to be displaced by the various projects” (Fine 2007:62). Urban renewal and programs and freeway construction created a prickly problem for state and local governments: relocating those displaced by the demolition:

The slum areas that were bulldozed were commonly converted in Detroit and elsewhere to commercial and nonresidential use or were replaced by housing priced beyond the means of the residents who had been on the site. As of 1968, Detroit’s urban renewal projects had resulted in the razing of about eleven thousand homes, largely occupied by low-income blacks, and their replacement by 3,814 housing units, 2,797 of which were priced for middle- or high-income persons. ‘They tore down to put up new apartments we couldn’t afford,’ declared a black woman after the riot. (Fine 2007:62)

Many African Americans shared this woman’s perspective, arguing that a ‘racial motive’ was behind urban renewal.

Detroit’s public-school system was segregated at the beginning of the 1960s. Seventy-five of the high schools were “all white” and 8 high schools were “all black. Thirty-one schools had a student body that was more than 90 percent white and 70 schools had a student body that

was more than 90 percent black. Eighty-nine “had a mixed enrollment (more than 10 percent of both races). White teachers taught at white schools. Black teachers taught at black schools (Fine 2007:8). “The school administration insisted that segregated student bodies resulted from segregated housing patterns and that black teachers taught in black schools because the schools were in the neighborhoods where the teachers lived and preferred to teach,” explains Fine. “But critics of school administration policies, including the black member of the Board of Education, charged that as blacks moved westward in the 1950s, school authorities redrew the boundaries so the system’s nine administrative districts so as to maintain a pattern of segregation.” As a result, in 1961, “a majority of the students in four districts were black, including 95 percent of the students in the center district, and three districts were almost entirely white” (Fine 2007:8).

The Detroit school system was reliant upon a diminishing tax base as whites increasingly fled for the suburbs: “The valuation of the real property on which the school millage was based decreased from \$5.672 billion in 1960-61 to \$4.807 billion in 1966-67, which cost the schools a total of \$58.2 million between the 1960-61 and 1967-68 school years” (Fine 2007:42). Detroit was also in need of additional classrooms and teachers. Despite a state law that “set the maximum class size at thirty-five, classes in the inner city and in predominantly black areas often had forty or more students.” Fine notes that at the time of the riot, “Detroit would have needed 1,650 teachers and one thousand additional classrooms to have the same ratio of teachers per thousand pupils as in the remainder of the state,” which gives an indication of how racial discrimination affected the education available to black children in the state. African Americans were offered an inferior public education while white children in the suburbs and other parts of Michigan had superior resources; in other words, those most in need were denied access to resources while those whose parents had benefited most from the manufacturing wealth created by World War II would also benefit now from superior schooling. Tensions over public education reach a boiling point in 1966 when students boycotted classes at Northern High, located on Woodward Avenue and Owen, a school that was 98 percent African American. The situation at Northern was not a good one—over 55 percent of ninth grade students were reading at a sixth grade level, while more than 75 percent of students in tenth and twelfth grade scored below average in math, science, and reading. One student from Northern remarked, ‘any time there is an all-black school, people just don’t care, man, they just don’t care whether you learn or not’ (Fine 2007:52). Another wrote, ‘I want a better education and to be taught by teachers who

care.’ The student boycott at Northern had “far-reaching effects,” according to Fine, who argues that the protest “‘focused’ the community’s attention on the Detroit educational system as never before and created sharp divisions in the city regarding educational policy” (2007:55).

The behavior of Detroit’s law enforcement provoked the most resentment among African Americans. Racism was rampant in the Detroit Police Department, and not only in its policing practices. In 1959 there were 1,566 applicants for positions in the department, and 434 of those were submitted by African Americans. Only 1 black applicant met the department’s qualifications for employment that year; for comparative purposes, 54 white applicants, or 4.7 percent, “met the department’s qualifications and was hired” (Fine 2007:12). A CCR investigation revealed that “the failure of black applicants was ‘consistently greater’ than the failure of whites in all phases of the screening process”: African Americans were systematically excluded and the department’s “highly refined series of *screens*” provided justification to allude criticism of racial discrimination in hiring practices. There were also “weighted” mechanisms in the promotion process that make it incredibly challenging for African Americans to advance to detective and sergeant. Heavy rates were given to ‘service ratings’ and ‘promotional evaluations,’ meaning superior officers were given “considerable discretion in determining whom to promote,” and occupational figures confirm the success of the tactic: In 1958 only 8 percent of African American officers “were in ranks above that of patrolman, and not a single black in the uniformed division had ever held a rank above that of sergeant”; twenty percent of white officers held ranks above that of patrolmen (Fine 2007:12).

Detroit’s black community was “even more disturbed about the manner in which the department enforced the law.” In the 1940s and 1950s, “informal police rules” called for “the investigation of ‘all blacks west of Woodward Avenue after sundown,’ according to a white deputy chief of the department who testified before a federal district court. Blacks were ‘subjected to unreasonable and illegal arrests, indiscriminate and open searching of their person on the public streets, disrespectful and profane language, derogatory references to their race and color, interference with personal associations,’ according to the executive secretary of Detroit’s NAACP, ‘and violent, intimidating police reactions to their protests against improper treatment.’ Accusations of police brutality were widespread: “A retired black policeman recalled in 1960 that the police in one precinct amused themselves in the 1950s by beating up blacks.” The *Michigan Chronicle*, a black newspaper, claimed that brutality was ‘commonplace,’ that the



managing editor “had personally observed police officers, without apparent cause, beating up persons under arrest” (Fine 2007:13).

The Reverend Albert Cleage, Jr. was pastor at the Central United Church of Christ on Linwood, just west of Twelfth Street, and the most outspoken among Detroit’s black nationalists. Cleage hammered established black organizations such as the NAACP, the Detroit Urban League, and the Trade Union Leadership Council was lacking even ‘the slightest understanding of the total situation’ facing the poor living in the ghetto, ‘nor of their proper role in the total struggle.’ Fine notes that Cleage stressed two major themes: self-determination and black separatism. ‘The most important thing that’s happening in Detroit,’ Cleage declared in 1964, ‘is the shifting emphasis in the FREEDOM STRUGGLE from ‘integration’ to ‘Separation.’ Blacks had to ‘think black, vote black, and buy black.’ Black nationalist groups sprang on the scene in Detroit during the 1960s, “and the city became a center for militant black organizing” (Fine 2007:25). Black power received a great deal of attention, but advocates “attracted few followers,” according to Fine, who points to the Reverend Cleage’s unsuccessful political career—he “ran for office four times in the 1960s and was badly defeated on each occasion”—as evidence that the philosophy never held command in the African American community. The Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) was among those groups that advocated ‘organized violence’ in the pursuit of black freedom: “RAM appeared in Detroit in 1963 or 1964, but it never had more than a tiny following in the city” (Fine 2007:26).

Traditional civil rights organizations were also active in Detroit. Committed to the ideal of racial integration, groups such as the NAACP actively worked with the city’s leadership to improve opportunities for African Americans. “Charged with being Uncle Toms and supine in their behavior, they were neither,” writes Fine. “They were, to be sure, more moderate in their rhetoric than their rivals, but they were nevertheless activist; and though they were middle class in their leadership” and “more in tune with older than younger blacks, they were by no means unconcerned about ghetto conditions and the fate of the black poor” (Fine 2007:31). And Detroit did appear to be a city where African Americans had made considerable progress; it acquired “a national reputation” as a model city for coping with racial tensions. Detroit “had a large and prosperous black middle class.” It had an auto industry “that paid the unskilled wages that were 20 percent above the average for unskilled workers in the nation.” In 1965 there were three African American judges in Detroit. In 1966 two African Americans served on the Board of

Education and two of five members of the Housing Commission were black. In 1967 Detroit “drew attention as the only city to have two black congressmen—they made up half of the black representation in Congress.” Twelve African Americans from Detroit “were members of the Michigan legislature in 1967” (Fine 2007:32). Detroit received more than \$230 million from the federal government for community actions projects between July 1962 and the start of the riots in August 1967 (Fine 2007:18).

African Americans in Detroit “gained markedly in income as compared to whites and as compared to blacks elsewhere in the nation between 1960 and 1965.” In 1960, the median family income in Detroit was \$4,366 for blacks and \$6,769 for whites; by 1965, median family income for nonwhites “had increased sharply,” to \$6,405, “well above the national figure of \$3,886 for nonwhites” (Fine 2007:71). The white median family income had increased to \$6,846, thus while median income levels for African Americans grew by more than \$2,000 annually during those five years, for whites the increase in median income was less than \$100. Other indicators suggest economic improvement as well: “In 1961 white unemployment in Detroit was 7.1 percent of the labor force and black, 17.4 percent; but by 1965 the white unemployment rate had been reduced to a miniscule 1.6 percent and the black to 3.4 percent.” Yet despite this decline, African Americans remained “concerned about the character of their jobs and job discrimination,” likely because in 1966, “the proportion of whites in professional, technical, and kindred jobs exceeded the proportion of blacks in such jobs by seven to one” (Fine 2007:71). The percentage of the total Detroit population considered impoverished also declined, from 21 percent in 1965 (18.9 percent for whites, 25.9 percent for blacks) to 16 percent in 1967; at the time of the riot, “the poverty rate for blacks in Detroit had fallen to 19 percent, which was far below the national rate for blacks of 37.2 percent” (Fine 2007:92).

By the 1960s, black hostility toward police had become “so common and so intense,” according to Harlan Hahn and Joe R. Feagin, “that the mere presence of a white policeman performing routine duties in the ghetto, when coupled with other conditions conducive to unrest, often was sufficient to ignite explosive violence” (1970:183). Burton Levy, the head of the Community Relations Division of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, studied police-community relations for two years, and in 1968, “he concluded that it was the ‘*police system*,’ not ‘a few bad eggs,’ that was at fault.” The police system ‘recruits a significant number of bigots, reinforces the bigotry through the department’s value system and socialization with older

officers, and then takes the worst of the officers and puts them on duty in the ghetto, where the opportunity to act out the prejudice is always available' (Fine 2007:95). A field survey conducted before the Detroit riot "revealed that 45 percent of police working in black neighborhoods were 'extremely anti-Negro' and an additional 34 percent were 'prejudiced' (Fine 2007:96). If nearly 80 percent of the police force harbors negative attitudes towards black Detroit residents, it is easy to see why African Americans regularly complained about not just police brutality but demeaning and disrespectful treatment in routine interactions.

The president of the Detroit NAACP declared in 1965 that 'Negroes in Detroit feel they are part of an occupied country. The Negroes have no rights which the police have to respect. It would appear that the average policeman looks upon the Negro as being the criminal type.' Police brutality could have more far-reaching psychological consequences that went beyond physical punishment: "What made people so mad was the idea you could be stopped and frisked in a humiliating manner for no other reason than the fact you were Black." Many felt they could not walk down the street without being hassled, and 43 percent of black respondents in Detroit felt police frisked blacks without good reason (Fine 2007:99).

In June 1965 Police Commissioner Ray Girardin "formed a special staff to appraise and to modernize the department's 'plans, procedures, and equipment' for dealing with a riot." The Committee on Means of Handling Civil Disturbances was headed by District Inspector John Nichols, and in August of 1965, the committee "made a series of riot control recommendations to Girardin," largely based upon conclusions drawn from the riot in Los Angeles. The Nichols committee concluded that the Detroit Police Department was not prepared for a major riot such as Watts: "It recommended that the department acquire additional shotguns, carbines, helmets, gas guns, gas vests, and gas masks." The committee noted that the 'greatest need' in Los Angeles had been for better communications equipment—and L.A.'s "communications system was superior to Detroit's." While the police department did expand communications—its PREP system became fully functional early in 1966—it "was short of both shotguns and gas equipment at the time of the July 1967 riot," allegedly because it feared acquiring such equipment would only "serve as an irritant to the community."

The department developed a riot-training program based upon the committee's recommendations involving "commando and riot-squad formations," in addition to the use of arms and tear gas (Fine 2007:129). In addition, in June 1963, Governor George Romney directed

state officials to coordinate a riot response among the Detroit Police, State Police, and the National Guard; developed in 1965 and updated in May 1967, the plan was named Operation Sundown. Throughout the United States, ‘sundown towns’ was often the name given to those places where whites prohibited African Americans from remaining in town after dark. “These places get called ‘sundown towns’ because some, in past decades, placed signs at their city limits typically saying some version of ‘Nigger, Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on You in [name of town]’” (Loewen 2018:vii). Apparently, state officials thought Operation Sundown was an appropriate name for a riot-response strategy that would obviously target African American residents. Though Sidney Fine does not reference the symbolic significance of the name choice, the state’s intentions—and its blatant racism—is obvious. The intensity of white racism in Detroit was also evident: “Twenty-five crosses were burned in Detroit in April 1965, many of them in front of black residences in integrated neighborhoods. This hateful action reflected the increasing resentment by whites at what they regarded as the ‘molly coddling’ of blacks by city authorities” (Fine 2007:133).

The Tactical Mobile Unit (TMU) was the ‘front line of defense’ in the Detroit riot plan. Having “receiving training in both crowd and riot control,” and equipped with “shotguns, bayonets, and helmets,” the commandos of the Motor Traffic Bureau were also on that front line of defense. The Detroit Police Department had a Mounted Bureau that by 1966 was also trained in riot control. Sidney Fine describes the city’s riot response plan:

The Detroit riot plan called for containment of the affected area, dispersal of the rioters, and prevention of their regrouping. Tear gas was described in the plan as ‘an effective and humane method of riot control when a mass must be rendered physically ineffective for a limited period.’ The police were to provide a ‘rifle-shotgun guard’ for firemen entering the riot area. They were to avoid ‘personality clashes’ with rioters, maintain a ‘completely neutral attitude’ at the scene of the disorder, ignore verbal abuse from rioters, and refrain from using ‘insulting terms and names’ and ‘unnecessary or rough handling’ of those involved. (2007:128)

In August 1966 the Detroit Police Department effectively mollified a situation that could easily have erupted into mass violence. The Kercheval incident, as it was known, began at around 8:30 p.m. on August 9 with an exchange between an all-white police crew and seven black males over ‘loitering.’ More than 150 police were quickly deployed to the area: “helmeted TMU and commando squads, their bayonets fixed, swept the street and successfully dispersed the crowd. The police then cordoned the area and controlled to patrol it for the rest of the night “in task force units composed of two cruisers and a patrol wagon containing a squad of police. The TMU,

in six-car units, supplemented the patrolling force” (Fine 2007:138). Though the crowd “stoned about three dozen police and civilian cars,” broke windows, and managed “a failed attempt at a firebombing,” there was no looting and only one significant injury—black youths beat a white motorist after he stepped out of his car, which had been stoned, to inspect the damage (Fine 2007:139). Businesses on the mile-long strip of Kercheval remained open the following day.

