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The Capital and Chicago Race Riots

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ON the face of the facts, both as to the origin and the immediate (fighting) results of the Washington and Chicago race riots, the Negro certainly has nothing to be ashamed of and nothing to regret—save the casualties and sufferings which of necessity were the portion of both groups of participants. And he has many reasons for a justifiable pride in the prowess and resource displayed by the men and women of his race who were forced to take up arms in defence of their lives and homes, and who, with their “backs to the wall,” fighting over the Battle of Democracy, showed themselves the superiors in courage, resource and “civilized warfare” of their white opponents and, terribly outnumbered though they were, more than held their own, hitting back in hard, telling blows that had more effect in discouraging the murderous lust of white hoodlums and ruffians than any act on the part of the local and military authorities.

And in both cases the Negro had an undeniable “moral case.” Both in Washington and in Chicago the white man plainly was the aggressor. And the aggressor on no excusable or condonable grounds! In Washington white marines and soldiers, travelling in groups, attacked and beat up lone colored men because of recent alleged attacks by Negroes on white women. In Chicago white bathers stoned to death a small colored boy whose drifting raft had carried him across the “white section” of the lake front!

But while both riots were caused by white aggression and while both have many features in common there are certain shameful things that occurred in Washington that, happily, were not duplicated in Chicago. For this reason, then, the two riots should be considered separately.

The Washington Riot

Without a doubt the Washington trouble could have been averted had the Capital police taken prompt measures in suppression of the mob spirit of the white marines

and soldiers. And quite probably, too, the Chicago trouble would not have occurred so soon, though observers seem to agree that it was fated to come. But the Washington police took no steps to suppress the disorderly conduct of the white mobs during the days when they were beating up Negroes and “shooting up” the Negro sections with the colored people quiescent, long-suffering and patiently waiting for action on the part of the police to suppress the disorder and re-establish the reign of Law and Order. The white papers themselves report that:

“During the troubles on the first two nights the police made no effort to stop the White mobs. They seemed to consider it was none of their business . . .”

General attacks on Negroes began on July 19 and for two full days the white mobs had a merry, unopposed blood-picnic while the white Washington police stood by in the role of benevolent neutrals and the colored police were detached from duty because, as *The Globe* reported:

“The attacks by service men on Negroes were so general that uniformed Negro policemen were detached from duty and sent home by the authorities.”

What a confession of weakness and race prejudice in high places! Thus the Negro population of Washington, refused the protection of white policemen and denied that of their own policemen, were thrown upon their own resources for the protection of their lives and homes. And how nobly and effectively they responded to this necessity is now a matter of proud record. Again we quote the white press:

“While in the minor disorders of Saturday and Monday night crowds of white men assumed the aggressive, the latest rioting was marked by a general preparedness on the part of colored men, who

during the day purchased hundreds of revolvers. They formed into crowds in their own sections and attacked white men wherever found."

But with action on the part of the Negro to defend his home and life against the wanton attacks of white mobs, the situation underwent a rapid change. The white police threw off its neutrality and we read such headlines in the Metropolitan dailies as:

"Capital Police and Negroes in Many Battles; Three Are Dead."

And then, with the situation beyond control of the local police, came military intervention and the despatch of white soldiers to Washington by order of the Secretary of War, who took action after a conference with the President, and the appearance in the Metropolitan dailies of such headlines as:

"5 Dead in Capital Race Riots; U. S. Cavalry Fail to Stop Negroes."

Thus establishing the fact that, while in Washington riotous outbreaks had occurred between two groups of American citizens, it was only against the mobs of one group that the United States troops were used.

But even the United States regulars seemed to have been unable to stop the long-suffering worm that at last had turned upon its persecutors; and Negroes, at first quiescent, later on the defensive, were now on the aggressive in true "Hell Fighters" style, and were carrying the war into "the enemy's country," speeding through the streets of the white quarters in improvised tanks and leaving deadly leaden souvenirs behind:

"Numbers of Negroes took possession

of high-powered automobiles in which they raced through the streets, pumping bullets from automatic weapons at all whites who happened within range. It is believed that numerous casualties resulting from this indiscriminate firing have not been reported to the police.

"Pennsylvania Avenue, the main thoroughfare, was thronged all night with crowds of both whites and Negroes. Wherever they met there was a clash. Shots were exchanged and razors flashed. Negroes, defying the whites, are touring the Northwest section of the city and daring any white man or woman to leave their homes. Many shots have been fired at windows in which a white face was seen.

"Apparently fearless of the shining bayonets of the United States forces, the Negroes organized a fleet of improvised tanks and started out to clean up the town. Practically all of them were armed. Many of the automobiles contained a surplus supply of sawed off shotguns loaded with heavy charges and buckshot."

And not only did the Negroes of the Capital fight back, and fight back with a vengeance, but the colored people in several near-by towns across the Maryland border organized and began to move upon the Capital to the aid of their brethren, and were only prevented from taking a hand in the Washington eruption by the quick action of the War Department which despatched a large force of United States regulars to block their way to the Capital.

