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America's Own Race Problem Blazes Up

Riots Bring Grave Peace Problems

WASHINGTON, August 2.

THE bitter, unvarnished truth needs to be told about the recent race riots in Washington.

It needs to be told for the benefit of the entire country, particularly in view of a similar and more serious outbreak in Chicago within a week, actually started there as in Washington, by whites.

It needs to be told because the old formula for race rioting has been changed by the war, the development of propaganda and the rise of Bolshevism.

The truth indicts both whites and negroes equally.

Race rioting, as defined by flagrant scenes of disorder last week in the nation's capital meant:

1. Attacks, real and reported, on women by negroes.
2. Hoodlumism by men in the uniform of the United States.
3. Insufficient police protection for the national capital.
4. Lack of restrictions upon the sale of firearms, and lax enforcement of the laws against carrying deadly weapons.
5. Incendiary press reports in both white and colored papers.
6. The spread among the negro population of this country of dangerous race propaganda growing out of the war and most commonly based upon the negro soldier's reception in France, the Irish question, Bolshevism and the century-old cry that the white man has oppressed the negro.

Both Sides to Blame

The truth about the Washington race riots is so unfavorable to both negroes and whites that one can hardly be blamed more than the other.

One June 25 a negro woman was attacked near Tennalytown, Md., about three miles northwest of Washington. Two days later two white women were similarly attacked, both near Brightwood, in the District of Columbia, three miles north of Washington. On July 5 a white woman was attacked near Somerset, Md., three and a half miles northwest of Washington.

From three of these cases charges of rape resulted. Two negroes were arrested; one was charged with two crimes and was positively identified by two women. The other negro fought extradition from Maryland on a charge of criminal assault.

Between July 5 and July 19, when the trouble started in Washington, no further attacks occurred, although Washington was kept on edge by false reports of more attacks. Women began to be afraid to go out alone.

On the night of July 18 the wife of a petty officer in the naval flying corps was jostled on the sidewalk by a negro. The report of her encounter grew into that of another criminal assault.

Mob Violence Begins

The next night mob violence was started by uniformed men in the government service. A mob of soldiers, sailors and marines invaded the "Southwest" district of Washington, and with fists, clubs and stones beat up every negro they met.

The following night free-for-all fighting was resumed, this time up and down Pennsylvania Avenue. Guns were used, however; it was a battle between hoodlums with the whites again the aggressors.

Monday, July 21, guns appeared. All day long reports came in that guns were being bought.

At noon negroes in a motor car fired at white men standing in the yard of the naval hospital.

Race rioting gripped Washington that night. Guns and blackjacks, knives, stones, clubs and fists were used without provocation. The police and the hospitals were swamped.

That night showed that the Washington police force was inadequate. While war had swelled the city's population, the police force had been cut down. Salaries were too low to hold good men or attract others.

The glaring fact also confronted the city that it had no law against the sale of firearms. Probably a thousand guns were bought on the days preceding the worst rioting. It is also admitted that strict laws against carrying concealed weapons have been lightly construed for months.

Seven Men Killed

Seven men—four colored, three white, including a policeman, a marine and a white boy—were killed. Over one hundred persons, including one white and several negro women, were injured.

There was some liquor. If there had been wide open saloons there would have been scores of deaths, every competent official declares.

Evidence that both sides were at fault is disclosed by the fact that Congress is being asked for more and better paid police, that the sale of firearms is to be restricted and put under license, that penalties for carrying concealed weapons are to be enforced, and that conferences are to be held at intervals between leading white and negro citizens in an effort to control both races. Leading negroes do not deny that white women were assaulted. They only question the exact number of attacks.

From this point the situation becomes less clear and enters the debatable stage. The negroes assert that there should be more negro policemen. With more than 125,000 negroes in Washington, they point out the fact that in years not a single negro policeman has been added to the police force.

They also say that unnecessary insults have been offered the negro race by recent bills introduced in Congress to provide "Jim Crow" streetcars and prohibit intermarriage of the two races.

The Gravest Charge

If there had not been a war; if there had not been a riot in Chicago a week after that in Washington; if radical negro agitators had not circulated among the Washington negroes; if negro bodies in New York City, Boston and elsewhere were counselling peace and not violence; if negro papers were themselves reasonably free from race propaganda of a violent nature, the final charge of the negroes, that the press associations and the Washington papers inflamed the white population and helped start the riots, would be perhaps the gravest indictment made against the whites of Washington.