In the spring of 1967, racial tensions hung heavy in the humid summer air. Posters began to appear in African American neighborhoods “urging blacks to join the ‘Black Guard,’ a ‘mystery group’ later identified as synonymous with the Revolutionary Action Movement, and to ‘unite’ and ‘defend themselves’ or ‘perish.’ Undoubtedly, as Fine notes, these posters “heightened concerns about the ‘long hot summer’ to come. “The Reverend Albert Cleage was telling his flock that the Black Guard was ‘a good thing,’ that blacks should ‘arm’ and ‘defend’ themselves, that it was time for them ‘to stop being House Niggers and slaves like Whitney Young and Roy Wilkins—and to stand and fight like Stokley [sic] Carmichael and Cassius Clay”” (Fine 2007:143).

In the 12th Street neighborhood where the riot began, the population of just under 5,000 was 98 percent black. The median family income in 1965 was \$4,000, the unemployment rate was 10 percent, “triple the nonwhite rate for the city and six times as high as the white rate.” A survey conducted between October 1966 and February 1967 in Census Tract 187, “one of the most congested in the entire city,” reveals data on attitudes held toward the community:

84 percent of the inhabitants of Census Tract 187 did not care for their neighborhood, and 92 percent wanted to move to another neighborhood. Seventy-two percent thought the neighborhood was ‘not too safe’ or ‘not safe at all’; 91 percent said they were ‘somewhat or very likely’ to get robbed/beaten at night’; 80 percent were dissatisfied with the recreational facilities available in the area; and 33 percent were unhappy about the education their children were receiving. Whereas 48 percent of the blacks in a well-to-do census tract in 1965 indicated that the police would respond to a call about ‘housebreaking’ in their neighborhood in ten minutes or less, only 22 percent in Census Tract 187 were of that opinion. (Fine 2007:153)

Some African Americans living in the Twelfth Street neighborhood felt they had ‘nothing to lose’ by rioting; others “made a determined effort to defend their homes, offering protection to firemen being pelted by the rioters” (Fine 2007:153). Fine reports on one black man, ostensibly upon being asked why he would burn his own community, replied, ‘How can you call this place a home? This ain’t no mother-fucking home. This is a prison. I’d just as soon burn down this damn place as any other’ (2007:154).

A pink and green jukebox pumped Aretha Franklin's 'Dr. Feelgood' from just inside the corner bar. A bartender jabbed his metal scoop into a tub of ice as the clack of billiard balls spilled into the street. At an all-night restaurant next door, "a full house munched the \$1.95 'soul food special'—pigs' ears, black-eyed peas, mustard greens, and baked yams. This was 12<sup>th</sup> Street" (Lukas August 27, 1967). Just north of the intersection with Clairmount Street was a blind pig, which is where the trouble began. The speakeasy, located up a flight of stairs from the building's entrance, was hidden behind a door with a small sign: 'The United Community League for Civic Action.' The after-hours establishment was known to law enforcement, and early Sunday morning on July 23, the bartender served a black man working as a police informant. And so just after 3:45 a.m., a column of police burst down the door and rushed up that flight of stairs, expecting to bust 30 patrons. They found 83. Black men and women were marched out into 12<sup>th</sup> Street, which was still bustling, even at the late hour. Seventy-three patrons were arrested, ushered out as residents in the surrounding buildings watched from darkened windows. The crowd swelled, from about 20 to more than 200; occasionally they jeered as police loaded prisoners into their paddy wagons (*The New York Times* July 24, 1967). Despite the growing resistance, all police involved in the raid were ordered to withdraw. "Just who gave the order is unclear," writes Fine, "but it was based on a presumption": police presence would further inflame an already tenuous situation, perhaps causing greater violence. 'If they left, the crowd would leave too,' one 12th Street resident quipped; this logic proved faulty, however.

Police were retreating from the scene, around 4:40 a.m., when a bottle "suddenly arched across the street, glinting briefly in the light of a streetlamp" before crashing through the rear window of a police cruiser (Lukas August 27, 1967). Black residents saw the police departure as a kind of tactical victory. 'For the first time in our lives we felt free,' said William Scott III, whose father was part owner of raided blind pig (Fine 2007:161). 'Those first few hours, when the cops pulled out, were just like a holiday,' recalled another young African-American male who joined in the looting that erupted in the aftermath. 'All the kids wandered around saying, real amazed like, "The fuzz is scared; they ain't goin' to do nothin'," he said, and the kids 'did all the things we'd been wantin' to do for a long time.' It was time for some compensation: 'that's what it was like out on the Street,' the young black man explained. 'All the guys who'd been sittin' on us—specially those shopkeepers who charged us 60 cents for a 49-cent half-gallon of milk—they go some dues paid' (Lukas August 27, 1967).

Shattered glass fell onto the sidewalks and into the streets, an invitation for poor folks to finally participate in the spoils of capitalism. In less than two hours since the mass arrest at the blind pig, 30 display windows had already been wrecked. The crowd swelled to about three thousand by 8:00 a.m.; by 8:24, a fire raged in a shoe store at 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Blaine. The three-story brick and frame structure housed 18 apartments and five stores. Vandals wrecked the building while looters cleared the shelves; they worked the store for two hours, and when word was passed that police were on their way, it was time to finish the job. ‘Okay, set it,’ the store’s owner heard one of them say (Fine 2007:165). Flames quickly spread through the store, up the walls, into the cramped apartments above. Detroit police did nothing to stop the window breaking, nothing to prevent more looting. One group approached a dry cleaners south of Clairmount carrying several five-gallon cans of gasoline: ‘they busted this big window and had a production line set up, where they were passing out this clothing—and it was funny, probably they were stealing their own clothing, because this was all secondhand stuff, you know,’ recalled Senak. ‘Well, they were passing this stuff out by the handfuls, and then they took these five-gallon cans of gasoline, took them in there, and put the place afire. And this was all in the presence of uniformed police officers’ (Hersey 1998:75). Police inaction would prove costly, heightening the carnival atmosphere unfolding in the streets: it was a “giddy sense of release from the oppression of routine, white-dominated life in the ghetto,” writes Fine. It was an opportunity for “ghetto residents to ‘exact revenge’ against those whom they believed had for so long mistreated them” (2007:165).

Sirens echoed down alleyways as residents raged in the streets, perhaps as many as ten thousand by noon as officers raced from place to place responding to newly reported acts of rebellion. Three squad cars, each with four police officers, were dispatched to the riot zone. ‘We proceeded east on Philadelphia toward Twelfth, and we were just getting to Twelfth Street—it was an officer-in-trouble run—and these two colored came running from between the houses, and they each had a brick in their hand,’ recalled David Senak, a 24-year-old police officer who had been on the force three years. ‘They came running up point-blank range and one of them threw a brick through the front windshield of our car.’ The four officers jumped from the squad car when a second black male tossed a brick through the police car behind them. Senak took chase into an alleyway, but ‘two colored males attacked [him] from either side’ (Hersey 1998:65). After wrestling with one of the men, and nearly getting kicked in the face by the other,

the officer called for backup. The men fled. Senak and the other officers were given orders to cordon off the area: ‘so they were coming up the street, and there were a good thousand of them—I think that’s a small estimate, really—and they were throwing rocks, rocks and bottles, anything they had, and it looked like rain they were coming down so heavy” recalled Senak, a regular of the vice squad. ‘And as they were coming they were breaking the windows of the stores on either side of them, and just looting, just open looting.’ Senak described how one rioter ‘ran about three stores ahead of the mob, threw this chair through a window, went inside,’ and carried away a wooden crate containing fifths of whiskey. This black man even had the audacity to throw one of those fifths at a police officer, with blatant disregard for his authority—yet when that officer raised his rifle to fire it was ‘jerked out of his hands’ by a sergeant. He ‘didn’t want to agitate these people,’ said Senak, baffled and outraged by the whole affair. This permissive policy of restraint proved disastrous. ‘It started because the police just stood there when the looting started,’ one resident of 12th Street testified; another claimed he would have stopped looting if an officer had ‘pulled a gun,’ but the police ‘seemed to be enjoying seeing 12<sup>th</sup> Street tore down’ (2007:177). Residents realized they were finally in control.

Ten thousand people surged through Detroit during that first day of violence, “looting stores in an area which extended from Livernois on the west to Conner on the east and from the Detroit River to Seven Mile road,” explains Locke. The police department “logged over 900 calls and scout car runs” (2017:34). Twenty-eight riot-related incidents were reported to police and sent out over radio between noon and 1:00 p.m., and the situation steadily deteriorated. Mayor Jerome Cavanagh requested the aid of the National Guard at 4:20 p.m.; by 5:25, the first guardsmen began arriving at Central High School, a riot staging area, and just before 7:00, Governor George Romney deployed the first unit. Detroit was placed under curfew from 9:00 p.m. through 5:00 a.m., and at 10:25 p.m. Commissioner Ray Girardin ordered all gas stations in the city closed. Yet still the violence escalated: between 11:00 p.m. and midnight, 182 violations were reported—an “average of three per minute in an area covering 11 of the city’s 13 police precincts,” according to Locke (2017:33)—bringing the total reported incidents for that first day to 960 (Fine 2007:185-6). More than 300 fires were set. Forty of them continued to rage out of control just before midnight, when Governor Romney declared that Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park were in “a state of public emergency” (Locke 2017:34).

*Day 2*



The first riot death was reported at 12:25 a.m. on Monday, July 24—a 45-year-old white male shot and killed by a white store owner, allegedly for looting. Within the next three hours, two more people were killed: a 23-year-old white female was shot at Woodward and Melbourne at 1:35 a.m., apparently by a sniper (according to police), and at 4:00 a.m., a 23-year-old white male was shot by guardsmen, also allegedly for sniping (Locke 2017:35). The entire block at Dexter and Davidson, home to 8 businesses, was completely gutted by fire during this time; the backlog of alarms was so intense that police and firefighters struggled to respond, and in some cases, emergency vehicles were unable to approach a blaze because they were met with stones, bricks, and in some cases gunfire. “At one point, beleaguered firemen pulled out of the blazing areas, saying that they had insufficient protection,” according to *The Times*. “They left their hoses in the streets. Block-long sections of tenements and small businesses went up in smoke,” but firefighters later returned, oftentimes because residents came together to offer protection: about 20 African Americans formed a block club and armed themselves with rifles. ‘They say they need protection,’ said Lennon Moore, a block member deployed to protect the firefighters, ‘and we’re damn well going to give it to them’ (July 24, 1967).

Black Detroiters raced in and out of busted windows with armloads of merchandise, even furniture and other home appliances. Some wore the clothes right out of the store, strutting down the street in those finer things they couldn’t normally afford. Liquor flowed freely; beer bottles crashed into the street. An entire four-mile stretch of businesses along Woodward Avenue were stripped bare and another three-mile section of Grand River had also been plundered. “Looters roamed freely within swirls of smoke in the embattled area, carrying clothes, lamps, golf bags and other goods from flaming shops and stores with their fronts bashed in,” according to *The New York Times*. Fires raged through “tenement buildings, businesses, and individual residences in a mile-square section of the city’s near West Side,” with additional blazes erupting on the Northwest Side. “Great clouds of smoke from flaming tenements and shattered businesses and homes lay over much of the city as dusk came,” reported *The Times*. A 20-block area of Grand River was “almost solidly aflame” (July 24, 1967). On 12<sup>th</sup> Street, where rioting first erupted, police checked buildings for suspected snipers as many homes and businesses burned (below):

This level of arson stands in contrast to the violence in Newark in terms of both frequency and intensity—there were more fires set by the end of the first day of violence in Detroit (300) than during the entire riot in Newark (100). ‘It looks like a city that has been bombed,’ remarked

Governor Romney while sweeping above the city in a helicopter over the riot zone.” Firebombing and looting spread uncontrolled “along three-mile and four-mile sections of streets crisscrossing the heart of Detroit and ranging seven miles outward almost to the city limits,” according to *The New York Times*. “Helicopters equipped with floodlights and manned by officers armed with submachine guns whirred through the fire-streaked darkness in search of rooftop snipers” (July 24, 1967). ‘We all thought that there was some organization behind it,’ said Robert Paille, a 31-year-old Detroit police officer who had been on the force two years by the riot, ‘that there were some experienced men there behind those guns.’ Police cruisers crept down riot-torn streets during that second day with their lights off, and Paille did the same. ‘I was just like everybody else,’ he said. ‘You never knew when somebody would take you or something of the sort there.’ A ‘few of these snipers had night scopes,’ the rumor went: ‘they could actually see in the night through the scope there and pick you right off, no matter if you had the lights off or not’ (Hersey 1998:119).

Just before midnight on July 24, President Johnson ordered Federal troops into Detroit, the nation’s fifth largest city, now under insurrection. Two police stations were under siege from apparent sniper fire, and the president approved sending 4,800 Army paratroopers to quell the violence after receiving a telegram requesting assistance just before 11:00 p.m. from Governor George Romney, who would later accuse Johnson of ‘playing politics’ in his response (Reed August 4, 1967). In just the past hour, five fire stations and two police command posts had also been attacked by snipers; according to Locke, police officers became convinced they were engaged in perhaps the “worst urban guerilla warfare” in United States history (2017:41). And for good reason. The death toll already stood at 19 and property damage, estimated by police at \$150 million, was *already* worse than in any riot in the nation’s history. ‘It looks like Berlin in 1945,’ said Mayor Cavanagh. (Roberts July 25, 1967).

### *Day 3*

At 3:00 in the morning a squad car full of uniformed police officers rushed down John R to the corner of Holbrook where looters were clearing groceries from the shelves of an A & P. Patrolmen Jerome Olshove (pronounced *All-shuh-vee*), Roy St. Onge, and William Bolgar responded to the call where they found one man, Albert Phillips, standing in front of the store with his face bleeding from a shotgun wound. Phillips would later die in the hospital. Twenty-year-old Danny Royster and 19-year-old Charles Latimer were still at work inside the A & P

when the officers commanded them to come out, hands in the air. The young men were ordered against a wall, and Latimer obeyed; he was handcuffed by Olshove. Royster hesitated or resisted the order, according to the police, and was then shoved. He began to scuffle with St. Onge, who had a 12-gauge shotgun, and both men fought over the weapon; it was Royster who discharged the weapon as he tried to grab the gun, according to St. Onge's account. Jerome Olshove, a 32-year-old officer who was well-liked by his peers, was killed in the blast. Four months earlier, he had become a dad. 'It sure was,' said Patrolman David Senak when asked whether the death of Olshove was a source of great anger for the police department (Hersey 1998:128-30).

Hundreds of new fire alarms continued to pour in as the insurrection surged into its third day. More than 731 fires had already been set in two days of violence, and large areas of the city were blanketed by thick clouds of black smoke. "Tanks rumbled into the city's East Side to rescue more than 100 policemen and National Guardsmen who were trapped inside the precinct houses" (Roberts July 25, 1967). On a section of Grand River Avenue, where African Americans and Southern whites lived in contiguous neighborhoods, stores were "raided by integrated bands of looters. At Packer's a block-long food and clothing center, a Negro looter boosted a white looter through a window," writes Gene Roberts for *The New York Times*. "Scores of other Negroes and whites looted and chatted side by side in the store, loading shopping carts, boxes, and bags with booty. When a busload of policemen arrived at the scene, the White and Negro looters scampered away, shouting to one another to 'run fast.'" One 12-year-old boy filled a brown bag with candy; another youngster raced from a florist's shop with gladiolas. One African American woman was seen trying to carry a mattress on her back. Streets, sidewalks, and parking lots were littered with televisions—apparently, some looters chose TVs that had "proved too heavy" to carry far. Liquor stores were cleared out fast, and even middle-aged black folks "could be seen staggering along the streets with bottles in their hands" (Roberts July 25, 1967).

