PREFACE

The *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots* introduces readers to the history of race riots in the United States with a particular emphasis on the twentieth century. In this regard, the selection of entries was far from a random exercise. While race riots are the clear focus of this project; other closely related phenomena (e.g., lynching, urban riots, white capping, and assassinations) are included. The many forms of racially motivated violence, whether involving mobs or not, are intrinsically linked together. For example, the act of lynching is interpreted as a micro-scale race riot in this work. Lynchings were often racially motivated, involved mobs of attackers, and were frequently linked to full-fledged race riots. A representative instance of this would be the 1919 Omaha lynching of Willie Brown, which accompanied an anti-black race riot. In a similar vein, discussing the 1921 Tulsa, Oklahoma, race riot while excluding analyses of the controversial film *Birth of a Nation*, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or the initial ruling to exonerate the police officers who beat Rodney King would not seem logical—especially since each of these instances generated waves of race riots.

The principal emphasis in these volumes is on the white–black racial binary, and this is due to the explicit focus on race riots. Clearly, there have been a large number of Native American massacres and acts of racially motivated violence. Likewise, Latin Americans and Latinos/as faced severe repression and suffered numerous racist atrocities. Other groups—Jews, Asian immigrants, Asian-Americans, Arab-Americans, the Irish, Italians, Eastern Europeans, and others—have dealt with an inhospitable set of circumstances in the United States. As will become evident in the present work, the overwhelming number of race riots in North American history has involved whites and African Americans as either instigators or victims. Other groups are not completely ignored, they just are not the emphasis of this encyclopedia and would fit better in a work that deals more broadly with racial violence in North America. This work does attempt a broader analysis in its chronological and geographic scope. Beginning with the New York City Draft Riots of 1863, this study covers race riots and other disturbances from the Civil War to the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Geographically, the entries cover disorders in the South, the North, the Southwest, the Midwest, and the West.

Offering more than 260 entries, the *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots* will prove a handy and highly usable information resource for both specialist and nonspecialist users. Scholars and graduate students in the social sciences and humanities, especially history and African American studies, will find these volumes to be excellent sources of quick and current information. Students, both undergraduate and high school, will find the entries to be engaging and informative introductions to the subject of American racial violence, while the interested general reader accessing these volumes through public libraries will quickly and easily find much important and eye-opening information.

Averaging 500 to 1,000 words in length, with many of the discussions of specific riots running much longer, the entries contain many bold-faced (e.g., **Accommodationism**) cross-references to other entries mentioned in the text and "*See also*" lines at the end of entries that refer readers to other related entries. Each entry concludes with a Further Reading section offering one or more additional information resources, including books, journal articles, and Web sites. Biographical entries provide life dates in the heading, and entries on books, reports, and films provide author names and publication dates in the heading.

Among the encyclopedia's other useful features are a compilation of primary document excerpts, including eyewitness descriptions of particular riots, newspaper accounts, statistics on incidents of lynching and other racial violence, court testimony, and passages from major government reports on race riots, such as the report of the Kerner Commission and the Tulsa Race Riot Commission. A "Guide to Related Topics" breaks down the entries into useful categories, allowing readers to quickly make connections among broad themes and topics. A chronology allows quick look-up of the dates of important events related to the history of American race riots and racial violence, and a clear and detailed foreword and introduction put that history into context for nonspecialist readers. A detailed subject index allows even greater access to the information contained in the entries.

INTRODUCTION

Racial violence has a long, tragic, and ironic history in North America. The frequency of race riots defies any attempt to describe them as anomalies; their ferocity illuminates the savage inequalities present in the United States. Indeed, the very presence of race riots becomes one of the most vexing components of the American paradox. In some important ways, race riots reveal certain truths about American society. Sociologists, political scientists, and historians have been at the forefront in the study of race riots in the United States and have greatly broadened understanding of these phenomena. This topic has spawned an enormous amount of scholarly attention and has even been the focus of fictional treatments, both in print and on film. Federal, state, and local governments have formed commissions to analyze the origins of race riots. Churches, religious associations, and civil rights organizations have also voiced concerns about violent racial disturbances; few sectors of American society have been unaffected by racial violence. This pervasive influence may be due to the fact that many of the defining moments in North American history were shaped, in profound ways, by racial conflict. Thus, a closer study of these phenomena, with a particular focus on race riots, may deepen our collective understanding of the American past and present.

