1919, The Year of Racial Violence

How African Americans Fought Back

This study recounts African Americans’ brave stand against a cascade of mob attacks in the United States after World War I. The emerging New Negro identity, which prized unflinching resistance to second-class citizenship, inspired veterans and their fellow black citizens. In city after city – Washington, D.C.; Chicago; Charleston; and elsewhere – black men and women took up arms to repel mobs that used lynching, assaults, and other forms of violence to protect white supremacy; yet, authorities blamed blacks for the violence, leading to mass arrests and misleading news coverage. Refusing to yield, African Americans sought accuracy and fairness in the courts of public opinion and the law. This is the first account of this three-front fight – in the streets, in the press, and in the courts – against mob violence during one of the worst years of racial conflict in U.S. history.

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To Eric Pullin, friend and fellow historian
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The following abbreviations for primary sources are used in order to reduce footnote length. For the same reason, citations of secondary sources provide only an author’s last name and a short title. The bibliography provides a complete list of the primary and secondary sources cited in the notes. In order to avoid obtrusive corrections, quotations in the text leave intact the original spelling and grammar of the sources.


RG 60, Glasser File: Records of the Department of Justice, Glasser File, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

RG 65, OGF: Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Old German File, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

RG 80: Records of the Navy, General Correspondence of the Secretary of the Navy, 1916–1926, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Source Abbreviations and Usage Note


RG 165: Record Group 165, Records of the War Department, General Staff, Military Intelligence Division, Microfilm Publication M1440, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

RG 174, Division of Negro Economics: Record Group 174, Records of the Department of Labor, General Records, 1907–1942 (Chief Clerk's Files), Records of the Division of Negro Economics, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

Waskow Notes: Arthur Waskow Notes on the NAACP 1919 Mob Violence File. (These notes are transcriptions that Waskow made in the late 1950s of the documents in the file, which was subsequently lost or destroyed prior to the deposit of the NAACP’s records at the Library of Congress. Waskow’s notes, which are held at the Wisconsin Historical Society, are the most complete copy of these invaluable historical records.)¹

¹ Arthur Waskow to the author, February 11, 2008, in the author’s possession.