The battle shifted to Detroit's west side later that Tuesday, July 25. Police accompanied fire engines to the "hundreds of fires still burning throughout the city," as sniper fire intensified once again. Between 9:00 and 10:00 p.m., police received "reports of police and guard patrol units under gun fire," from eight different locations "scattered around the city." The pattern of sniper fire intensified through the final hours of Tuesday evening:

By 10:20 p.m. the curious pattern of the previous night's gun fire activity had begun to emerge again with report of snipers firing on the Kiefer command post. Eighteen minutes later snipers were firing across Livernois into the 10<sup>th</sup> precinct station. Twenty-three minutes later snipers opened fire across town on the

fire station at Mack and Rivard (precinct 1), 10 minutes later the fire station at Livernois and West Chicago ... was under heavy sniper fire, and 19 minutes later the fire department command post at West Warren and Lawton came under sniper fire (precinct 2). In the last 25 minutes of Tuesday night, the police department logged 15 reports of sniper fire, 4 lootings, and 4 fire bomb incidents. (Locke 2017:43).

And it did not ease up after midnight, as the “early hours of Wednesday, July 26, turned out to be one of the worst periods of the riot.” The *Detroit News* accused black snipers of turning “140-square blocks north of West Grand Boulevard into a bloody battlefield for three hours,” temporarily routing police and the National Guard. “It was as though the Viet Cong had infiltrated the riot-blackened streets,” the paper said. “Tanks thundered through the streets and heavy machine guns chattered” (cited in Hersey 1968:21).

#### *Day 4*

Seven people were killed during the first three hours of Wednesday morning. Helen Hall, 50, of Oakdale, Connecticut was staying at the Harlan House. She was in town taking inventory of electrical supplies purchased by her firm. Hall, a white mother of three children, watched a gun battle unfold below from the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the Harlan House Motel, near General Motors headquarters. It was around 12:50 a.m. when three bullets shattered the window. Helen Hall was killed, according to an investigation by the *Detroit Free Press*, from a bullet fired by the

**TROOPS BATTLE DETROIT SNIPERS,  
FIRING MACHINE GUNS FROM TANKS**

Source: *The New York Times* (July 26, 1967)

National Guard (Roberts July 27, 1967; Locke 2017:44). Four-year-old Tanya Blanding was huddled with her family in the living room of their second-story

apartment. The sound of gunfire was frequent. It was just after 1:00 in the morning when a National Guard tank moved into position outside their apartment building at 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Euclid. Then one of the occupants of the Blanding apartment lit a cigarette—at least, according to a guardsman’s account—and “tank crews blasted away” with .50-caliber machine guns (Roberts July 26, 1967). Tanya Blanding was killed at 1:20 a.m. that Wednesday. Paranoia over sniper activity appears to have prompted the trigger-happy response. At 2:20 a.m. 19-year-old William Dalton’s body “was found lying in the street at Grand River and Edmonton.” There are two competing accounts regarding his death—the official account is that police ordered Dalton to *halt* and he did not listen, while the bystander account is that the police ordered Dalton to *run* and in complied—but regardless of which account one believes, the ending is the same: William

Dalton was either shot by police “as he fled” or shot by police because he “continued to flee” after they demanded he stop (Locke 2017:45).

The Algiers Motel was located at 8301 Woodward Avenue, a notorious pleasure den frequented by narcotics peddlers and prostitutes. Outside the main part of the hotel a towering sign stretched between two fieldstone posts featuring a “neon-fronded palm tree drooping over a chrome frame enclosing the legend of its Africa-whispering name,” wrote John Hersey, who investigated the deaths of three persons who were shot to death between 12:17 on Wednesday night and 2:21 a.m. Thursday morning. Hersey describes the property as containing the motel, a “two-story wing of rooms with pink-painted concrete-block walls” with a large pool out front. Most of the trouble transpired at the Algiers Manor House, however, “an annex to the motel proper, originally one of the big bourgeois houses of Virginia Park, a three-story brick bulk trimmed in white wood.” The manor house contained “enormous dormers” on the third floor, “big bay windows on the ground floor primly curtained in white,” and a wide front porch buttressed by heavy white pillars (Hersey 1968:15). Clara Gilmore, a young receptionist who worked at the front desk, said she had heard several shots fired from the direction of the manor house; within several minutes, “an Army jeep and three or four police cars” rushed into the parking lot on the west side of Woodward Avenue, right in front of the motel’s glass-fronted office. Officers in uniform took cover behind trees and several sections of “stone-capped brick walls” separating the Algiers property from Virginia Park, the elm-lined street to its south. Gilmore heard several more gun shots. Then her switchboard lit up on the counter. It buzzed. A girl was on the other end; she had been talking to her boyfriend, Larry Reed, who was staying in A-3. The girl heard shots in the background and the line cut out. Clara Gilmore went to call room A-3 and found the line open. ‘Get your hands up!’ she heard someone yell. ‘Watch out!’ another shouted. After hearing several shots, Gilmore “panicked and pulled the plug” (Hersey 1968:17).

Fires continued to rage throughout the city that Wednesday as Army paratroopers “shielded firemen during an outbreak of more than 100 new fires.” In addition to the 4,700 paratroopers dispatched by President Johnson, 2,262 Michigan guardsmen and 4,000 Detroit police officers combated the violence as it continued to spread from 12<sup>th</sup> Street to other sections of the city (Sheehan August 23, 1967). Wednesday’s looting and arson was concentrated mainly on Detroit’s East Side—located more than 12 miles from the Grand River-Linwood-12<sup>th</sup> Street districts—likely because few stores remained in the African-American communities in the

northwest of the city. “No fewer than 950 buildings had been destroyed or heavily damaged by fire,” wrote Gene Roberts, and at least 1,500 more had been looted; total property loss was estimated at more than \$150-million, “making it the costliest riot in the nation’s history.” Police made 2,700 arrests. Nearly 900 people suffered injuries during the first four days of violence; thirty-one people had already been killed, of whom five were white, and seven “refugee centers” were providing care for families who fled the most dangerous riot areas (Roberts July 26, 1967). More than ten thousand persons were fed at these emergency centers on Wednesday (Flint July 28, 1967).

### *Day 5*

Grand River Avenue was packed with motorists Thursday morning, seeking a glimpse of the devastation. One block on 12<sup>th</sup> Street between Philadelphia and Pingree avenues had 10 stores. “Only blackened facades and twisted girders remain today,” wrote Jerry M. Flint of *The New York Times*. “There are no roofs, no second floors, and no first floors. The facades were being pulled down and the rubble pushed into basement holes by bulldozers.” Business districts on the West Side were hardest hit—especially 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Linwood, and Dexter—but cleanup crews were already out removing debris from the hardest-hit neighborhoods. Honest Joe’s, a 12<sup>th</sup> Street clothing, was burned the previous evening; dismembered mannequins were strewn about on the floor as a small fire continued to burn inside the store. About a mile to the west, on Linwood and Pingree, one house was left standing on the corner; the next eight were gone, nothing left on the entire block “but a row of blackened chimneys.” Bulldozers and cranes were out toppling burnt-out buildings while police and guardsmen continued to patrol the streets. “It is a spotty rather than a total destruction, with an entire block on one side of a business street destroyed while the other side of the street may be untouched,” wrote Flint. “On a single block, three stores may be burned or looted. The next three on the same block may be untouched” (July 28, 1967).

Despite improvements, Detroit’s West Side remained under siege. Black snipers “waged daylight guerilla operations.” Firefighters battling flames at Grand River Avenue and 14<sup>th</sup> Street came under attack, presumably by snipers. A police command post at Herman Kiefer Hospital was also under sniper fire. Guardsmen rolled into the West Side section of the city, “raking roofs and the debris of burned-out buildings with .50-caliber machine guns.” Two guardsmen were injured in the fighting. ‘It just takes time to rout them out,’ said Lieutenant General John Throckmorton, commander of the Federal forces in Detroit, ‘and we will rout them out.’ Armed

helicopters “swooped low over buildings,” casing rooftops for sniper activity (Roberts July 27, 1967).

Locke argued that two factors stood out in Thursday’s violence: white Detroit residents and ‘out-of-towners’ were participating. A 24-year-old white male was wounded by police after he was caught launching a firebomb into a barber shop. During the afternoon, police fought a “running gun battle” against three carloads of white males in the Lodge Freeway and Boston Boulevard area but only managed to apprehend one car and its occupants. Several hours later, police “broadcast descriptions of cars with Alabama, California, Illinois, New York, and Ohio plates, all wanted for breaking and entering, possession of loot or guns, or firebombing” (Locke 2017:49).

Violence began to wane on Friday, July 28. A young African American was killed by an Army paratrooper on Sunday night, July 30—the first killing of a Detroit civilian inflicted by Army troops during the riot—bringing the total number who lost their lives in the violence to 40. Detroit police officers were responsible for 13 of the deaths, National Guardsmen for three. Private guards and civilians were responsible for five deaths, while snipers were charged with two killings. Three people were killed by fire. The remaining 13 died from ‘undetermined’ firing. More than 5,000 persons were arrested, and even on Sunday July 30, a full seven days after the rebellion began, 4,200 Federal troops and 7,000 National Guardsmen remained in Detroit, some on active patrol, others waiting in reserve within the city (Flint July 30, 1967). The 41<sup>st</sup> victim felled during the rebellion was fireman John Ashby; struck by a “falling high tension wire” while fighting a fire on Tuesday July 24, Ashby died ten days later of “shock and burns” (Flint August 5 1967). He was the second firefighter killed during the rioting. The 42<sup>nd</sup> victim died the following day, August 5, after fighting for his life for 12 days: George Tolbert, 20, was shot when he “allegedly ignored a ‘halt’ order from two Guardsmen on a West Side street.” The 43<sup>rd</sup> victim also died August 5<sup>th</sup> from gunshot wounds received July 26<sup>th</sup> when he was shot by a Guardsmen, apparently during a “sniper incident,” according to police. Albert Robinson was 38 years old when he died, the 34<sup>th</sup> African American killed during the rebellion. It was not until August 6<sup>th</sup>—two weeks after Detroit was “plunged into the bloodiest and most costly Negro riot in modern United States history”—the Governor George Romney lifted his state of emergency orders (*The New York Times* August 6, 1967).

Bernard DeCoster, city fire marshal, said that arsonists “destroyed or badly damaged” 477 buildings during the week of violence in Detroit (Flint August 5 1967). An insurance survey showed that 538 businesses had been “destroyed” and 549 other establishments “seriously damaged: drug and liquor stores were most targeted, with 131 destroyed and 68 seriously damaged; grocery stores were second, with 83 destroyed and 93 others seriously damaged; clothing stores came third, with 51 destroyed and 80 seriously damaged; and finally laundry stores, with 57 destroyed and 77 seriously damaged. The General Adjustment Bureau noted that 24 apartment buildings suffered extensive damage (12 destroyed, 12 seriously damaged). Dun & Bradstreet estimated that businesses in Detroit averaged \$23,063 in damages, compared with \$12,000 in the Newark riots (*The New York Times* August 12, 1967).

The Detroit *Free Press* concluded from its investigation that Michigan Guardsmen were responsible for 11 of the 43 deaths that occurred during the rebellion—nine of these persons were later deemed innocent of any wrongdoing. National Guard troops ‘did not obey’ when ordered to unload their weapons and fire only when given command by an officer. Eighteen of 43 victims were shot by Detroit Police: according to the *Free Press*, 14 of the 18 were killed for looting, one for shooting at police, one for suspected arson; two others were shot at the Algiers Motel. The paper concluded that “both the number of snipers active in the riot area and the danger that snipers presented were vastly overstated,” whereas the “performance of the Michigan state and city police seems generally restrained and impressive” (*The New York Times* September 5, 1967).

## CONCLUSION

Black rioting was political—and it was viewed by white politicians and business interests as a “serious threat to white power and control in cities, including control over the means of coercion,” write Feagin and Hahn. The urban rebellions of the 1960s were “intimately related to the attempts of blacks to move out of the grip of the neocolonialism characteristic of the ghetto, to remove the control of modern-day white carpetbaggers over their lives” (1973:47). African Americans attacked “important centers of power controlling their destinies” (1973:46), particularly white-owned merchants and white police forces; as a result of this rioting, “significant political developments took place, ranging from the local and national response of study commissions and general legislative action to specific programs that came to ghettos as a



result of the rioting” (Feagin and Hahn 1973:47). The Reverend Albert Cleage, Jr. declared in his sermon shortly after the riot that America was set on a “disaster course of conflict and violence. The black man cannot accept America as it is. The white man refuses to make the changes necessary for the black man to live in America with dignity and justice. These are two facts,” he affirmed before his congregation. “We will not accept conditions as they are, and the white man will not accept the change. There is no solution to that except open conflict and violence. You don’t have to feel guilty about that, either. It is his fault, not ours” (Hersey 1968:350). Black violence was compensation for deeply felt grievances with a long history of simmering.

Some leaders in the Black community feared white backlash and political repression as a result of mass violence, however. “The rioting must be stopped,” declared Bayard Rustin, the long-time civil rights activist who organized the 1963 march on Washington. “Whatever force is necessary should be used. If the riots continue, they will be a threat to all civil liberties. Unconstitutional laws of repression may be passed. There will be a fantastic backlash from white people who are weary and frightened of the Negroes.” In fact, Rustin directly compared events in 1967 to those one hundred years earlier: ‘The situation today has a parallel in 1877 when the North withdrew the Union armies from the South. The withdrawal was followed by Southern repression of the Negroes. The riots today could lead to the same kind of repression’ (Handler July 27, 1967). What were the consequences of this violence?

### *Black Rebellion: Instrumental or Detrimental?*

For six days in July 1967, “law enforcement expended 13,326 rounds of ammunition,” mostly against young African Americans. Black men engaged in “lethal skirmishes of defiance and retribution. More than 1,100 people sustained injuries and 1,400 more were arrested. More than 350 buildings were damaged or destroyed. Millions of dollars in goods were stolen (Mumford 2007:125). “In the carrying out of the Governor’s weekend definitions and policies at least 20 Negroes died, nearly all from police shooting,” writes Hayden; “as many as 100 Negro-owned businesses were attacked by police and troopers” and “hundreds of apartments were fired into along the ghetto’s streets. The average white citizen was convinced that these things had to be done in order to halt what Governor Hughes called a ‘criminal insurrection’” (1967:38). The reported “after-riot losses for retailers was \$1,734,925, of which \$1,412,375 was in stock (and the remainder in property damage),” writes Mumford. “By the end of the riots, 85 percent of

storefronts suffered broken window glass, and the total number of businesses destroyed was 1,029, leaving 4,492 employees at least temporarily out of work” (2007:158).