For it is a fact, as the negroes have definitely pointed out, that on the day following the worst roiting a dispatch appeared on the first page of a prominent Washington paper which was undoubtedly calculated to cause further trouble at the very time that troops had been called in. This article said, in part:

MOBILIZATION FOR TO-NIGHT

"It was learned that a mobilization of every service man stationed in or near Washington or on leave here has been ordered for to-morrow evening near the Knights of Columbus hut, on Pennsylvania Avenue, between Seventh and Eighth streets.

"The hour of assembly is 9 o'clock, and the purpose is a 'clean-up' that will cause the events of the last two evenings to pale into insignificance.

"Whether official cognizance of this assemblage and its intent will bring about its forestallings cannot be told."

Contrasted to this one may find on the front page of "The New York Age" one day last week the two items adjoining.

But it is the contention of this article that the Washington riot was more than a local disturbance; that it really symbolized a situation that lies dormant the country over, namely, that because of the war new elements have been injected into the problem of racial friction between whites and negroes in this country.

The death of Policeman Harry Wilson in the Washington riots dramatizes this point by bringing to the attention of the police one example of the propaganda now being carried on in the negro papers of this country.

A Girl Sniper

On the night of July 21 sniping was reported from the second story of a house at 220 G Street, N. W., in the negro section. Policeman Harry Wilson and others went to the house, forced their way upstairs and began searching in a dark room for the sniper. From under a bed a seventeen-year-old negro girl shot and mortally wounded Wilson.

A day or two later the police had on file a copy of "The Boston Age" of July 19, which had been directed to the address where Wilson was killed.

The Washington police do not claim that the paper in question incited the negro girl to sniping. But the content of at least one article in the paper, edited by a prominent negro leader, who has just returned from France, reveals the fact that the negroes of this country are fostering in their own papers dangerous propaganda of the following kinds:

1. That fostering the feeling that the white man is oppressing the black purposely.
2. That which touches at a dangerous point the idea of racial equality between whites and negroes.
3. That which counsels violence between the races.
4. That which teaches the negro to talk freely of this country going Bolshevist.
5. To attack England, to raise the Irish question and to declare the United States no democracy.

This type of propaganda is most generally ascribed to two causes: The presence of negro soldiers in France, where French women of the lower classes accepted them as equals, and the presence of an increasing number of agitators among the negroes.

Bruising the Hand That Blessed
—From *The Richmond (Va.) Planet*

The CRISIS

(From the cover of the current issue of "The Crisis," the organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Drawn by Laura Wheeler).

How About Your Own Doorstep, Uncle?
—From *The New York Amsterdam News*

(These three drawings, showing the negroes' point of view, are taken from negro publications)

EXTRA!

DAILY PRESS INCITES RIOTS, SAYS PULLMAN

(SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK AGE)

WASHINGTON, D. C.—Major Pullman, head of the police here, stated to a delegation of negroes, of which James W. Johnston, of "The Age," was a member, that only four cases of assault had come to his notice, that the first woman assaulted was a colored school teacher.

EXTRA!

WHITE FIEND ATTACKS A 16-YEAR-OLD COLORED GIRL

(SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK AGE)

PENSACOLA, Fla.—A brutal assault was committed by a white fiend on a sixteen-year-old colored girl in broad daylight, and the crime has aroused the colored people to a high pitch of excitement.

The girl was sent by her widowed mother in a buggy to get some sweet potato vines. On her way she was attacked, her assailant jumping in the buggy and dragging her out, while threatening to cut her with a knife if she uttered a sound.

The negro press and the riots

A Chaos of Opinion

American Press Offers No Solution

IF THERE is any solution of the race riot problem it is difficult to find it in the comment of the American press. Opinion is hopelessly varied and conflicting. One conspicuous and expected cleavage is that between Northern and Southern newspapers. Typical of the extreme Northern view is "The Hartford Courant," which says:

"For more than a hundred years white men have lynched black men in the South with the open approval and often through the assistance of what the South regards as its best citizens, and with the tacit approval of the authorities, and in time the country must pay the bill thus incurred. Harvest follows seedtime; the pendulum must swing in one direction as far as it does in the other, and if negroes can be killed in the South negroes will, in time, kill white persons in the North until the odds have been evened.

"A beginning has been made in two cities, but there is no reason to think or trust that the riots will be confined to those two places, for Philadelphia, New York and Boston may see like trouble."

