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Variations in Black Media Coverage of the East St. Louis Race Riot

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VARIATIONS IN BLACK MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE EAST ST. LOUIS

RACE RIOT

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, History, American Studies

By

Angela Womack

May 2018

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VARIATIONS IN BLACK MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE EAST ST. LOUIS RACE RIOT

History

Missouri State University, May 2018

Master of Arts, American Studies

Angela Womack

ABSTRACT

Research for this thesis was undertaken after first researching the East St. Louis Race Riot and seeing that there was an insufficient amount of analysis that had been done on black media coverage in US history overall as well as with the riot specifically. Three significant trends of black media were found during my research. East St. Louis Race Riots black media coverage during and after the events varied at the local, regional, and national levels. My research showed that three media outlets varied. The local media provided information that guided victims and volunteers as to where to go for food, shelter, and legal services. The regional level varied on coverage and focus based upon where the media source was located. The national news coverage conveyed a message that called for justice and change to eliminate the possibility of another race riot from occurring.

KEYWORDS: east st.louis race riot, black media, black newspapers, race relations

This abstract is approved as to form and content

Angela Hornsby-Gutting, PhD
Chairperson, Advisory Committee
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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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INTRODUCTION

Booker Washington used to tell with great amusement how he entered a little town and spoke to a large gathering, making as good a speech as he was capable of. The next morning he picked up the town paper, expecting to see himself and the meeting given considerable and prominent space, but only an inch or so of recognition on the last page. He had made a successful speech, but the whole front page was given to a Negro who had made an *unsuccessful* attempt to snatch a woman's purse.¹

The 1916 newspaper article by William Pickens, a journalist with *The New Negro*, laid bare the realities of racial bias against African Americans by the white, mainstream press, a fact that would resonate just a year later in coverage of the East St. Louis Race Riots. Pickens, one of the founding members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, devoted his life's work to social activism in response to de facto and de jure race discrimination. For example, in Pickens' autobiography he explained that when a white man prospered and excelled, he would receive a raise and promotion, whereas a black man who had the same achievements would have been stuck at the same position or even removed for doing too well, as he may gain too much attention or disrupt the status quo.² Pickens' race consciousness dovetailed with the so-called New Negro Movement. Advanced by young black men a generation or two removed from slavery, the movement stressed race pride and racial equality in America. Black media, notably, but also advocated for racial progress and black advancement. While black media content could reflect a particular race ideology, such perspectives were not universally endorsed. Pickens' newspaper received criticisms

¹ William Pickens, *The New Negro*, 150. Booker T. Washington was an activist and race leader until his death in 1915.

² William Pickens, *Bursting Bonds: The Autobiography of a "New Negro"*, 49-50.

from Black conservatives that felt that he and other “New Negroes” were too radical in their pronouncements and race strategies, provoking agitation and backlash in communities, as controversy was seen as dangerous.³ These and other factions and disagreements in the black media have often times been overlooked, resulting in a monolithic image of the black press and its readership. History reminds us that black media, across time and space, encompassed divergent viewpoints as concerns race and race relations. This thesis seeks to illumine such complexity by examining black media’s coverage of the East St. Louis Race Riot. Differences in opinions as to how to tell a news story, what to include and omit, as well as solutions or remarks on reform or justice can tell as much about the time period as the story itself. Such is the case in how the black media differed in the telling of the East St. Louis Race Riot, showing the relationships of the media to the community. Black media outlets were forced to weigh what and how they depicted news stories based on the risk and backlash of their community due to the community being harassed for what newspapers printed. Due to these harsh realities, media would vary as to how they approached events of the day, including instances such as the racial violence.

One of the worst race riots in history occurred in East St. Louis, Illinois, an industrial river town. Media coverage of this race riot, which began on July 2, 1917, varied significantly between the mainstream white press, and the black press. Although there were subcategories found within the black press, including newspapers, journals, and magazines that each had their own priorities and views, there were principles that nearly all black media outlets shared. Black newspaper men and women, through their

³ Ibid., xi.

reporting and writing, aimed to redress biased depictions of African Americans by the white press. While black newspapers replicated their white counterparts in terms of news essentials like editorials, sports, and classified ads, black newspapers often gave positive praise and recognition to members of the black community.