Tom Hayden writes that in the aftermath of the Newark riots, “the average view of Negroes as ‘criminals’ to be suppressed was reinforced throughout the suburbs of New Jersey. The Negro community learned more deeply why they should hate white people. The police remained a protected and privileged conservative political force, the only such force licensed to kill” (1967:61). White folks saw the violence as *criminal* while African Americans largely viewed the violence as *protest*. This distinction is crucial—for meaning making shapes not only the direct response of law enforcement; in other words, the *definition of the situation* (Goffman 1957) shapes the political response in the aftermath of racial violence. Governor Hughes repeatedly asserted that the ‘line between the jungle and the law’ had to be drawn; in fact, on Saturday he declared that African Americans ‘had better choose sides’ because the ‘side of law and order has joined this to the finish.’ “Certainly the police and much of white America agreed,” writes Hayden (1967:38). Jeffrey Paige, a graduate student at the University of Michigan, conducted interviews with residents in the Central Ward for about a year; he sampled “residents in the core area of the riots, accounting for 70,243 of a total of 138,035 black population based on the 1960 census. Paige found no correlation between economic status and rate of participation in the riots,” but he did find that “racial consciousness and the issue of substantive political power had shaped the behavior and rebelliousness of the rioters rather than class or economic motives” (Mumford 2007:137). In fact, subsequent court testimony indicates that many riot participants “consciously distinguished between white-owned stores and those owned by the black community by spray painting the word ‘soul’ on their windows, indicating which side they were on” (Mumford 2007:159).

In both national and local elections in 1968, the far right wing of the Republican Party “benefited from the likes of Newark’s culture wars, catalyzing realignment in the party system from the liberal, urban, multiethnic coalition of the New Deal to the white-identified, suburban, southern-based conservatism of the New Right,” writes Kevin Mumford. Post-sixties “suburbanites were moving fairly far to the racial right, founding a new white conservatism that originated not so much in the flight from cities—after all, not only whites but blacks wanted to move into suburbs—but in the ruins of the riots” (2007:170). White nationalism was “not only more visible than before the riots, but also more legitimate and acceptable.” By 1967, much of

the white public “denounced black resistance to the police in the rebellions of the north” (2007:171). Social relations were increasingly polarized after the riots:

In this aftermath of white liberal loss and withdrawal, a kind of tolerance or acceptance of discourse of racial bigotry and insult reconfigured the margins and moved into the center of the political terrain. Here the urban nationalist ideologies—what was dispensed in the vogue of Afrocentrism as a justification for anti-whiteness and in [Anthony] Imperiale’s denunciations of civil rights as reverse racism—encouraged the acceptability of racial prejudice. . . . By examining historical convergences between certain conservative strands of black political ideology and white conservative racial movements, an analysis of post-riot Newark suggests a shared dynamics of racial nationalism. (Mumford 2007:174)

Just as Gerald Horne noted an association between the Los Angeles riot and increased Ku Klux Klan membership, Mumford notes that whites in New Jersey also joined the Ku Klux Klan in increasing numbers after the riot. Membership in the John Birch Society, the ultra-right anti-communist organization that accused civil rights activists of fomenting a socialist revolution, spiked after the urban rebellions: the society “grew by an estimated two hundred new chapters, including two thousand to three thousand dues-paying members in New Jersey, along with new chapters of Americans for Law and Order” (2007:177).

White Republicans demanded an increase for police budgets, mainly “for requisitions of sophisticated arms and state-of-the-art anti-riot technology. Conservative whites enthusiastically approved of large budgets for plastic super-teargas grenades, new defense, uniforms, and fifteen-ton tanks designed especially for riots that dispersed massive doses of tear gas, and even special fire extinguishers specifically designed to diffuse Molotov cocktails,” explains Mumford. “For law and order whites, the new militarism not only promised to prevent crime and defend against black subversives, but fortified their political control over the cities. For African Americans in the post-civil rights era, law and order signaled dangerous escalation of violence against the community (2007:176). In addition to an increasingly militarized and repressive approach to law enforcement, influential whites established militant groups of their own. Anthony Imperiale created the Citizens’ Council, “not unlike the White Citizens’ Councils in the South that had terrorized Martin Luther King, Jr., and civil rights demonstrators.” Members were “united primarily by their ability to operate firearms, patrol neighborhoods, and skill in the martial arts.” By 1969, there were 3 Citizens’ Council chapters in Newark, and most of the surrounding suburbs had chapters, including Nutley, Belleville, Point Pleasant, and the “racially integrated suburbs of East Orange and Orange” (Mumford 2007:181). Mumford notes that in New Jersey, “white nationalism and the police mutually shaped each other for several years” after the riots

(2007:185). In the fall of 1968, “returns showed a white nationalist landslide. Both Imperiale and Anthony Giuliano, the president of the Police Benevolent Association, won city council seats in the November elections,” and the “white nationalists dealt another blow of revenge for the riots” (2007:188). “The New Jersey electorate responded to the rhetoric with a victory for the Republican Party, when only four years earlier Lyndon Johnson had received twice the vote cast for Republican candidate Barry Goldwater in the state,” notes Mumford” “This racial fallout from the riots foreshadowed a similar realignment in Michigan (the Detroit disorders) and Wisconsin (the Milwaukee disorders), both of which gave first- or second-place finishes to ultraright segregationist presidential candidate George Wallace in 1972” (2007:190).

Massive and widespread arson left more than 500 families homeless in Detroit. Though stores were the primary targets of the black rebellion, many apartments located above first-floor commercial establishments were lost in the flames, and in other cases, homes were burned by fires that spread from stores. The city immediately began planning how to rebuild—and Detroit’s black nationalist leaders “sharply criticized” their effort. ‘The black community wants to have the direction of the rebuilding of the ghetto, not Walter Reuther, not the businessmen,’ said the Reverend Albert Cleage Jr., chairman of the Inner City Organizing Committee. Spokesmen for the Malcolm X Society declared they “did not want white people deciding how to rebuild in the Negro area” (Flint July 29, 1967).

**Conclusion**

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**The Forgetting**

## **The Forgetting: Black Lives Matter and the Enduring Legacy of Racial Violence**

The forgetting is habit, is yet another necessary component of the Dream. They have forgotten the scale of theft that enriched them in slavery; the terror that allowed them, for a century, to pilfer the vote; the segregationist policy that gave them their suburbs. They have forgotten, because to remember would tumble them out of the beautiful Dream and force them to live down here with us, down here in the world.

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (2015:143)

Black Lives Matter first made national news in 2014, following the murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Eric Garner suffocated to death by officer Daniel Pantaleo on July 17—after repeating the words ‘I can’t breathe’ *eleven* times while face down on the sidewalk in Staten Island, New York—because he was selling loosies, single cigarettes sold on the streets illegally for a profit (Baker, Goodman, and Mueller 2015). Eighteen-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed less than two months later on August 9 by Darren Wilson, a 28-year-old white police officer, in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis (Bosman and Goldstein 2014). A night of protests and looting follow, and over the next week, clashes between heavily armed police officers and protestors erupted in dark streets clouded by tear gas (*New York Times* 2014). On November 24, 2014, a St. Louis grand jury decided not to indict officer Wilson, and less than two weeks later, on December 4, a Richmond County grand jury decided not to indict officer Pantaleo. Blue Lives Matter was started later than month, on December 20, in response to the Black Lives Matter movement and negative media reports on law enforcement.

Six years later, a white Minneapolis police officer named Derek Chauvin knelt on the back of George Floyd’s neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. Floyd repeatedly complained that he could not breath—even called out for his dead mother to help him!—yet officer Chauvin persisted, causing the 46-year-old Black man to lose his life. It was May 25, 2020, and over the coming weeks, large protests against police brutality and systemic racism took place in more than 150 American cities. Derek Chauvin was charged with second-degree murder in June, after initially facing third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter charges (*The New York Times* 2020). Commentators talked about how these protests were different; never before had so many white folks joined the dissent against police brutality and racial injustice in the courts. But we also saw Blue Lives Matter and ‘Back the Blue’ counter protestors take to the street, even in

response to Black Lives Matter events (Ottolini 2020). We see the ‘All Lives Matter’ hashtag on Twitter as white folks angrily remind people of what should be a self-evident truth (Capatides 2020; Smith 2020). The history of American race riots presented in this book shows that Black lives have not mattered. Law enforcement participated in the brutality unleashed against Black Americans at various points throughout the entire 110-year period examined in this study, first as revelers engaging in white riot rituals, then as agents of the state repressing Black rebellion.

White disciplinary violence has had devastating effects for Black Americans, consequences that stretch across generations, across entire communities. The residual effects of buried trauma are still felt today, expressed in the tension between African-American communities and law enforcement. In fact, white disciplinary violence has gone largely unpunished throughout U.S. history, whereas Black rebellion has been met with overwhelming force and fervent punishment from law enforcement and the criminal justice system more broadly. In the 66 years between Emancipation from slavery, in January 1863, and the start of the Great Depression, in late October 1929, there were at least 317 disciplinary riots featuring the rituals of anti-Black violence, according to data gathered from *The New York Times*. Few white rioters were apprehended, let alone punished by the criminal justice system. For more than two generations following the end of slavery, African Americans confronted a terrifying reality: state and local law enforcement would not protect them from white riots *and* the criminal justice system would fail to deliver justice for the perpetrators; in fact, evidence indicates that white law enforcement officials, jury members, and even judges either participated in the rituals of violence or were sympathetic to the men who did.

Relations between the Black community and the criminal justice system have been shaped by this history, yet most white Americans (myself included, prior to this research) remain unaware, not only that race rioting was a ubiquitous feature of social life during this period, but that whites used violence to dispossess Black citizens of rights and property. Violence has proven instrumental in maintaining white supremacy, particularly during the 70 years following the Civil War: race riots have been used to deny Black citizens the right to vote; as a tool to seize Black-owned property; as a technique to limit Black liberty, especially concerning their right to live wherever they so desire; and as a mechanism to inspire widespread fear, anxiety, and demoralization among the Black community, thereby enhancing white social control. In the following sections I show how race rioting served specific objectives, first in Reconstruction and

Redemption (1863 to 1890), then in a period known as the Nadir of American race relations (1890 to 1929), and finally in the age of Black militancy and rebellion (1930 to 1972).

### *Reconstruction and Redemption*

In the months after President Abraham Lincoln emancipated four million Black men, women, and children, previously held as property, white men began using violence as a means of social control in shaping a new social order—even before the Civil War dissolved the South’s institution of slavery. White disciplinary violence erupted first in the North over the course of four days in July 1863 when throngs of Irishmen indiscriminately robbed and attacked Black residents on the streets of New York City. Irish Americans (and recent immigrants who were not yet Americans) ransacked tenement houses before burning them to the ground, and as Black residents fled, these fiends hunted them in the night. They engaged in predatory rituals, including the lynching of several Black Americans and the burning of the ‘Colored Orphan Asylum,’ coordinated to dispossess Black New Yorkers and deny them their rights as equal citizens. Known historically as the New York City Draft Riots of 1863, this atrocity *began* as a military-conscription protest with the burning of the federal government’s draft apparatus at Third Avenue and Forty-sixth Street, but the riot quickly devolved into an attempted racial cleansing.

Irish Americans engaged in the rituals of racial violence to exert control, not only politically, but economically and socially as well. The \$300 clause, which relieved those who the means to pay from military service, was undoubtedly a prime source of animosity for many from the Irish underclass, but the riot is better understood as an expression of racial hatred against Black Americans, with the whom the Irish were in direct competition for employment. After destroying Provost Marshall Jenkins’s draft office and raiding the armory at Second Avenue and Twentieth Street—clearly political targets, the first aimed at the federal government and the second at the city attempting to quell the disturbance—white rioters continued felling telegraph poles along Third Avenue to hinder the power of instant communication between precincts that would ultimately aid in the rapid concentration of officers and soldiers necessary to extinguish the riot event. But within hours, the targets for white wrath quickly shifted that Saturday afternoon when a mob began attacking Black residents along Baxter Street. White rioters appeared “impelled by a strange logic” as they burned the Colored Orphan Asylum to the ground after plundering all of value: “There would have been no draft but for the war—there would have been no war but for slavery. But the slaves were black, ergo, all blacks are responsible for the



war.” This appeared to be the “logic of the mob,” explained Joel Headley, a journalist who covered the riots (2009:169). As the violence gained intensity, the riot’s form shifted from politically motivated to racially motivated attacks: the plundering of Black residences empowered white rioters through direct dispossession of their Black neighbors; the assaulting and murdering of Black refugees as they fled in the streets satisfied Irish grievances against Black competition for labor; and the use of symbolic violence, such as lynching and the total annihilation of the orphan’s asylum, delivered a message of warning. A similar race riot erupted in Memphis, Tennessee, fewer than three years later, only this time regional differences in the professionalization of law enforcement played a critical role in shaping the form of violence.

The New York City ‘Draft Riot’ can more accurately be called a *disciplinary riot* because it involved Irishmen using violence to assault, plunder, and purge the city of its Black citizens, who were in direct economic competition. Perhaps the most extreme riot in United States history—it stands with East St. Louis, Illinois (1917) and Tulsa, Oklahoma (1921) as the most devastating racial cleansing events identified in this study—the New York City riot event in 1863 indicates how white rioters used violence as *self-help*. Donald Black (1998) has argued that conflict management can be assessed along a discipline-rebellion continuum; here, I have applied Black’s ideas to create a theoretical framework for analyzing race rioting. A riot’s form is first defined by the direction of violence in social space. Rioting takes a downward form when it is wielded by the powerful as a tool of oppression against those who are weak; this is *disciplinary collective violence*, and its most extreme form is a *racial* or *ethnic cleansing* event, where an oppressed minority is physically eliminated from a community by a more powerful group. Rioting takes an upward form when it is wielded by the subjugated as a tool against those who seek to dominate; this is *compensatory rebellion*, and its most extreme form is *revolution*, where an oppressed group uses violence to topple existing economic, political, and/or social institutions. The direction of violence is the first factor in assessing a race riot’s form; the second factor involves the achievement of objectives since, as I have argued throughout this book, race riots have always been motivated by political grievances. Collective resentment intensifies to the point of mass violence, typically set off by an incident of racial conflict, and the race riot’s ultimate form then depends on *how* it evolves, on the *kinds* of riot rituals permitted to unfold. A riot’s form is defined by the direction of violence and the extent to which riot rituals achieved specific objectives for the perpetrators of violence. The second variable includes factors such as

the riot's *intensity* (i.e., a variable combining the density of violence with its duration) and *severity* (i.e., the damage inflicted, calculated by injuries, loss of life, and property damage). Once large groups begin to engage in the rituals of violence, the behavior of law enforcement is crucial when determining the final form ultimately *achieved* through the performance of riot rituals. A definitive grievance logic motivates the selection of targets. Collective resentment is expurgated, and through violence, rioters achieve specific objectives.