The Southern View

The Southern papers take the view that race feeling, deplorable as it is, is natural and universal and operates more viciously against the negro in the North than in the South. Says "The Baltimore Sun":

"The black and white riots in Chicago were not needed to prove that race hate is not merely a sectional product. Some Northern cities have tried to create this impression, and they still harp on Southern lynchings as a proof that the South is the nursery of race antagonism. But other outbreaks in Northern cities and sections long ago made their theory ridiculous.

"It is clear to the unprejudiced observer that race feeling is far deeper and more intense north of Mason and Dixon's line than south of it. When this feeling is aroused in Northern or Western cities, it assumes the character of ferocious and murderous animosity. What the South asserts in its lynchings is the determination to maintain white integrity and separateness. It is not inspired by race hate, but by the instinct of race preservation. The Southern people have no unkind feeling for the colored race as such. On the contrary, they like the negro, they understand him, and are ready to help him."

A frank threat that segregations, Southern style, must come unless the present frictions can be avoided is found in "The Chicago Tribune." This is one of the few practical suggestions for a solution of the underlying difficulties mentioned by any paper:

"The issue is beginning to be sharply drawn. The colored people do not seem disposed to recede from what they consider a just position in the community, and the whites seem determined not to give way, as they conceive it, before a penetration of colored people into neighborhoods which heretofore have been restricted to white population.

"The colored people insist upon just and equal advantages. White people take the position that the 'encroachment' of negroes is not just to them, because depreciation of property values always follows.

Segregation Suggested

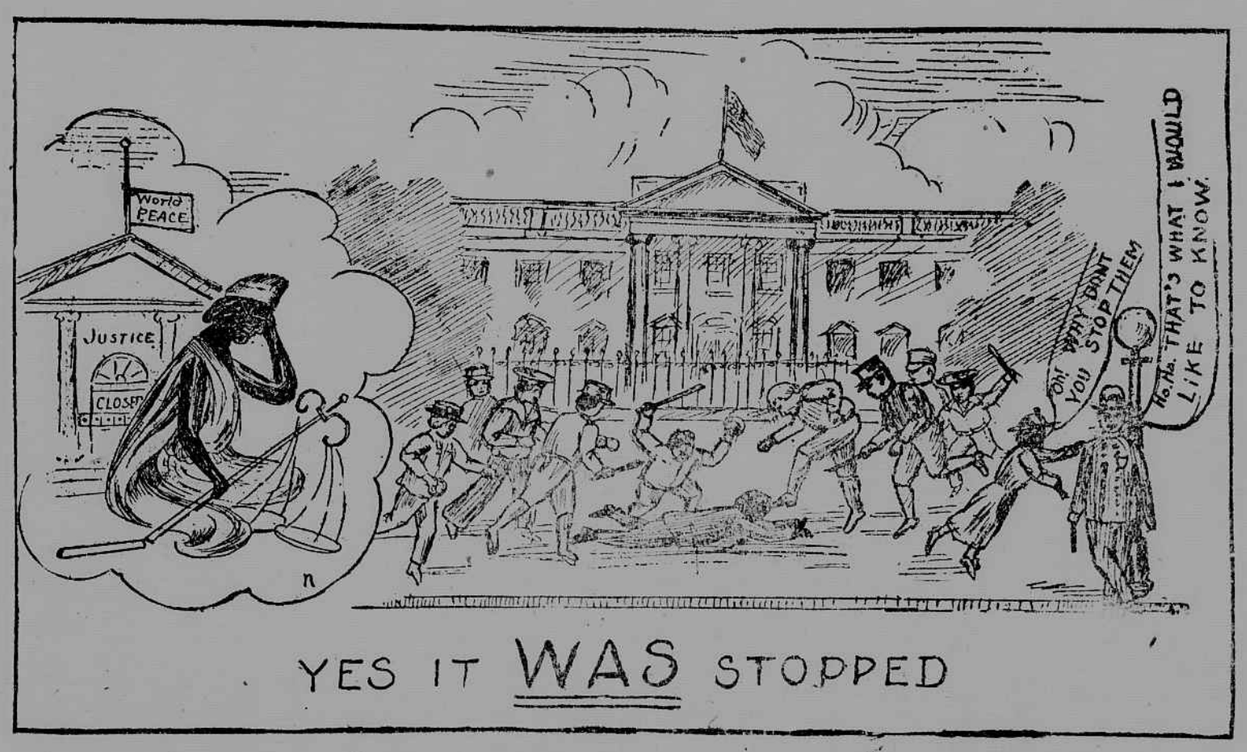
"If the whites and colored cannot refrain from riots and bloodshed and interminable violence on the bathing beaches, how long will it be before this question is asked: Shall there be separate bathing beaches for the whites and colored?