In the twentieth century, race riots became the most frequently encountered form of race conflict in the United States. Highlighted by the Red Summer of 1919, the 1943 race riots, and the urban rebellions of the mid- to late 1960s, these examples of racial conflict demonstrate how race, white supremacy, urbanization, and various socioeconomic factors can contribute to violent race relations in the midst of a pluralistic society. The presence of frequent race riots has become one of many paradoxes in U.S. history. While heralded worldwide as the paragon of freedom, justice, tolerance, and opportunity, the United States has seen its history warped by such forces as racial slavery, racial injustice, violent intolerance, and prejudice.

Colonial Era Encounters: Racial Conflict in the Birth of a Nation

Although the modern idea of race clearly was a creation of eighteenth-century Enlightenment, North American history was at its start (during the

founding of Jamestown in 1607) defined by racial conflict and the elevation of whiteness as a status. The uniquely English notions of civilization prefigured the disastrous relations the early colonists established with the local Algonkians and other Native American groups. In addition to constrictive and ethnocentric definitions of civilization, the early English settlers in the Chesapeake brought a sense of religious superiority and an enormous thirst for acquiring more land. All these factors converged in 1676 with the first race war in North American history—Bacon's Rebellion.

Although he came to Virginia with a fair amount of wealth, Nathaniel Bacon created a doctrine that would inspire the thousands of poor and landless Englishmen, who had rapidly multiplied in the colony. In the decades before the rebellion, impoverished Englishmen were lured to the colony with the hope of gaining land and becoming yeomen farmers. In exchange for their passage across the Atlantic, however, they had to give their allotment of land and between four and seven years of labor as indentured servants to tobacco planters who financed their voyage. Once their term of indenture was finished, these former servants would receive freedom dues—a small allotment of land, tobacco seed, guns, livestock, and some currency. Because this system created a steady stream of competitors for the tobacco-planter elite, they conspired to eliminate the land allotment portion of the freedom dues, which allowed them to monopolize all arable land in the colony. As a direct result, Virginia had a growing population of landless, hopeless, but armed, young Englishmen in the decade leading up to 1676.

Although this growing group of landless poor could have vented their collective anger and frustration at the white landed elite, Nathaniel Bacon found a different solution—one that would doom American race relations from that time forward. Bacon's doctrine elevated the status of the landless poor by reinforcing the notion of white supremacy. His plan was to attack all Native Americans—friend and foe alike—and take their land. This diverted the anger of the English poor away from the English elite and toward a common racial enemy. His war, "against all Indians in general," allowed poor whites to rally around notions of white supremacy and racial scapegoating in an all too familiar pattern.[1] This unique form of race consciousness worked against attempts to forge collaborative efforts across racial lines in the colonial and antebellum South. It may also explain why poor southern whites supported, and even fought to protect, the system of racialized slavery, despite the fact that slavery's very existence guaranteed them a degraded socioeconomic status.

During the decade leading up to Bacon's Rebellion, another terrible transformation was underway. When the planter elite realized that indentured servitude would not be a permanent solution to their labor needs, they turned to a group that had recently been imported into the colony—Africans. Between 1619 and 1641, some 300 Africans had entered Virginia. Ironically, they were not legally defined as slaves. Instead, they were treated much like other indentured servants; once they gave four to ten years of labor, they would be freed and given freedom dues. For a variety of complex reasons, the landed elite moved to legalize racialized slavery in 1667.

One of the most compelling reasons for this shift was Bacon's Rebellion, which provided the best rationale for the permanent substitution of black slaves for white servants. The legalization of racial slavery was not only the crowning moment in the creation of the American paradox, it also prefigured an enormous amount of racial violence in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

From Revolution to Reconstruction: The American Paradox Expands

Although a number of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century conflicts had racial components—the First and Second Powhatan Wars, King Philip's War, the Seven Year's War—the two conflicts with the greatest potential impact on modern race relations were the American Revolution and the American Civil War. Both wars began with the hope of inaugurating a new era of peace, prosperity, and justice. Both ended with bitter disappointment and continued racial strife. Fueled by classical liberal ideology, the American Revolution promised to bring liberty, justice, and prosperity for all. However, when Thomas Jefferson penned the famous words "all men are created equal," neither he nor other members of the American elite sought to extend this statement to Native Americans or African Americans. Instead, a war was fought to bring freedom to the country, but not to the half-million slaves whose labor helped generate revenue for the war effort. The American Revolution, therefore, added yet another dimension to the growing American paradox, and slavery would continue to have a firm base in the land of freedom.