Memphis was a booming riverboat town in May of 1866 with all the ingredients of social disorganization. The city's population had increased rapidly: recently freed slaves, returning Confederate veterans, retained Union soldiers, white Irish immigrants, and white Northerners—goddamn Yankees, as they were referred to in the South—flocked to the city in droves. The *freedmen* (and *freedwomen*) sought out lost loved ones, kin stripped away by heartless white owners under the institution of slavery. Civil War veterans, immigrants, and freed people alike sought economic opportunity as commerce surged along the riverfront, at the city's three train depots, and in its commercial district on Main and Front streets. A skirmish between a group of Black veterans and white Irish police officers on South Street, about 500 yards from Fort Pickering (where the Black soldiers had been mustered out) on Tuesday, May 1 led to retaliation, both by white Irish police officers and white Memphis residents, as they sought to purge the city of its ever-increasing population of freed people.

The massacre in Memphis left scar tissue that endured beyond the atrocity in the form of emotional trauma. In the months following the riot, psychological terror confronted many residents who remained, just in New York City, only in Memphis, anonymous leaflets were circled with a warning for Black folks: "we are determined to rid our community of negro fanatics and philanthropic teachers of our former slaves," it read (U.S. Congress 1866:23). While Black institutions were attacked in New York City—most notably the Colored Orphans Asylum—they were not targeted to the same extent that they were in Memphis, a critical difference between the two attempted cleansing events that is largely due to the intervention efforts made by law enforcement. Black churches and schools were not burned in New York like they were in Memphis, largely due to differences in the professionalization of law enforcement: the Metropolitan Police were far more prepared to combat the rioters in New York City, given the city's history with ethnic violence, and its officers actively sought to protect Black residents; conversely, Memphis Police officers helped instigate the riot event, and many actively

participated in the rituals of violence (rather than protect Black residents). This distinction is critical when examining the history of American race riots and the trajectory of racial violence. Police departments become active participants in the development of racial collective violence; their behavior shapes the contours of the event, limiting possibilities. The sheer scale of participants in New York City dwarfed those in Memphis, yet the formal control efforts of law enforcement contained the spread of violence, thereby preventing an even more barbarous cleansing event from becoming a reality, while in Memphis, law enforcement officers participated in the attempted cleansing, a dereliction of duty that would define the Southern policing of Black bodies for generations to come.

In the years following the Civil War, many southern leaders found themselves disenfranchised and barred from holding public office during an era derisively referred to as ‘Radical Reconstruction.’ White Southerners had lost the war. Now they were being subjected to ‘Negro rule’ and the specter of Black political power. Many former Confederates had been disenfranchised for participating in the rebellion, thus resentment was piled on the shame of defeat. Historian George C. Rable has argued that much of the white violence unleashed during Reconstruction proved “instrumental” because it had a “strongly political purpose,” beginning with the presidential election of 1868, a contest between Ulysses S. Grant, the Republican nominee and Civil War General, and Horatio Seymour, the Democratic nominee and Governor of New York. Democrats felt that the policies of Reconstruction were nothing short of revolutionary—and so many Southern White men formed counterrevolutionary organizations whose main objectives were to drive Republicans from power in state and local governments while reestablishing dominance in race relations. This form of white violence falls along the *discipline* continuum and was most extreme in nature. The goal was to manufacture fear and acquiescence among Black citizens to achieve specific political objectives. White violence during Reconstruction can accurately be labeled *political terrorism*: it played a “significant role” in the return of ‘home rule’ to Southern state governments, first in Louisiana and Alabama during the presidential election in 1868, then in Mississippi and South Carolina during elections in 1874, 1875, and 1876 (Rable 2007:x).

On September 28, 1868 two white men stormed into a small schoolhouse in St. Landry Parish and delivered a politically motivated caning to Emerson Bentley, publisher of the *St. Landry Progress*, a radical Republican newspaper. The men beat Bentley in front of his young

pupils because, they said, he had made incendiary political speeches. The event led to an exchange of gunfire between Republicans and Democrats in Opelousas, the parish's largest town. After the fight, white bands swept through the countryside and seized 29 Black men: "The next day a mob seized all but two of the prisoners and shot them to death," explains Rable. "Night riders again moved into the countryside, brutally murdering any blacks they could find" (2007:76). Republican officials estimated that Democratic murder clubs, like the Knights of the White Camelia, had murdered more than two hundred during the spree of violence. Two hundred miles north, on September 30, a posse of armed whites surrounded a plantation in Bossier Parish and "murdered at least one hundred of them." The only purpose was revenge; apparently, after they had been drinking, two Black men tied an Arkansas cotton salesman with rope and proceeded to assault him because he had "snapped his pistol at one of them." White men from Arkansas poured across the border to assist in the slaughter, as they would do in the decades to come, indicating that in the fight against Black citizenship, state boundaries meant nothing. Southern were unified in a struggle to maintain white supremacy in all affairs. There were two other significant riot events that October, in St. Bernard Parish and in New Orleans. Voting returns following each riot event show the effect of white violence in suppressing the Black vote.

In 1867 there were 2,102 registered republicans in St. Landry Parish, and in the election held in April 1868, Republicans enjoyed a 678-vote margin of victory. Yet during the November 1868 presidential election, out of 4,787 votes cast in the parish, not a single Republican ballot was cast for Grant (according to the *Supplemental Report*; see Joint Committee of the General Assembly of Louisiana 1869:xix). Similar results were found in Bossier Parish, where African Americans represented more than 70 percent of the population, yet only one Republican ballot was cast in the 1868 November election. Likewise, in St. Bernard Parish, where only one vote was cast for Grant despite a population that was more than 50 percent African American. Grant received fewer than 300 votes in New Orleans. Between the April and November state elections in Louisiana, the Republican vote declined by over 26,000; during the same period, the Democratic vote increased by over 44,000. Organized racial violence was the primary mechanism in practically eliminating the Republican vote in four Louisiana parishes during the 1868 presidential election, with significant consequences—groups like the Knights of the White Camelia and the Ku Klux Klan provided a blueprint for other Democratic murder clubs to follow as they attempted to subvert Radical Reconstruction and return 'home rule' to the South.

Congress ratified the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution on February 3, 1870. The last of the Reconstruction Amendments, it grants the right to vote to all (male) citizens: neither the federal government nor any state shall deny the right of citizens to vote ‘on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.’ Three states in the former Confederacy had Black populations that were larger than the state’s white population. It is no coincidence that these states also experienced the greatest number of race riots during Reconstruction. African Americans tended to vote Republican in overwhelming numbers, much like many Black voters tend Democratic today. Newly enfranchised freedmen instantly comprised a voting bloc with enormous potential; should they cast their ballot with white Republicans (a small faction of whites, certainly), there was little chance that Democrats could win *any* state election. This challenge to white supremacy deepened the sense of deprivation seeping into the southern fabric, frayed yet refusing to be torn asunder. And so it was decided that violence was necessary.

In March of 1871 in Meridian, Mississippi, three African-American Republican supporters were put on trial for making ‘incendiary’ speeches; a gunfight erupted during the trial, leaving the judge and two of the Black defendants dead. White men gathered their pistols, saddled a horse, and “went on the hunt for negroes,” according to W.H. Hardy, a local Democratic leader who wrote about the event (Wharton 1947:189). Nightriders torched the house of Republican leader J. Aaron Moore, and shortly thereafter, Democrats burned Meridian’s Black Baptist church to the ground. White disciplinary violence went unchecked for nearly an entire week, and by the time it was finished, “all of the black and white leaders of Lauderdale County Negroes were dead or exiled” (Hennessey 1978:179). We will never know with any certainty how many Black Americans were murdered during this week of ritualistic violence, but Hardy estimated between 25 and 30 lost their lives from this act of political terrorism—and it was most certainly *not* an isolated incident, for white Democrats in Mississippi had become unhinged by the specter of ‘negro domination’ in state politics and the coming of ‘social equality’ with whites.

In the fall election of 1873, African Americans won 55 of 115 seats in Mississippi’s House of Representatives, and nine of 37 state senators were Black. This shift in political power inspired the formation of the White Line, an organization similar to the White League across state lines in Louisiana; these organizations wielded violence in the open, unlike the Knights or the Klan, which operated in secret. For four weeks beginning in July 1874, White Liners

patrolled the streets of Vicksburg, using a system of sentinels and guards to moderate who was permitted in and out of the city. These men were stationed on all roads in Vicksburg, especially at night; they monitored the steamboat landings and all arriving ferries. The White Liners “admitted whom they pleased and kept out whom they pleased,” according to *Vicksburgh Troubles*, a report published by the 43<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Congress (1875:III). Armed Democrats “impressed upon the whole city that fear which comes naturally” when confronted by the threat of disciplinary violence—despite the fact that the city was predominantly African American—and on August 5, the Republicans were swept swiftly from power.

White violence spread across the state after the Democratic victory in Vicksburg, for it signaled that President Grant was not interested in sending federal forces to intervene in a Mississippi election, and by September 1875, militia clubs were formed across the state. On September 4<sup>th</sup> at a political rally and barbeque in Clinton, more than 30 Black Republicans were murdered during a two-day massacre that stretched into the countryside; some estimate that as many as 50 Black residents were killed and in the coming days, more than 500 African-American refugees had camped near the federal courthouse in Jackson, Mississippi’s state capitol, seeking the protection of the United States Army (Lemann 2006). In Yazoo County, where Black Americans greatly outnumbered white residents, and White Liners invaded Yazoo City, much like they had done at Vicksburg. Rituals of violence effectively suppressed the Black vote. In the election of 1873, the Democrats gained 444 votes to the Republican tally of more than 2,400, but in the election of 1875 the outcome was reversed: Democrats had gained more than 4,000 votes while the Republicans garnered seven. The Republican sheriff was even driven from Yazoo County—hence no Republican, Black or white, would be afforded any protection. White Line political terrorism most certainly succeeded in Mississippi, particularly during the elections of 1875 and 1876: “They have secured power by fraud and force,” explained Senator Boutwell. Democrats “can command, on an instant, the presence of organized bodies of armed men at every voting-place.” This reality would surely “deter the republican party from any general effort to regain the power wrested from them” (U.S. Congress 1876:xxix). And it did.

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**THE MISSISSIPPI TERROR.**  
*HOW THE STATE WAS DEMOCRATIC.*  
REPORT OF THE SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE—A DELIBERATE SCHEME TO MURDER OR TERRIFY EVERY REPUBLICAN VOTER CARRIED OUT WITH BARBARIC FEROCITY — REPUBLICAN COUNTIES OVERRUN BY DEMOCRATIC BANDITTI.  
*Special Dispatch to the New-York Times.*

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Source: *The New York Times* (August 8, 1876)

These so-called ‘race riots’ spread across the South, perpetuated by different paramilitary groups. In South Carolina, the Red Shirts engaged in riot rituals that would produce total domination for the Democratic party during the election of 1876. In Hamburg, South Carolina a massacre unfolded on the Fourth of July following a traffic incident involving passing horse and carriages. The incident itself was only a precursor for the subsequent assault targeting Black militiamen, carried out by Martin Witherspoon Gary and Matthew Butler, in which at least six Black Americans were executed. Houses were ransacked and all valuable property seized. This was the ‘Shotgun Policy’ in action, the use of violence to enforce white supremacy in South Carolina. “It is not to be doubted that the effect of this massacre has been to cause widespread terror and apprehension among the colored race and the republicans of this State,” explained South Carolina Governor D.H. Chamberlain in a letter to President Grant, and it was only beginning (U.S. Congress 1876:2). Armed bands of whites began “seizing black property and arms,” according to the sheriff of Aiken County, while white “cavalry companies patrolled the countryside” (Rable 2007:166).

The Red Shirts were active in other parts of the state as well during those months leading up to the 1876 presidential election. White men mounted on horseback “roamed the countryside, cajoling, threatening, and occasionally murdering Republicans,” explains Rable. Night riding “created panic among both white and black radicals, who feared the red shirts might storm the polls on election day or even attack United States troops” (2007:173). The Red Shirts were most visible in Edgefield and Aiken counties, the “centers of anti-Republican fanaticism,” and on September 20, whites killed perhaps more than one hundred Black Americans in an around Ellenton. Election day in Edgefield “more nearly resembled a military engagement than an exercise in American democracy,” explained Rable. “Armed men arrived in town the night before and rode around giving the rebel yell, firing their pistols, and hurling bloodcurdling epithets at local Republicans” (2007:176). Democrats used terrorism to secure political power: though President Grant sent U.S. troops to South Carolina (unlike Mississippi), and though Black residents resisted more fiercely in South Carolina than in any other Southern state during the Reconstruction era riot events, a counterrevolution had finished the work of ‘Redemption.’ White violence was politically instrumental, but it was also used to settle disputes of all kinds, particularly labor conflicts and disputes involving money, as the Freedmen’s Bureau records show in their reports of “outrages” committed against former slaves. White violence also proved

instrumental because of its symbolic value. Lynching, arson, and murder conveyed a message to the newly emancipated Black population, many of whom were still uncertain as to what rights they were entitled, if any at all. Their choices were clear: submit to the will of the planters, who required a labor force if their operations were to continue; flee the area and never return; or remain in the area, expecting fair payment for labor, fair treatment from the plantation owner, and the right to participate in the political process. Those who fell in the latter category were frequently targeted for assassination by the Democratic banditti, as *The New York Times* (1876) referred them, given their propensity for eliminating prominent Republicans, Black and white.

Republican Rutherford B. Hayes would assume the presidency following the ‘Compromise of 1877,’ and in exchange, all federal troops remaining from Reconstruction would finally be removed. It was the return of ‘home rule,’ the restoration of Black southerners to a condition of servitude. White violence proved instrumental, for without political terrorism across Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, the Democratic party could not compete, given the numerical strength of the Black population in all three states. Without white violence, the political structure of each state would have been drastically different: how that structural transformation would have affected the economic livelihood and social status of Black southerners post-Reconstruction is purely speculative; that more Black southerners would have continued to exercise their right to vote in the absence of white violence, thereby electing representatives to pursue their own interests rather than those of wealthy white planters, is not speculative, however. Part of the enduring legacy of white violence is that it effectively buttressed the structures of white supremacy across the south following Reconstruction—a truly revolutionary period of promise for Black Americans unknown before (and perhaps since).