The Chicago Riot

Ill-feeling of long standing between the two races in Chicago was the underlying cause of the outbreak which, however, was undoubtedly precipitated by the Washington troubles. One of the chief reasons of

JEAN D'ARC

Washington, D. C., July 24.—Carrie Johnson, seventeen-year old colored girl, shot Harry Wilson, a white detective in the stomach when the latter attempted to force an entry into her home, during the Capital race war. She is now accused of firing several shots from the window of her home into a white crowd bent on invading the colored district. It is said that many other colored girls and women were to be found upon the firing line with their men folk in defence of their "inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The whites will undoubtedly try to make an example of this brave colored girl in one of their travesties on justice as they have done in the case of Dr. Leroy Bundy who led his race in defence of their homes and women and children in the East St. Louis riots. Will our people stand by idly and allow these fiends to have their will and exact their vengeance on this girl because of her brave deed, or will they rally to her support with money and all the resources at their command?

racial antagonism in Chicago was the rapid growth of the Negro population, its increasing competition in the labor market and its invasion of white neighborhoods.

The Chicago Negroes, having digested the lesson of the Washington riots when the white police stood by in benevolent neutrality to white mobs, fought back from the start. They, too, carried the war into "the enemy's country," though in greater numerical inferiority than were the Washington Negroes. They, too, demonstrated that they had learnt a good many things by their participation in the White Man's War of 1914-1919. One of their first acts being the storming and rifling of an armory and the cutting of the telephone wires in the "war area."

While, as said before, the two outbreaks were alike in their salient features, Chicago was saved the disgraceful spectacle of the authorities truckling to the white mobs by detaching from duty her colored policemen. She escaped the stigma, too, of inciting to riot by her white press. Apart from this, however, the white mobs of Chicago have nothing to be proud of. Like the white mobs in Washington they were bravest in their attacks on lone Negroes, and in the instances when they cornered a lone and unarmed Negro they descended to barbarities that the Washington whites have not been, as yet, accused of. The New York Call of August first, reports, with photographs, one of these instances as follows:

"This mob has cornered a Negro under an outside stairway near 46th street and Wentworth avenue. The men who 'got' him are in the right of the picture just running to join the group about the stairway.

"And at the right is the dying Negro and the pair who were 'in at the death.' The arm of the one in the cap is still upraised. He has just thrown his last stone."

Another lone Negro cornered in a white section was burned to death. And to such barbarities did the white mobs of Chicago descend that the Mayor of the second American city (to whom by the way all honor for his stand against turning the militia loose) gives as his reason for finally calling upon Governor Lowden for troops the fact that he was in receipt of authentic information that an attempt would be made to burn down the "Black Belt" with a duplication of the East St. Louis horrors:

"Information was accurate, and I was satisfied it was well founded," the Mayor said. "The condition of the buildings was so dry that a conflagration might have

started in no time. As evidence of the absolute authenticity of my information, I am having prepared a list of the fires and alarms last night."

Comment

Naturally two race riots of such extent excited considerable comment from the press and leading men of the nation. The New York Call and The New York World were outspoken in their denunciations of the white injustices which both recognized to be the underlying cause; the New York Globe joined in denouncing white injustice and the wanton attack upon Negro lives but nevertheless was of the opinion that Negroes never, never should resort to force; and Arthur Brisbane, in the New York American, while engaging in no denunciation that we have seen or heard of, professed the advice that Negroes would do well not to resort to force as "The odds are too great in number and in ability. Besides, real force resides in Government and this entire Government is white."

The only word from the white "Christian Church" was uttered by Cardinal Gibbons, who, not deigning to denounce the injustices to which the Negro is subjected, showed more interest in booze than in human lives and saw in the riots only proof "that a legislative suppression of intoxicating drinks is not, as it was said to be, a panacea against all social and moral evils," which comment he supplemented with some drivel to the effect that capitalism was Labor's best friend.

Among such papers as The New York Times, the riots were attributed to the growth of Bolshevism among Negroes and not to any injustice in the white man's attitude and treatment of the Negro.

The ubiquitous Lusk Committee, too, had its fling by the dissemination of the opinion of one Ven Svarc, a Cleveland lawyer, whose testimony before the Stone Agers included the statement that:

"The Bolsheviki had a bad habit of getting hold of armored cars and running them through the streets of Petrograd and carrying on disorderly shooting, and when I read recently about the way some of the Negroes were behaving down at Washington it reminded me very much of the Bolshevik tactics of the same kind in Petrograd."

Not that Negroes who are determined to defend their lives and homes against wanton and lawless attacks will have any objections to being called Bolsheviks for so doing, but it is an interesting phase of a

serious situation and further proof of the hypocrisy and casuistry of the caucasian that he should feel called upon to frame up causes and excuses to explain two outbreaks that were acknowledgedly started by white mobs and in which colored men and women merely fought in defence of their lives and homes. Is the white man, already morally bankrupt, approaching intellectual bankruptcy?

EUROPEAN COMMENTS ON THE RIOTS

Berlin, July 27.—Reports of the Negro riots in Washington are reaching Germany in the most sensational form through the Italian newspapers, the *Gorriere della Sera* having notably stimulated this brand of

German interest in the American outlook.

An example of German comment on the situation is furnished in a column article in the *Lokal-Anzeiger*, headlined "The Black Peril," which says:

"The disorders now reported are but a beginning. If the Negroes can find a leader—perhaps already they have one—we may yet experience all sorts of things, *perhaps some day a black President.*

"It is easily possible that Bolshevik propaganda will make use of the Negro. One cannot foresee what might happen in the United States if these masses poured over the country, murdering and plundering. *The Japanese, too, are calculating on the Negro.* Some day this can grow into a very serious problem, beside which the labor question will be like child's play."