Although it would be difficult to label slave rebellions as race riots, in many ways they became violent attempts to overthrow the white southern aristocracy and to challenge white supremacy. Gabriel Prosser, Charles Deslondes, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner each led movements that sought—at the very least—to kill whites who directly benefited from the labor of the enslaved. Only two of these rebels—Charles Deslondes (1811) and Nat Turner (1831)—managed to carry out these plans. While abolitionists fought each other over the right of slaves to rebel against their masters, one particular abolitionist—John Brown—took matters into his own hands. His 1859 raid on the Harper's Ferry federal arsenal was a clear attempt to foment an anti-white, anti-slavery revolt in Virginia. Although his attempt was ultimately unsuccessful, Brown did force the nation to address the central paradox in American society, and his raid was one of a series of events leading directly to the Civil War.

One of the worst race riots in U.S. history occurred in the midst of the Civil War. In July 1863, a mostly Irish mob engaged in an orgy of violence in New York City that left eighteen dead (not including the more than seventy black men reported missing) and dozens injured, and caused more than $4 million in property damage.[2] Convinced that the Civil War had become a crusade for the benefit of African Americans and angered at losing industrial jobs to black men because they were drafted into the Union army, thousands of unskilled Irish workers attacked draft offices and any African Americans they could find. Ironically, a number of Irish were

convicted and hanged in 1741 after they had allegedly formed a conspiracy with slaves to destroy New York City and establish a biracial regime. A century later, there was no room for such collaborations and any appeals to the common ground between the black and immigrant poor fell on deaf ears. Again, a unique sense of racial consciousness allowed Irish workers to attack black workers, but not the wealthy whites in New York who could purchase exemptions from the draft. Nor would they think to attack white factory owners or other employers who actively hired African American men as cheap labor or used them as strikebreakers and scabs. Even as late as 1863, the doctrines of race consciousness, white supremacy, and racial scapegoating—promoted two centuries earlier by Nathaniel Bacon—continued to determine race relations in North America.

Like the American Revolution, the American Civil War was greatly anticipated as a force for positive change in the United States. With the coming of the Thirteenth Amendment, the paradox of racial slavery was finally brought to an end, although this did not mean an end to racial strife. Perhaps the epitome of this notion was the emergence, in 1866, of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Established as a social club for former Confederate soldiers, the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist organizations began a campaign of political terrorism using arson, rape, threats, intimidation, beatings, and murder to force newly freed slaves and their Republican Party allies into a subordinate position in the South. Groups like the KKK, the Knights of the White Camellia, the White Caps, and others violently upheld the tenets of white supremacy in their attempts to redeem the South after defeat during the Civil War. More importantly, these groups were responsible for the increasing number of anti-black riots and lynchings that convulsed the black South beginning in the 1870s.

With the premature end of Reconstruction in 1877, a new set of paradoxes emerged. The end of Reconstruction inaugurated a reversal of rights that African Americans and their northern allies had fought for between 1865 and 1876. Democracy in the South was short-lived as southern states assumed control over civil rights and the federal government seemingly supported this troubling reversal. For example, the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* U.S. Supreme Court ruling gave federally sanctioned form to the substance of segregation and the nearly insurmountable color line that had long been a major component of American society. By establishing the "separate but equal" doctrine, this pivotal decision essentially rendered two previous civil rights acts (those of 1866 and 1875) and the Fourteenth Amendment null and void. Without protection provided by the federal government, the collective fate of millions of African Americans hung in the balance.

Southern blacks were forced to suffer through what Rayford Logan refers to as the Black Nadir, as they faced the five-headed hydra of sharecropping, political disenfranchisement, social segregation, anti-black propaganda, and racial violence during the century following the Civil War. In 1903, when W.E.B. Du Bois prophetically announced that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," he, like many of his contemporaries, saw the 1896 ruling as the pinnacle of the movement by state and federal government officials to make white supremacy the official law of the

country.[3] Unprecedented amounts of racial violence were the most visible outcome of these various initiatives.

The Great Migration: Racial Violence in the Midwest and North

The oppressive weight of southern racism became a major push factor, as thousands—then later, millions—of African Americans left the only homes they knew for new opportunities elsewhere. The growing tide of race riots and lynchings were key forces providing enormous impetus to these migrations. In the 1890s alone, lynching claimed the lives of 104 black men, women, and children annually. As historian Leon Litwack notes, between 1882 and 1959 "an estimated 4,742 blacks met their deaths at the hands of lynch mobs. As many, if not more blacks were victims of legal lynchings (speedy trials and executions), private white violence, and 'nigger hunts,' murdered by a variety of means in isolated rural sections and dumped into rivers and creeks."[4] Lacking the ability to serve on juries, hold political office, or even vote, African Americans throughout the South were virtually powerless in the face of violent anti-black repression of this sort.