It may be tempting for some readers to dismiss the race riots of Reconstruction as “products of a uniquely pathological time and place,” but as historian Stephen V. Ash notes, “when we move from a close examination of the riot to a longer view, the event begins to resonate across centuries.” Riot events like the Memphis Massacre of 1866 “can be seen as both a continuation of older forms of racial brutality and as a harbinger of a new kind of violence: the organized terror Southern whites would carry out against blacks well into the twentieth century” (Ash 2013:xiv). Ash is correct, but historians have yet to fully examine this ‘longer view,’ thus a complete picture has yet to be excavated. My primary intention in this book has been to show the trajectory of racial violence, from the Emancipation Proclamation to the ‘Great Uprising’ by



Black Americans during the 1960s and early 1970s. Extending the historical analysis “well into the twentieth century,” as Ash suggests, reveals that whites in the American Midwest also participated in these barbarous riot events, as did whites as far north as New York. It reveals the pervasive extent of white violence; it reveals that law enforcement agents failed to protect Black Americans from white violence, beginning immediately upon their release from bondage to World War II. In fact, it reveals that this lack of protection continued, particularly in the South, following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. Conducting a ‘long-view analysis’ is critically important, because it shows how white Americans have used violence to oppress fellow Black citizens in really *all domains* of social life—and these violations of Black rights are not limited to one particular historical era. On the contrary, white violence is a ubiquitous feature of American social life: it has been summoned to eliminate Black political rights, including the right to vote and hold public office; it has been used as economic coercion, first to force Black laborers back to the plantation, then to suppress Black wealth and landownership; and it has been used as a tool to counteract Black education. White disciplinary violence has also been summoned as a device to control Black social mobility, including choice of residence, thus as a social practice defined by a collection of violent rituals, white-initiated riot events have *political*, *economic*, and *social* consequences, with residual effects that extend across generations.

### *The Nadir of American Race Relations*

Racial segregation swept across the South like a wildfire scorches drought-stricken earth during the 1880s. Tennessee passed the first law mandating segregation in 1882, and in 1883, the U.S. Supreme Court neutered the Civil Rights Act of 1875. Legislation requiring racial segregation in public accommodations came in three waves and were related to specific areas of public life. The first wave stretched from 1889 to 1893 and involved primarily trains, street cars, and passenger boats; the second wave stretched from 1897 to 1907 and primarily affected public accommodations of other kinds. The third wave stretched from 1913 to 1915 and primarily impacted industrial settings—segregated facilities in factories, especially public toilets, were increasingly required by law. Neighborhood residential patterns were also affected as several cities “set up schemes designed to achieve block-by-block segregation in urban housing” (Williamson 1984:253). Woodrow Wilson’s administration re-entrenched segregation in certain federal departments and public facilities, and it was during this time that the word ‘segregation’ became used in reference to the physical separation of the races.

White men “lost power in a new and frightening way” during the agricultural depression that began during the late 1880s and lasted through the 1890s. Embattled white men “found themselves disadvantaged and locked into a rapidly changing national and international economics that they were powerless to control.” No longer capable of playing “the role of protector-as-breadwinner,” these men assumed the “protector-as-defender of the purity” of white women, particularly against the sensationalized image of Black men as rapists: “Lynching and rioting, total disfranchisement, and blatant segregation formed satisfying displays of power in one area of their lives when they could no longer display power in another” (Williamson 1984:301). The first ‘Mississippi Plan’ was a campaign of violence to intimidate Black residents from voting for the Republican party in the 1875 election; it was followed by a ‘Second Mississippi Plan,’ ratified in November 1890, when the state accomplished the disenfranchisement of Black voters at its State Constitutional Convention. South Carolina adopted similar measures in 1895, followed by Louisiana in 1898.

Eight Southern states accomplished disenfranchisement around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century “by either amending or rewriting the constitution of the state,” explains historian Joel Williamson. “In those eight states, disfranchisers of both persuasions [i.e., Conservative and Radical Democrats] typically set up standard qualifications of property, education, and good citizenship for voters,” then they added some other clause to allow poor whites an opportunity to by-pass those requirements, such as the ‘understanding clause’ (i.e., a citizen could ‘explain’ a section of the state constitution after it is read to him by an election official; white Democrats generally judged the performance) or the ‘grandfather clause’ (i.e., a citizen’s ancestor had voted in the state in the past, typically prior to 1868, when the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified, thereby excluding Black residents). In South Carolina, administration of the understanding clause produced powerful results: “Virtually no white man who seriously wanted the vote was denied, and practically no Negroes were allowed the privilege.” By 1905, in a state in which the majority of the voting population was African American, not a single Black representative was elected to the “legislature or any other significant state or local office, a condition that would prevail *for more than half a century*” (Williamson 1984:232; emphasis added).

Black Americans enduring a process of “political reduction” that began in Redemption and continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most African Americans “retired from practical political activity,” explains Williamson, who classifies the period after Reconstruction as a “great

emotional recession.” Black Americans “moved downward from a practical inability to vote, to an inability to register to vote, to an inability even to participate in Democratic party activities and the Democratic primary (which, in effect, soon became the real election), and, finally, to an inability to maintain their undisputed representation in national Republican conventions, and, hence, from that, by the 1920s, to a loss of federal patronage” (1984:225-26). White violence was no longer necessary to control the voting behavior of African Americans as Southern states like North Carolina (1900) and Georgia (1906) followed suit, passing legislation that legally disenfranchised the Black electorate—and both states did so within two years of major race riot events. The Wilmington massacre of 1898 and the Atlanta race riot of 1906 were significant *disciplinary riots* that reached attempted *racial cleansing* status due to the extreme nature of white violence, which evolved during this period. Racial violence took different forms depending on the objective; as political disenfranchisement was achieved through legal avenues like property/education requirements and understanding clauses, white violence increasingly served other functions, both economic and social, including property seizure, the enforcement of residential boundaries, and as retribution for perceived social violations.

Whites used collective racial violence in Wilmington, North Carolina in November 1898, first to achieve perhaps the only successful *coup d'etat* in American history. Members of the Secret Nine, the Committee of Twenty-Five, the Merchants' Association, and the White Government's Union systematically banished Black residents who were perceived as a threat to enduring white supremacy (and white Republicans as well). Mayor Silas P. Wright resigned following the riot event in Wilmington, followed by Chief of Police Melton and the entire Board of Alderman. Mayor Wright was replaced with Alfred Moore Waddell, the former Confederate officer and thunderous orator famous for threatening to fill Cape Fear with Black “carcasses” prior to the election. One by one, Republican officials were replaced with Democrats as armed guards lined Wilmington's city hall until the usurpation of city government was complete. The instrumentality of white violence was not limited to political power, however; indeed, the seizure of government represented the opening stages of a much larger campaign for white supremacy.

An exodus of African-American residents transpired in the days following the violence, and in addition to those who left voluntarily, several prominent Black business leaders were banished through force. White violence therefore reduced economic competition and had significant social consequences, both for those who left and those who remained. Estimates

suggest that more than a thousand refugees fled the city by December 1898. By the time the city directory was published in 1905, significant ownership changes were evident in Wilmington's residential patterns: the city's "predominantly white sections" had expanded, according to a study by Hayumi Higuchi, while the "transition blocks" separating the white section of town from Black neighborhoods were "pushed further toward the perimeters of town." A small grouping of "integrated neighborhoods," situated near Market Street along North Fourth and Princess, had "disappeared," Higuchi reports; another section of integrated city blocks "also disappeared," replaced with "concentrations trending toward a white majority" (1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission 2006:248). Wilmington became increasingly segregated by race in the aftermath of the riot, thus violence achieved social objectives beyond the political coup that reverberate outward, across generations.

White violence also produced significant economic consequences for the Black community, as made evident by differences in employment and business ownership. The city directory for 1900 contained occupational listings for nearly 2,500 Black workers, nearly a thousand fewer than in the 1897 directory—and this development is incredibly important, for in this thriving coastal community, the mass exodus of Black labor improved employment prospects for white residents. In 1897, there were 102 businesses owned and operated by Black Americans; by 1900, that figure declined to 78, a significant reduction. Even the ecological layout of the business district was transformed: In 1897 there were 76 Black-owned businesses located in the city's central business district; by 1900, there were 33, according to the Wilmington Race Riot Commission (2006:232). Many Black-owned businesses were relocated to the "traditionally African American neighborhood of Brooklyn," located along North Front Street. White violence set off an economic shockwave that dramatically reduced Black competition for employment, thereby improving the job prospects of local white residents. Projected over the long term, the Wilmington massacre undoubtedly had consequences shaping the intergenerational transmission of wealth, both for Black families (many of whom potentially suffered property theft and destruction, loss of employment, residential dislocation, and the enduring effects of emotional trauma, conditions with consequences passed directly to their children) and white families (some of whom potentially benefited from property seizure, new employment opportunities, and greater potential for upward mobility).

White Atlantans performed the rituals of violence fewer than eight years later, primarily to achieve social and economic objectives. Unlike the event in Wilmington, Atlanta's race riot was independent of an election (it took place over two days in September, 1906), motivated ostensibly by sensational reports of Black criminality in the white-owned media. Yet economic motives also played a role, as we saw in Wilmington, and white violence was used against what historian David Goldshalk calls a "rising generation of New Black Men," prosperous African-American business leaders, politicians, lawyers, doctors, and other professionals: "The churches, the businesses, and the colleges for which [these Black professionals] had sacrificed so much of their lives had been among the rioters' prime targets." William F. Penn's medical practice was located in central downtown Atlanta, as was Thomas Slater's; both practices were owned by Black men and both were targeted during the riot. Jesse Max Barber's *Voice of the Negro* and Benjamin Davis's *Atlanta Independent* were also located downtown; both were targeted by white violence. The mob was especially hostile to Black-owned barbershops, though Alonzo Herndon, a prominent African American barbershop owner and political leader, saw his shop spared. "The Brownsville confrontation had occurred right at the doorsteps of Gammon Theological Seminary and Clark College," explains Godshalk (2005:140-41). The white militia even "threatened Atlanta Baptist College and its faculty," indicating the extent to which riot violence was used against Black educational institutions—a legacy of white violence stretching back to the Memphis Massacre of 1866, forty years prior.

The Atlanta riot also served as a pretext for legislation aimed at controlling the Black population, a development not seen in Wilmington. During the first two weeks of October, following the riot on September 22 and 23, the Atlanta city council "adopted a series of resolutions clearly aimed at both more tightly controlling African American drinking and more actively discouraging heterosexual and interracial mixing in saloons," explains Godshalk. City council "segregated every saloon in the city," and as the behavior of its investigating committee makes clear, the council's "overriding goals" were to discourage interracial contact and limit the availability of alcohol to Black Americans: "Prior to the riot, African Americans could obtain alcohol in as many as sixty saloons, many of which were integrated. By the end of the investigation, only twenty saloons remained open to blacks, and every bar in Atlanta was segregated" (2005:144). This is important evidence because it illustrates the long reach of white

violence, which extended into city hall, with serious social consequences that would endure far beyond the riot event itself.

An Atlanta grand jury indicted 22 white residents on attempted murder and assault charges, in cases stemming directly from the violence on Saturday night, September 22. Of these, only two cases ended in conviction: “notorious career criminal” George Blackstock was convicted of assaulting Black victims on the first night of the riot, and T.F. Clements plead guilty to assault charges. “Even after three police eyewitnesses fingered J.H. Carr as a member of the Saturday night mob and a jury convicted him for general rioting, Judge [Leonard] Roan inexplicably acquitted the defendant, citing insufficient evidence,” explains Godshalk:

The court dropped eight other cases on similar grounds. Clearly, then, white defendants benefited from strict evidentiary standards and the presumption of innocence. In contrast, superior court judges and carefully screened white juries were predisposed to reach guilty verdicts against black assault defendants. Such persons were further disadvantaged by the desperate postriot desire of judges and white civic leaders to demonstrate the efficacy of the criminal courts in punishing black rapists as a means of discouraging mob violence. (2005:148-49)

Historical data indicate that white riot rituals were effective, went largely unpunished, and were then used as justification to further punish African Americans via city council measures. The Atlanta riot shares similarities to the massacre in Wilmington, but it is also very different in form. Law enforcement in both cities failed to protect the lives of Black Atlantans during the violence, but in Wilmington, racial violence played a direct role restructuring city government (i.e., from a Republican-led city government to one led by Democrats), whereas in Atlanta, racial violence played a direct role in legislation designed to enhance white social control of Black residents (i.e., social control through city council resolutions and mechanisms used within the criminal justice system). Black citizens also resisted white violence to a far greater extent in Atlanta, perhaps because the events in Wilmington made clear protection was not forthcoming from white law enforcement, the state, or the U.S. federal government.

The Atlanta race riot was a catalyst for African American resistance to white supremacy, as was the disciplinary riot that erupted in Springfield, Illinois, President Lincoln’s birthplace, two years later, in 1908. Emerging from the ashes of these events was a new national organization focused on attaining full citizenship rights for Black Americans. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People grew from W.E.B. DuBois’s Niagara Movement, a gathering of Black professionals, scholars, and activists who met for the first time in 1905 in Niagara Falls, New York. Black militancy, represented in the Niagara Movement,

fused with the “new currents of racial equalitarianism found among liberal and radical whites” to form the NAACP, which met in New York for the first time on May 31, 1909. From its inception, the NAACP denounced racial collective violence. The fight for democracy abroad that erupted during World War I had profound consequences for Black self-determination and resistance to white violence back home.

Racial violence intensified during World War I and in the months following the armistice due to a dramatic shift in social relations. African Americans had served the United States military during every war of consequence since the country’s inception, including the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I. The time for equal voting rights, equal access to public accommodations, and equal opportunities for education and employment had come. Increasingly, the ‘new Negro’ demanded that white Americans make real the promise of equality: “Black soldiers may have returned home believing that their work and sacrifice entitled them to the rights of citizenship, but for the supporters of Jim Crow the black man in uniform was rather to be feared and hated than respected,” explains Herbert Shapiro. “Black migrants to the urban, industrial culture of the North looked forward to a future of economic and educational opportunity, but northern society would turn the clock back, drive blacks out of jobs in industry, and maintain a racial caste system in which blacks would occupy a menial position and submit to being crowded in a ghetto” (1988:143-44). Racial tension simmered in urban crucibles during the World War I era in the United States, especially during the ‘Red Summer’ of 1919, when race rioting spread from city to city in the span of a few weeks—an entirely new development in the history of racial violence. When examining the behavior of law enforcement during the racial cleansing attempted by whites in East St. Louis in July 1917 and the disciplinary riot unleashed against Black residents in Chicago in July 1919, one main conclusion can be drawn: law enforcement participated in the rituals of white violence in the North as well. Racial collective violence was not a Southern phenomenon.

At least 39 Black residents were murdered during two days of rioting in East St. Louis. Rumors passed around town following the event maintained that Black bodies were tossed into the Mississippi River, never to be seen again and therefore not included in the official count. A Saint Clair County grand jury estimated the death toll could have been as high as 100, and the Red Cross suggested as many as 200 could have been killed. Entire blocks of homes were incinerated; more than 1,200 homeless Black residents camped around city hall in the wake of

white violence, and at least 7,000 more crossed the Mississippi River into St. Louis, Missouri, many never to return (Lumpkins 2008). The number of Black children enrolled in public school was about 35 percent lower in 1918 than it had been the previous school year, before the explosion of violence (Rudwick 1982:164). These data indicate the extent to which white residents succeeded in cleansing East St. Louis of its Black population—and this would never have been possible had the local police department forcibly restored order. This event would never have been possible had state soldiers moved swiftly to protect Black lives and property. But neither of those responses materialized; though three companies of the Illinois state militia arrived by noon on July 2, these men did little to help protect Black lives. “Many of them participated in it, and those [who] didn’t participate didn’t attempt to quell it,” recalled G.E. Popkess, a reporter for the *St. Louis Times*, during the congressional hearings on the East St. Louis riot. The event reached cleansing proportions because those entrusted with protecting the lives and property of all citizens actively participated in anti-Black violence. Militiamen actively looted Black property and set fire to their homes. These men then shot at Black victims as they tried to escape, as if conducting target practice.