"If the races cannot get along in certain neighborhoods without fights and brawls and police interference, how long will it be before segregation will be the only means of preventing daily murders and perhaps a recurrence, on a scale vastly enlarged, of the East St. Louis disaster?

"If a colored person cannot enter a streetcar without this being the signal for shooting and furore, how long will it be before public policy and the protection of life and property makes necessary another system of transportation?"

There is a general agreement in Northern papers that the present outbreaks are serious and forebode wider trouble. That they bear a significant relation to the world's troubles and have a moral for all Americans is the view of "The Bridgeport Standard Telegram."

The general opinion is that the Chicago and Washington riots are symptoms of a general unrest and the direct result of the war.



A negro journal's view of the Washington riots. From "The Washington Bee."

Must We Fight?

The Negro's Question

THE negro papers of the country have spoken plainly of the consequences which they think may result from the race riots. "The New York Age," one of the most important negro papers in the country, commented as follows upon the Washington outbreaks:

"Civil war in the capital of the United States and within the shadow of the Capitol, is the logical result of undemocratic and intolerable conditions which have become unbearable to colored Americans. Since the Wilson régime Washington has been filled with white job hunters from the South, who are lynchers at heart and who believe that the colored man has no rights which a white man is bound to respect. Hounded, beaten and killed by soldiers and sailors sworn to protect the law, and with the police in most instances indifferent to their appeals for protection, the colored people of Washington found it necessary to resort to the last recourse—protect themselves.

A Bolshevist Soviet

"Unless those at the head of the government take rigid measures to restore the respect for law and order, a Bolshevist soviet or a committee of soldiers and sailors may yet rule from the Capitol.

"The progress of the outbreaks at Washington, with the reported resistance on the part of the negroes and resort to retaliation in kind, emphasizes the national responsibility for the growth of this spirit of mob violence and contempt for law and order. It is fitting that this demonstration should occur at the capital of the nation, as it shows how far the evil has spread under national toleration, if not encouragement. It will need the utmost exercise of the national power to prevail over the spirit of anarchy and lawlessness that is threatening the overthrow of the orderly administration of the law.

"The warning is so plain that it cannot be overlooked. Will the nation heed it?"

"Must the Negro Fight?" is the heading of a long article in "The Veteran," a newly started negro journal in New York.

"Must the negro fight to secure his rights as an American citizen? Must he who fought across the seas to save the world fight again at home to save himself? Must he who faced death and braved it to make the world safe for democracy, face and brave an unfortunate issue to make America a safe place for his sons and daughters to live? Must the negro fight?

"There is a fight ahead of the negro, and the sooner he gets into it and carries it through to victory the less intense and prolonged shall be the struggle. But where is he to get his weapons? The answer is patent. What is that in thine hand?

Fiercely, Relentlessly

"In the hand of the negro at the North is the ballot, an effective weapon when rightly wielded. With this weapon he must make his fight fiercely, relentlessly. In most Northern cities the negro easily constitutes the balance of power. His vote thrown to either of the dominant parties spells defeat to the other. At the primaries his support given to one of two or several closely contending aspirants means victory for that candidate.

"In the hand of the negro at the South is economic force, the most terrible of weapons, more terrible even than the ballot, because it is the basis of the ballot. The negro is the economic cornerstone of the Southland. If the negro should desert the cotton fields and turpentine and other industries of the Southland for a single day powerless public officials would suddenly become endued with strange power and legislators would set in earnest about finding their own remedy for mob violence and discrimination. The negro feeds and clothes the Southland. He constructs its factories and railroads. He produces its wealth. He clothes the dominant with power. The poor whites eat their bread from his hand. What a weapon he holds in his hand! Really, he could desire no other. A general strike, or perhaps better still, a wholesale exodus of negro labor from the South, will do more in one month toward revolutionizing the social conditions under which the negro lives than a score of industrial schools with their doctrines of servility, combined with a score of advancement societies with their doctrines of mere protest, could hope to accomplish in a generation. The negro must fight.

"These are the negro's weapons—political and economic force, the ballot and the strike or exodus. Let him wield them now and so avert a struggle of violence which otherwise must surely come somewhere in the distant future."