Roughly 40,000 black southerners were part of the Exoduster movement. Between 1879 and 1898, the Exodusters established independent, all-black communities in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska. More importantly, the largest internal migration in U.S. history witnessed close to two million African Americans leaving the South between 1910 and 1940. This massive wave of migrants concentrated primarily in the Midwest and North, although many made it as far as California during the Great Migration. While the push of the Black Nadir explains much of this movement, the various socioeconomic pulls of better job opportunities, better housing, and higher living standards played important roles in the decision of African Americans to leave the South. Similar to the utopian views of the Midwest and North shared by many enslaved African Americans before 1850, these regions were envisioned as the "Promised Land" for millions of black migrants during the early portion of the twentieth century. These dreams would soon be dashed as African American settlers realized there was no escape from the Black Nadir or the American paradox.

One set of responses to the influx of such large numbers of African Americans into the Midwest and North was an increasing number of race riots. Two riots in Illinois—Springfield (1908) and East St. Louis (1917)—proved that the Midwest would not necessarily be more hospitable for African Americans. Accusations of raping white women and intense labor competition led to the deaths of dozens of African Americans and hundreds being forced or displaced from their homes. Despite the intensity of these incidents, nothing matches the Red Summer of 1919 in which two dozen race riots occurred throughout the country. Pioneering historical and sociological assessments of this violent summer have explained it as the outcome of labor competition, anti-black propaganda in the media (especially the 1915 release of *Birth of a Nation*), and the influx of white supremacist doctrines into midwestern and northern states.[5] Whatever the specific causes of the numerous race riots in 1919, they proved once again that the American

paradox was alive and well in the twentieth century. The irony of sending more than 300,000 young black men to fight to make the world "safe for democracy" during World War I was made more glaring by the number of anti-black race riots and overt attempts to deny these same men full citizenship.

Mirroring the anti-Jewish pogroms in Eastern Europe, the savage destruction of two black communities in the 1920s became additional proof that the United States had not found an effective way to negotiate the widening gulf between African Americans and whites. In 1921, the Greenwood section of Tulsa, Oklahoma, suffered through an all-out war, complete with death squads and incendiaries dropped from airplanes by whites. What was once a prosperous black community lay in ashes after days of uncontrolled rioting. In addition, more than 200 black residents were killed in what can be described as a massacre.

In 1923, the all-black community of Rosewood, Florida, suffered a similar fate. After a white woman in a neighboring community claimed that she had been raped—apparently to hide an extramarital affair she was having—hundreds of whites descended on Rosewood. After a week of rioting, the entire town was destroyed and as many as 300 African Americans were killed. Again, a prosperous black community was razed at the hands of a white mob. What both of these cases prove is that economic competition and white supremacy were not the only provocation for race riots in the United States. Jealousy and the fear of African Americans acquiring wealth and property were also significant factors.

During a renewed effort to make the world safe for democracy, the country witnessed another wave of race riots in 1943. Major disturbances occurred in Detroit, Harlem, and Mobile. Again, labor competition was among the principal causes in these examples. Although there would be a number of white-on-black murders, civil rights assassinations, and at least two more lynchings—Emmett Till (1956) and Mack Charles Parker (1959)—the tide of racial violence shifted dramatically in the aftermath of World War II. With a handful of exceptions, the vast majority of race riots in the postwar era were urban revolts that involved black mobs attacking white business owners and police officers. White flight, which resulted in the creation of impoverished black urban ghettos, created a volatile powder keg. It was the frequent examples of police brutality and "justifiable homicide" that often served as the spark. The result of these combined factors was massive and destructive riots in Los Angeles, California; Newark, New Jersey; and Detroit, Michigan, among others. These examples continue to epitomize race riots even in the twenty-first century.

White Flight and Black Ghettos: New Patterns of Race Riots

The radicalism of the mid- to late 1960s reflected a growing acceptance of militancy in blacks. Leaders like Robert F. Williams, Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton, and Stokely Carmichael called for self-defense initiatives and economic self-help for the black urban poor. These endeavors reflected, perhaps, the notion that the civil rights movement had benefited the African

American middle-class but had done little to improve the condition of the black masses. This circumstance was compounded by specific sociological phenomena that convulsed black communities around the country. One of the most significant responses to successful civil rights legislation and court rulings by whites was urban flight. As the doctrine of social integration became more of a reality in the United States, white Americans began leaving major cities and created exclusive all-white suburbs. In the wake of this considerable white flight, jobs, services, and tax funding for local schools disappeared. In addition, banks, grocery stores, and restaurants left inner-city neighborhoods and relocated to the expanding white suburbs. This reshaping of the urban–suburban landscape across the country created what can be called the Doughnut Effect—essentially, once prosperous cities became impoverished, mostly black cores surrounded by affluent white suburban peripheries. Thus, the "black ghetto" was created.