Black Americans actively retaliated against white violence in Chicago, including reports of ‘snipers’ crouched on fire escapes and peering out darkened apartment windows. Young Black men, including war veterans, were posted on guard at the YMCA on Wabash Avenue, between 37<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> streets, ready to combat white intrusion into their community. It is for this reason that Morris Janowitz labeled this kind of event a *communal riot*: Black residents battled with whites for residential space, like rival drug gangs battle for territory today. Black self-defense of this kind had been missing from the social landscape, perhaps since 1876, when African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina not only used retaliatory violence to thwart white attacks but also participated in riot rituals to personally benefit themselves, like assaulting white pedestrians and stealing merchandise from white-owned stores. Mayor Thompson requested Governor Lowden mobilize the Illinois state militia, and by Monday evening, July 28, 3,500 armed soldiers were stationed for duty in Chicago’s armories—yet the mayor continued to rely on his police officers in attempting to restore order. Chicago’s police force had a “long history of hostility towards blacks,” thus as William M. Tuttle, Jr. argues in *Race Riot* (1970)—a seminal study in American race rioting, along with Elliott Rudwick’s *A Race Riot in East St. Louis* (1964)—a “well-disciplined military troop might have proved to be less biased in its law



enforcement.” But Mayor Thompson did not send that order, and by that Tuesday night, 31 people had died and more than 400 were injured, 266 of whom were African American.

Whites hunted Black residents on North Side streets. Telephone and electric wires were cut on the fourth day of violence, and the Black Belt was in a state of siege. Armed policemen stood on every corner. Illinois state soldiers began patrolling the streets around 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday evening, July 30 as whites set fire to Black settlement houses on the South Side, destroying at least six. By midnight, more than 7,000 soldiers—mostly from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Regiments of the Illinois Reserve Militia—had infiltrated the city and gone to work against the white athletic clubs with names like Reagan’s Colts. This was the beginning of the end. During the height of violence, the most intense rioting occurred in the Stock Yards district, located south of the Chicago River to Fifty-fifth Street, west of Wentworth Avenue, yet law enforcement was “worse than nonexistent,” according to Tuttle. Rather than combat the spread of violence, white police officers and militiamen “worked in collusion with white mobs in their quest to ‘get a nigger.’” Several state troopers were even seen assisting rioters as they torched Black homes and participating in homicide. Armed Black resistance and an overwhelming deployment of state troopers finally quelled the violence, with sporadic episodes continuing for nearly two weeks.

Black resistance increased after World War I, as David Krugler’s (2015) research indicates, but so did the intensity of white violence. The ‘race riot’ that occurred in Tulsa, Oklahoma in June 1921 is more accurately characterized as a ‘race war.’ White residents armed themselves and quite literally invaded Greenwood, a thriving Black community segregated on the other side of the tracks. Planes flew overhead, firing guns and potentially even dropping incendiary devices on the neighborhood below. The Red Cross’s *Disaster Relief Report* (Willows 1921) identified 1,115 residences destroyed by arson during this attempted racial cleansing, in addition to stores and other businesses like the Dreamland Theater not included in this figure. White disciplinary violence essentially reduced the community to ashes. Larry O’Dell examined data gathered from three sources (the Tulsa Real Estate Exchange Commission, claims filed against the City Commission during meetings, and actual damage claims in court cases against both Tulsa and insurance companies) to estimate the extent of property loss African Americans suffered at the hands of white violence. His analysis led the Tulsa Race Riot Commission to estimate Black property loss at \$1.8 million in 1921 dollars (2001:149).

Red Cross figures indicate that 5,366 persons were seriously impacted by the explosion of racial violence in Tulsa. More than 1,400 lawsuits were filed against the city “for losses upward of \$4 million” (claims ranged from \$25 to \$150,000). Greenwood’s prominent structures were decimated, each building a symbol of Black prosperity. The Gurley Hotel (\$150,000 claim); the Dreamland Theatre and Williams building (\$100,000); the Mount Zion Baptist Church, for which black Tulsans had saved for seven years to erect (reportedly at a cost of \$85,000), and Tulsa’s black newspapers, the *Star* and the *Oklahoma Sun*, were all burned to the ground (Ellsworth 1982:70). The Stradford Hotel, a 54-room brick building with a drug store, barber shop, and restaurant, was also burned to the ground, as were the Red Wing Hotel and the Midway Hotel. “Literally dozens of family-run businesses—from cafes and mom-and-pop grocery stores, to the Dreamland Theater, the Y.M.C.A. Cleaners, the East End Feed Store, and Osborne Monroe’s roller skating rink—had also gone up in flames, taking with them the livelihoods, and in many cases the life savings, of literally hundreds of people” write John Hope Franklin and Scott Ellsworth (Oklahoma Commission 2001:23). White rioters dispossessed African Americans of their property and eliminated a prosperous community, yet the Tulsa legal system “did virtually nothing” to prosecute those responsible. A grand jury “issued several dozen indictments”—mostly for Black Tulsans—but no indictments were issued for murder or arson (Brophy 2002:75). White prosecutors were unable or unwilling to prosecute a single individual: “no white Tulsan was ever sent to prison for the murders and burnings on May 31 and June 1, 1921 (Ellsworth 2001:89). Instrumental white violence helped maintain the political, economic, and social structure of white supremacy in the sixty years following the fall of slavery. But when the New York Stock Exchange crashed in October 1929, the nature of collective violence began to change. A new form of rioting struck in 1935.

### *Black Resistance and Rebellion*

Race rioting continued trending downward during the 1930s, both in terms of frequency and severity. Data from *The New York Times* Index shows only 15 race riots occurred between 1930 and 1939, a significant drop, and, I argue, evidence that the Nadir of American Race Relations had ended. Between 1920 and 1929, there were 29 serious race riots in the United States, a decline from 53 during the previous decade (1910 to 1919), and from 65 during the decade prior to that (1900 to 1909), when race rioting was at its peak, at least in terms of frequency. To help put the figure of 15 race riots into perspective, consider the decades following the Civil War. In

the four years after the end of the war, there were at least 30 significant episodes of mass racial violence in the United States. In the 1870s, as the country spread westward, there were at least 51 significant episodes of racial collective violence in the United States, and in the 1880s, at least 44 serious race riots occurred; at least another 37 race riots erupted during the 1890s, hence the 1930s represents an extraordinary drop in collective racial violence across the United States. It appears to have been the least violent decade on record in the sixty-five years following the Civil War—yet it happened during the height of the Great Depression, a phenomenon casting some doubt on the theory of relative deprivation.

Racial collective violence changed dramatically in form over the next several decades, beginning in 1935 in Harlem, when thousands of Black residents engaged in collective rebellion against social structures dominated by whites—especially merchants, accused of exploitative practices, and law enforcement, accused of discrimination and brutality. Violence was a technique of power used collectively to receive compensation for continued injustice. The year 1935 marks a transition toward Black-initiated collective violence and what I have called *compensatory rebellion*. Harlem’s riot is the first to feature widespread property destruction and looting performed by Black rioters, many of whom targeted symbols of white power, such as exploitative merchants and prejudiced police officers. The evolution of racial violence continued in 1943 with a *reciprocal riot* in Detroit. A reciprocal riot represents the “transition” category between two ideal types in the theoretical framework presented here; it features near simultaneous interracial rioting, with proactive Black violence rather than merely Black resistance to proactive white violence. Harlem also rioted in 1943, but the form was of racial violence was quite different: it was more property-oriented rather than interpersonal.

In the 40 years between 1919 and 1959, a period that began with the end of the World War I, fourteen years pass without a single episode of collective racial violence. This period represents the least violence period of contemporary American history, at least in terms of race riot incidence, and it coincides with a period of progress toward greater racial equality. A rights revolution was percolating in 1944, when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt announced his Second Bill of Rights, which sought to extend citizenship to include “positive rights.” This cultural shift towards a more progressive ideology “fundamentally shifted the terms of the debate in the civil rights movement, particularly in the period from the 1930s to the 1970s,” writes historian Thomas Sugrue. Cultural debate on human rights and the extension of citizenship

proved contentious, as one might expect: “Was there a right to welfare? Was there a right to equal education? Were rights restricted to the lifting of negative restraints on an individual’s freedoms—the equality of opportunity—or were they to be expanded to include equality of results, such as truly integrated schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods?” (2008:xvii). These questions dominated national political debate because Black activists and their white allies kept them in focus; it is interesting to note, therefore, that between 1939 and 1959 eleven years passed without a significant episode of race rioting. This was an unprecedented stretch of relative tranquility, at least in comparison to past U.S. history, and it coincides with the end of World War I, the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, and a period of dramatic reduction in economic inequality (Pinketty 2014).

The economic status of Black Americans definitely improved during the 1950s, but those gains were relative, and when compared to white Americans, the differences were stark. Economic data indicate that every year after 1953, African Americans suffered unemployment rates more than double those of whites, a pattern that held stubbornly throughout the following decade: “It was, in other words, close to a full-employment economy for whites, but a deep recession for blacks,” explains Sugrue (2008:256). World War II industries that had attracted southern Black migrants shuttered their urban plants and relocated production to suburbs; white people benefited from this shift, while economic dislocation devastated cities throughout the country. Detroit lost 140,000 manufacturing jobs between 1947 and 1963, most in unskilled and semiskilled positions that had once “provided an avenue of opportunity” for Black workers. New York City “underwent a massive economic restructuring,” as both the finance and real estate sectors grew, but neither industry employed many Black or brown workers, and industries that did, like the garment industry, lost more than 70,000 jobs during the 1950s. Port cities that had previously provided longshore and warehouse employment like Newark, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Oakland, “saw their wharves emptied as shippers turned to containers and trucking” (Sugrue 2008:257). Economic trends associated with deindustrialization and the effects of globalization circulated with the currents of employment discrimination. The Commission on Civil Rights, created as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1957, released a report in 1961 that documented “widespread workplace discrimination, especially in the skilled trades.” Complaints were “particularly numerous in ostensibly liberal California, New York, and Michigan.” And just as distressing, separate and unequal education systems existed throughout the North, “a problem

every bit as serious as that in the South,” according to the Commission (Sugrue 2008:271). All of these cities experienced serious episodes of racial unrest during the 1960s.

Race rioting increased dramatically as the decade progressed, beginning in 1963, when 10 race riots erupted—nearly all of them in the South. Twenty-one race riot events erupted between 1960 and 1963, with 18 occurring in the South. New York (1961), Los Angeles (1962), and Philadelphia (1963) were the others. Black Americans in the 1960s engaged in the rituals of compensatory rebellion, targeting structures symbolic of racial oppression—primarily a historically racist system of capitalism, visible in the exploitative practices of white-owned merchants in spaces predominantly populated by Black people, and a historically racist criminal justice system, visible in the biased practices of white police officers and judges, (again) in spaces populated predominantly by Black people. By 1964, racial violence had shifted to the North, reaching its peak in 1967, when at least 40 serious race riot events erupted in urban centers across the United States, and 1968, when, in the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at least 29 cities experienced significant race riot events. Black urban rebellions continued into the early 1970s, albeit with declining frequency. Twelve rebellions took place in 1970, placing it among the most violent years of the period (1963, 1964, 1966, and 1969 were also years with between 10 and 13 serious incidents of racial unrest). New Jersey was particularly violent, with four riot events spread throughout the state in 1970 (i.e., Asbury Park, New Brunswick, Jersey City, and Trenton). But race rioting began to subside thereafter, with six race riots in 1971 and three in 1972. After several years of increased spending, urban police departments were well equipped with military-grade vehicles and weaponry to conduct warfare against Black and brown residents. And on June 17, 1971, President Richard Nixon famously declared drug abuse as “public enemy number one in the United States.” The War on Drugs had officially begun, and along with it, a new era of Jim Crow for Black Americans.

Law enforcement’s response to Black rioting was entirely different than its response to white rioting. Sheriff’s departments and urban police officers largely ignored white disciplinary riots—and some actively participated in riot rituals as agents of white violence—while the U.S. federal government could only intervene if called (and Southern Democratic governors generally refused to request federal intervention). Yet when Black Americans took to the streets, law enforcement officials utilized helicopters, tanks, and other forms of military technology to suppress the violence, while the Johnson Administration typically responded with alacrity when

called upon (though there is significant debate about the debacle in Detroit 1967). Black-initiated riot violence has proven detrimental when considering its direct consequences. Urban law enforcement was increasingly militarized in the aftermath of rioting. A white political backlash against Black civil rights was another detrimental consequence of rioting. The lack of public support for rebuilding riot-torn neighborhoods is another direct consequences of the *compensatory rebellion* African Americans waged during the 1960s and early 1970s, prior to the War on Drugs. Historian Peter B. Levy has called this event the ‘Great Uprising,’ a period where African Americans engaged in the rituals of compensatory violence in a semi-coordinated attack against white power structures. Yet ultimately, Black urban rebellions provided white politicians with justification for a “variety of repressive measures,” including the expansion of COINTELPRO, the counter-intelligence program. Political maneuvers such as these “helped lay the groundwork for the war on crime and the rise of the carceral state” (Levy 2018:2).

When examining American race riots using the discipline-rebellion continuum suggested here, a singular social fact becomes evident. Riot rituals have proven *instrumental* as mechanisms for white Americans to control the economic, political, and social mobility of Black Americans, largely because law enforcement failed to protect Black citizens and the judicial justice system failed to hold white rioters accountable. Conversely, for Black Americans, engaging in riot rituals have proven largely *detrimental*: though the U.S. federal government did increase aid to some riot-torn cities during the administration of President Lyndon Johnson (Button 1978), the militarization of urban law enforcement has transformed social relations between police officers and the Black and brown communities they are sworn to serve. It is fair to ask whether the drug war was a new attempt at the social control of Black people, a new technique of subordination selected out of necessity in the aftermath of widespread urban rebellion. Michelle Alexander has argued that mass incarceration, largely a consequence of the War on Drugs, is simply a new technique of social control; that is, the drug war is *The New Jim Crow* (2010), the newest form of oppression in a long line of evolving techniques.

### *Black Lives Matter and the Legacy of White Violence*

Historical knowledge is political. And scholarship that seeks to uncover the deliberately hidden past has “transformative potential” because it illuminates the “deep connections between past injustices and modern social inequality,” as historical archaeologist Edward González-Tennant has argued in his excavation of the Rosewood Massacre (2018:8). Lynching and race riots were

fairly common events during the first several decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many communities were shattered by racial violence, yet “as a nation, we have chosen to forget this history and thus commit ourselves to ongoing cycles of violence.” Race riots are forgotten events that faded from public view because they are markers of disgrace, “masked by generations of silence” (González-Tennant 2018:2). The *forgetting* was a collective choice, made by white residents in towns that actively erased white domestic terrorism from their local histories; it was a collective choice, made by white textbook publishers who have ignored this vast trauma, likely because it tarnishes the cultural ethos of America as a land of opportunity for all.

