
The East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917

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**August Meier and Elliott Rudwick
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**The East St. Louis
Race Riot of 1917**

A Guide to

The East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917

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Elliott Rudwick**

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Mike Acquaviva**

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NOTE ON SOURCES

All materials included in this micropublication, with the exception of the transcript of the trial of Dr. LeRoy Bundy, come from Record Group 233 (Records of the U.S. House of Representatives) at the National Archives, Washington, D.C. The Bundy trial transcript is from the Illinois State Library, Springfield, Illinois.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Researchers may wish also to consult two additional UPA micropublications which contain valuable federal documentation on the East St. Louis Race Riot. They are "Black Workers in the Era of the Great Migration," edited by James R. Grossman, and "Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans: The First World War, the Red Scare, and the Garvey Movement," edited by Theodore Kornweibel.

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ISBN 0-89093-742-7.

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INTRODUCTION

by Elliott M. Rudwick
Kent State University

World War I and the immediate postwar era were marked by a number of bloody racial confrontations in which blacks were victims of white hostility and aggression. While most of these riots took place in 1919, one of the most important and the one with the highest death toll of any interracial conflict in twentieth-century America occurred at East St. Louis, Illinois, on July 2, 1917. It is an excellent example of the pogrom-like persecutions that characterized nearly all of the interracial riots in the country during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Like many of the civil disorders of the period, the causes of the East St. Louis riot were largely rooted in the economic insecurity of white workers as several hundred thousand blacks migrated from the South in search of work and better living conditions.

This particular riot is important not only in and of itself but, because of the volume and nature of the surviving evidence, it is the race riot of the period most accessible to historians for scholarly investigation.

Because the riot resulted in the virtual suspension of commerce between the neighboring states of Illinois and Missouri for up to ten days in July, the U.S. congressional committee that conducted an investigation was formally called the House Select Committee to Investigate Conditions in Illinois and Missouri Interfering With Interstate Commerce Between These States. The transcripts of the hearings and related records are part of Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233 of the National Archives.

The transcripts of the hearings of the select committee are arranged chronologically. They are preceded by a handwritten index, prepared by the committee, of subjects and persons mentioned in the hearings. In the

transcripts, consideration of the interstate commerce issue precedes discussion of other aspects of the riot. The transcripts, reproduced on reels 1-5, are followed by miscellaneous related records, some of which were entered as exhibits in the hearings. Exhibits are reproduced on reel 6 and consist of: (A) the report submitted to the governor of Illinois by Colonel S.O. Tripp, Illinois National Guard; (B1) a report of a board of inquiry into the conduct of the officers and men of the Illinois National Guard; and (B2) the proceedings of the board of inquiry. Reproduced on reel 7 are the following: a draft of the committee's final report; photographs; financial and other administrative records, including some untranscribed stenographic notes; transcripts of the June 1917 hearings held by the Labor Committee of the Illinois State Council of Defense to investigate "the cause of the heavy influx" of southern blacks into East St. Louis during 1917; a few labor bulletins; the report of the grand jury of St. Clair County; and a petition from the citizens of East St. Louis demanding changes in the police department and improvements in law enforcement. Reels 7 and 8 reproduce the transcript of the criminal conspiracy trial of Dr. LeRoy Bundy, the principal leader of the East St. Louis black community who was charged with inciting the riot.

For background on the riot, the researcher may wish to consult Elliott M. Rudwick, *Race Riot in East St. Louis* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Ill.)

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