As high school dropout rates, unemployment, underemployment, crime, and drug use began to soar in inner-city ghettos, the hope that once provided impetus for the civil rights movement began to fade. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the last year of his life, sought to reorient the movement to deal with the growing problem of poverty in the United States. His "Poor People's Campaign" was short-lived, and no relief for the spreading problem of urban poverty seemed to be in sight. Combined with worsening economic conditions in black inner cities, police brutality became a growing issue. In addition to alleged beatings, a number of unarmed black men had been killed by white police officers in incidents that were later deemed justifiable homicides. Without hope, lacking any support from federal, state, or local government institutions, black urbanites created their own solution to the enormous problems they faced—urban rebellions.

Beginning with the 1965 Watts riot in Los Angeles and continuing into the twenty-first century with the 2001 Cincinnati riot, a new pattern of racial strife emerged. In more than three dozen cases—including examples in Detroit, Michigan (1967); Augusta, Georgia (1970); Miami (1980) and Tampa, Florida (1987); Los Angeles, California (1992); and Cincinnati, Ohio (2001)—race riots or urban rebellions began in impoverished black communities typically after instances of police brutality. The only exception to this rule was the 1992 Los Angeles riot, which was sparked after three white police officers were initially found not guilty of various charges in relation to the videotaped beating of an African American, Rodney King. The ensuing riot was linked more to the perception of injustice by an all-white jury than to the actual beating, which occurred several months prior to the controversial ruling. In every case, however, black urban residents looted and burned businesses owned by non-blacks who reportedly had long histories of either not hiring African Americans or of treating black customers with disrespect. In addition, white motorists were attacked and white police officers and firefighters became targets of black rage.

It was in the aftermath of the 1967 urban rebellions in Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit, Michigan, that President Lyndon B. Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, headed by Gov. Otto

Kerner of Illinois. In their final report, published in 1968, the eight-member commission concluded as follows:

> There was, typically, a complex relationship between the series of incidents and the underlying grievances. For example, grievances about allegedly abusive police practices, unemployment and underemployment, housing, and other conditions in the ghetto, were often aggravated in the minds of many Negroes by incidents involving the police, or the inaction of municipal authorities on Negro complaints about police action, unemployment, inadequate housing or other conditions.[6]

In the estimation of the Kerner Commission, poverty, more than anything else, created the necessary conditions for the twenty-three urban riots that occurred between 1964 and 1967. In addition to poverty, the Kerner Commission cited white racism as a cause of urban rioting, noting that the United States was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal." In fully implicating white Americans in the creation of black ghettos, the Kerner Commission created a long list of recommendations for government reform to address these issues. Although the Johnson administration did not enact any of the specific recommendations of the Kerner Commission, the concerns the report raised became a linchpin in Johnson's "War on Poverty" and his goal to create "the Great Society."

Conclusion

As watersheds and defining moments in American history, race riots represent one of many ways to track the continuation of various paradoxes in American society. From, quite literally, the opening act of American history to the dawn of the twenty-first century, racial strife has been a constant in a country known more for its various political liberties and economic opportunities. By assessing the nature of racial conflict in the American context, we not only expand our understanding of this country's nuanced history, but we can perhaps more accurately gauge the troubles and dynamics inherent in any pluralistic society.

Notes

1. Nathaniel Bacon quoted in Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975), 259.

2. Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, *The History of Violence in America: A Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), 536.

3. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: New American Library, 1982; originally published in 1903), xi.

4. James Allen, Hilton Als, Leon Litwack, et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000), 12.

5. See, for example, William Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1972); Lee Williams and Lee Williams II, *Anatomy of Four*

Race Riots: Racial Conflict in Knoxville, Elaine (Arkansas), Tulsa, and Chicago, 1919–1921 (Jackson: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1972); Arthur Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-In: A Study of the Connection Between Conflict and Violence* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1966); H.O. Dahlke, "Race and Minority Riots—A Study in the Typology of Violence," *Social Forces* XXX (May 1952), 419–425; Allen D. Grimshaw, "A Study in Social Violence: Urban Race Riots in the United States" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1959); Allen D. Grimshaw, "Urban Violence in the United States: Changing Ecological Considerations," *American Journal of Sociology* LXVI (September 1960), 109–119.

6. Quoted in Allen D. Grimshaw, ed., *Racial Violence in the United States* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 330.