The Black Lives Matter movement is needed today, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because large swaths of the white population remain unaware regarding these techniques of oppression. Black Lives Matter is necessary today because many white people remain unaware that for more than a century, law enforcement agencies failed to intervene and protect Black citizens from white violence. In fact, in many cases law enforcement actively participated in riot events, and in cases where the state actually tried prosecuting white rioters, all-white grand juries typically found no cause for indictment. If a case actually reached trial, all-white juries typically returned ‘not guilty’ verdicts, thereby releasing offenders back into the community. Black Lives Matter is necessary today because many white people remain unaware that the United States federal government did little to intervene in states where Black citizenship rights were being violated, either because it lacked the Constitutional authority or because the administration refused to offer assistance, but when Black folks rebelled during the 1960s, white governors ordered the use of overwhelming force against their citizens to restore the status quo. White Americans must be educated on this reality, not only regarding the ubiquitous nature of white-initiated collective violence across U.S. history, but of the *instrumentality* of white violence, how it has been used as a mechanism to deny rights and property to Black Americans throughout our history. The cumulative burden of collective racial violence remains with us, so activists march in protest. They must remind us that Black Lives Matter. Because white folks have participated in the forgetting for nearly 180 years, and it is long past time to fulfill our original nation’s promise.

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APPENDICES

**Appendix A. Results of the Presidential Election in Louisiana, 1868**

Parish	Total Voters Registered, Nov. 1868	Total Votes, Nov.	Dem. Votes, Nov.	Rep. Votes, Nov. 1868	Registered Republicans, 1867
Bienville	1,571	1,386	1,385	1	955
Bossier	1,898	1,636	1,635	1	1,938
Caddo	3,586	2,896	2,895	1	2,987
Morehouse	1,745	1,526	1,525	1	1,318
St. Bernard	1,187	474	473	1	679
Union	1,572	1,417	1,416	1	664
Claiborne	3,157	2,954	2,952	2	1,682
Sabine	1,063	936	934	2	<i>nd</i>
Caleasien	970	823	814	9	200
St. Martin	1,981	1,481	1,456	25	1,618
Caldwell	768	536	503	28	437
St. Helena	1,528	1,230	1,094	136	681
Catahoula	1,196	959	800	150	881
St. Tammany	1,465	1,174	704	470	556
Avoyelles	2,287	1,865	1,345	520	1,249
East Feliciana	2,417	2,055	1,411	644	1,686
Jefferson	5,999	3,180	2,222	672	3,677
East Baton	2,099	2,598	1,350	1,247	2,835
St. Landry	5,113	4,787	4,616	<i>nd</i>	2,102
DeSoto	2,361	1,260	1,260	<i>nd</i>	1,700
Lafayette	1,586	1,422	1,422	<i>nd</i>	766
Jackson	1,508	1,398	1,398	<i>nd</i>	659
Vermillion	999	958	958	<i>nd</i>	246
Washington	851	656	656	<i>nd</i>	363
Franklin	1,186	<i>nd</i>	<i>nd</i>	<i>nd</i>	606
Orleans	41,733	<i>nd</i>	<i>nd</i>	<i>nd</i>	<i>nd</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>91,826</b>	<b>39,557</b>	<b>25,283</b>	<b>3,911</b>	<b>30,544</b>

*Source: Supplemental Report, Joint Committee of General Assembly of Louisiana (1869)*

**Appendix B. Mississippi State Treasurer Elections by County, 1873 and 1875**

	Republican Vote			Democratic Vote		
	1873	1875	Change	1873	1875	Change
<i>Ballot Stuffing</i>						
Adams	2,066	2,616		361	793	
Alcorn	397	1,593		1,423	1,806	
Amite	1,080	1,095		407	1,189	
Attala	1,130	1,210		1,249	1,840	
Bolivar	813	1,920		103	348	
Calhoun	42	205		1,255	1,563	
Carroll	1,082	1,262		946	1,811	
Clark	1,123	1,225		582	1,289	
Copiah	1,784	1,861		1,576	2,434	
Covington	229	308		355	633	
Greene	57	59		80	303	
Grenada	1,152	983		543	1,230	
Hancock	242	257		345	492	
Harrison	312	290		460	760	
Issaquena	998	2,044		45	266	
Itawamba	<i>nd</i>	30		1,073	980	
Jackson	322	312		605	878	
Jasper	627	835		468	1,163	
Jefferson	1,294	1,922		58	678	
La Fayette	1,355	1,661		1,651	2,070	
Lauderdale	1,399	1,266		1,491	1,977	
Lawrence	9	591		57	797	
Leake	555	617		688	1,182	
Leflore	728	1,334		216	424	
Lincoln	872	980		488	1,311	
Madison	2,331	2,587		354	1,488	
Marion	216	214		197	487	
Marshall	3,126	2,856		1,998	3,186	
Neshoba	108	136		135	1,002	
Newton	232	432		549	1,420	
Noxubee	2,378	2,088		103	1,383	
Oktibbeha	1,233	1,598		44	781	
Panola	2,939	2,400		1,485	2,968	
Perry	6	36		48	361	
Pike	870	1,200		892	1,393	
Rankin	1,079	1,028		1,028	1,672	
Scott	344	490		723	1,138	
Simpson	285	332		496	737	
Smith	25	44		861	1,149	
Tallahatchee	812	969		353	1,239	
Tate	1,338	1,495		1,506	1,973	
Tippah	291	268		1,009	1,468	
Warren	1,572	2,042		1,211	3,606	
Washington	1,829	1,638		473	2,043	
Wilkinson	1,497	1,808		76	400	
Yalabusha	938	941		1,203	1,687	
Tunica	720	1,165		5	141	

Source: *Mississippi in 1875, Vol. I (1877:37-8)*

**Appendix B. Mississippi State Treasurer Elections by County, 1873 and 1875**

<i>Violence &amp; Fraud</i>					
Benton	503	293		923	1,047
Chickasaw	1,463	987		976	1,778
Choctaw	395	281		544	788
Claiborne	1,880	496		39	1,049
Coahoma	1,295	234		294	509
Colfax	1,559	659		41	1,737
De Soto	1,950	1,566		622	2,405
Hinds	3,489	2,321		1,184	3,836
Holmes	2,285	1,254		578	2,291
Jones	33	4		156	414
Kemper	1,229	418		781	1,339
Lee	715	183		1,162	2,423
Lowndes	2,725	2,021		680	2,137
Monroe	2,007	1,546		1,837	2,613
Montgomery	923	763		940	1,291
Prentiss	248	71		1,202	1,857
Tishemingo	67	12		781	1,352
Union	481	379		844	1,204
Wayne	253	363		245	586
Winston	514	377		687	908
Yazoo	2,427	7		411	4,044
<i>Fair Election</i>					
Franklin	385	542		513	747
Pearl	1	7		102	133
Pontotoc	474	464		1,292	1,442
Sumner	<i>nd</i>	<i>nd</i>		342	799
Sun Flower	421	378		299	346
<b>Totals (73)</b>	<b>70,462</b>	<b>67,000</b>		<b>47,486</b>	<b>97,922</b>

Source: *Mississippi in 1875, Vol. I (1877:37-8)*

### Appendix C. African American Residences Damaged and Destroyed in Springfield Race Riot: The Badlands

Address	Owner / Occupants	Property	Est. Loss
<i>Madison Street</i>			
829 East Madison	Isaac Kanner (owner); George Burnet (occupant; <i>no data on race</i> )	frame residence	nd
813-819 East Madison Street	<i>no data on occupants</i>	4 houses	\$3,000
907-909 East Madison Street	Charles Neal (African American)	saloon & residence	\$5,000
910-912 East Madison Street	Unoccupied	2 houses	\$800
913-915 East Madison Street	Isaac Kanner (owner); Dan Niel (occupant)	2-story frame residence	tl
917 East Madison Street	Isaac Kanner (owner); Dan Niel (occupant)	frame saloon	tl
1008 East Madison Street	David Black (African American)	1 residence	nd
1010 East Madison Street	Mrs. Coleman (African American)	1 residence	\$800
1010 East Madison Street	Fortune Bros. (owner); G. Cartwright, Sr.	frame residence	nd
1012 East Madison Street	African Americans ( <i>nd</i> )	1 house	\$1,000
1014 East Madison Street	Unidentified occupant (African American)	1 house	\$1,000
1016 East Madison Street	Unidentified occupants (African American)	frame residence	\$1,000
1018 East Madison Street	W. D. Booth (owner); Dave Block (occupant)	frame residence	\$1,000
1020 East Madison Street	W. D. Booth (owner); Jess Wormley (occupant)	frame residence	\$1,000
1022 East Madison Street	A. McCosker (owner); Mrs. Mary Davis (occupant, African American)	boarding house, brick	\$1,800
1024 East Madison Street	S. Puglisi (owner); J. H. Smith (occupant)	frame residence	tl
1106 East Madison Street	Tom Doyle (owner); G. Cartwright, Jr. (occupant)	frame residence	tl
1108 East Madison Street	no data	frame residence	tl
1110 East Madison Street	Unidentified occupants (African American)	1 house, vandalism	\$300
1114 East Madison Street	George Cartwright (African American)	1 house	\$1,000
1115 East Madison Street	Sandy Curry (African American)	1 house	\$1,000
1117 East Madison Street	no data on owner; James Ruffing (occupant)	1 house	\$500
1119 East Madison Street	no data on owner; Mrs. E. Edwards (occupant; African American)	1 house	\$500
1121 East Madison Street	Patrick Myers (owner); Charles Diamond (occupant, African American)	frame residence	tl

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### Appendix C. African American Residences Damaged and Destroyed in Springfield Race Riot: The Badlands

Address	Owner / Occupants	Property	Est. Loss
1123 East Madison Street	Patrick Myers (owner); Della Flynn (occupant)	frame residence	tl
1125 East Madison Street	J. E. Crowley (owner); Miss Edwards (occupant)	frame residence	tl
1129 East Madison Street	Joe Warner (owner); William Brandon (occupant)	Brick residence	tl
1131 East Madison Street	Joe Warner (owner); Al Hammond (saloon); James Hamilton (tenant)	saloon & residence	\$1,400
<i>Mason Street</i>			
1004 East Mason Street	Mrs. J. A. Spaar (owner)	frame shed	nd
1005 East Mason Street	D. C. Hinton (owner); Ed White (occupant)	2-story frame house	nd
1105 East Mason Street	Harry Moore (African American)	1 residence	\$300
1114 East Mason Street	George Cutwright (African American)	1 residence	\$300
1126 East Mason Street	W. Coll (owner); William Hughes (occupant)	frame residence	nd
1128 East Mason Street	W. Coll (owner); Walter Walker (occupant)	frame residence	\$1,200
1202 East Mason Street	Mrs. Mary Casey (white)	building	\$100
1124 East Mason Street	William Tearose (white?)	1 residence	\$350
<i>Jefferson Street</i>			
810 East Jefferson Street	Dan Smith	saloon	nd
815 East Jefferson Street	Mary Smith	residence	nd
817 East Jefferson Street	J. Carpenter (owner); Ina Smith (occupant)	frame residence	\$600
901 East Jefferson Street	J. Carpenter (owner); Scott Burton (African American, occupant)	barber shop	\$300
<i>Ninth Street</i>			
300 Ninth Street (west side)	Unidentified occupants	4 houses	\$2,000
304 North Ninth Street	William Scott (African American)	1 house	\$800
306 North Ninth Street	Unidentified occupants (African American)	1 house	\$800
308 North Ninth Street	Isaac Kanner (owner); J. B. Scott (occupant)	frame residence	tl

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Address	Owner / Occupants	Property	Est. Loss
310 North Ninth Street	Isaac Kanner (owner); Grace Carter (occupant)	frame residence	tl
311 North Ninth Street	Isaac Kanner (owner); George Lewis (occupant)	frame residence	tl
314 North Ninth Street	Isaac Kanner (owner); no data on occupants	frame residence	tl
<i>Tenth Street</i>			
301 North Tenth Street	Gerhardt Westenberger (owner); Will Smith (occupant)	frame residence	tl
Tenth Street, near Madison	Sue Crawford (white)	double frame shack	\$600
Tenth Street & Madison	Robert Darden (white)	1 residence	\$300
Tenth Street & Madison	African Americans (several, <i>nd</i> )	2 shacks	\$600
Tenth Street & Eleventh	Interstate Telephone Company Property	power lines & cables	\$3,000
311 North Tenth Street	Ed Payne (owner); Henry Brackmeyer (African American)	1 residence	\$400
313 North Tenth Street	Unidentified occupants (African American)	2 houses	\$1,000
314 North Tenth Street	H. I. Freeman (owner); Della Smith (occupant)	frame residence	tl
315 North Tenth Street	Mrs. T. Schwartz (owner); unidentified occupants	frame residence	tl
317 North Tenth Street	Unidentified occupants (African American)	2 houses	\$1,000
320 North Tenth Street	Isaac Kanner (owner); unidentified occupants (African American)	1 house	\$1,000
323 North Tenth Street	R. I. McGuire (owner); H. Stoutmeyer (occupant)	frame residence	tl
<i>Eleventh Street</i>			
230 North Eleventh Street	Reisch Bros. (owner); unidentified occupants	frame residence	tl
300 block, Eleventh Street	3 African Americans: B. Smith, S. Green, Mrs. L. Coeman; Nell Pitt (w)	4 residences	\$3,000
304 North Eleventh Street	Mrs. C. Tanner (owner); unidentified occupants (African American)	1 house	\$200
306 North Eleventh Street	Mrs. C. Tanner (owner); unidentified occupants (African American)	1 house	\$200
308 North Eleventh Street	Isaac Kanner (owner); J. Williams	1 house	\$200
310 North Eleventh Street	Isaac Kanner (owner); D. Short	1 house	\$200
311 North Eleventh Street	Mrs. Head (owner); unidentified occupants	2 houses	\$500

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Address	Owner / Occupants	Property	Est. Loss
313 North Eleventh Street	Mrs. Head (owner); unidentified occupants	2 houses	\$500
Eleventh Street & Madison	Frank Schuckhart (owner)	saloon	\$2,000
Eleventh Street & Madison	Reisch Brewing Company	residence	\$1,000
<i>Twelfth Street</i>			
320 North Twelfth Street	A. Williams (African American)	1 house	\$200
320 North Twelfth Street	John White and Cass Williams	1 double house	\$700
322 North Twelfth Street	Scott Burton (African American)	1 house	\$200
Twelfth Street & Madison	John Rouse and Lawson Goodwin	saloon & residence	\$3,000
Twelfth Street & Mason	Unidentified owner/occupants	double house	\$800
Twelfth Street & Mason	William Branden (white)	barber shop	\$600
Twelfth Street & Mason	Caldwell (African American)	shoe shop	\$100
Twelfth Street & Mason	Scott Burton (African American)	1 residence	<i>nd</i>

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