News coverage also varied within black media. Factors such as the regional location where the news was being written affected how much animosity or tension an editor might receive from the white community. Also, if a media outlet was said to be local, regional or national meant a great deal as to what stories were covered and the response to those stories. Such was the case with the coverage of the East St. Louis Race Riots of 1917. The differences in how black media outlets addressed the race riot, led to different patterns and perspectives formulated by black newspapers throughout the nation. Exploring the black media of 1917 reshapes the East St. Louis Race Riot because it offers a different perspective. Due to this specific subject being a race riot, race was already at the forefront of the events. However, considering that white people were attacking black people solely based on race made the events a matter to which black newspaper men and women would inherently have more of a connection to the victims. Even as many mainstream white newspapers condemned the riot, they still did not provide the guidance, viewpoints, concerns, opinions, outcries against the dominant views of the majority, along with solutions that the black newspapers uniquely supplied. Thus, when black newspapers are focused upon and analyzed, there can be a greater understanding as to not only why and how the East St. Louis Race Riot happened, but also how various black leaders in the media used their voices to help their communities gain information, aid

victims, cope, heal, and move for justice, safety, and security in East St. Louis and in America.

Once the reader acknowledges that the narratives of the black media are important and essential to having a greater understanding of the race riot, one can go even further and see the role contested spaces played in instigating and igniting the atrocities as well as the reporting of the events. The theories of analyzing spaces have been put forth primarily by Georg Simmel and Henri Lefebvre, with the former concentrating on borders and the latter having a focus on different levels of space.⁴ More specifically related to the riot, that contested spaces, such as public streets and community centers, are valued by multiple groups and can lead to conflict and even violence, as Edwardo Pagan addresses in his article on the Zoot Suit Riot of 1943.⁵ In the case of the East St. Louis race riot, the contested space was the factories, primarily the Aluminum Iron Ore plant. The plant was the main area of contention, due to it employing over 13,000 workers.⁶ These workers were comprised predominantly of low-income, unskilled white and black men. The following pages discuss how and why tensions arose between the races in East St. Louis, including the primary link of industrial jobs that fueled the river town of East St. Louis. In addition, the area in which the riot occurred will be analyzed, including the main starting point and its significance, as well as how neighborhood location served as a stopping point of the riot. Specifically, that the largest black

⁴ Beat Kümin, "Introduction", *Political Space in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Farnham UK: Ashgate, 2009), 8.

⁵ Edwardo Pagan, "Los Angeles Geopolitics and the Zoot Suit Riot, 1943," *Social Science History*, 24, no. 1 (2000): 224.

⁶ N. W. Ayer & Son's Newspaper Annual and Directory, Philadelphia, 1917, 218.

neighborhood was not invaded during the riot, as the white mob stayed where they would outnumber their victims.

Not only would there be contested spaces between the East St. Louis rioters and their victims, but it can also be connected to the black media coverage of the events. While the black press was often put into a general, all-encompassing realm, they too would dispute one another in relation to how they would educate their readers as to what was happening in East St. Louis. Therefore, the contested space would also be seen in the social, conceived space of the black press. The conceived space in this case, being the black press and their variations of coverage, focus, and opinions on the same subject matter: the East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917.

Causes of the East St. Louis Riot

On July 2, 1917, the city of East St. Louis, Illinois erupted in what would become one of the most violent race riots in American history. Reports by both black and white media sources on the events agreed that nearly one thousand white men and women took part in what became a bloodthirsty mob. Reports vary of anywhere from thirty-nine to four hundred black men, women, and children being killed during the riot. Between two and three hundred houses were set on fire and destroyed. One reason why the actual number of those killed is approximate is due to the destruction of bodies.⁷ The details and figures are said to have varied specifically because many eye witnesses gave testimony saying that bodies were lost in the river or burned. One specific incident was reported in

⁷Andrew J. Theising. *Made in the USA: East St. Louis, the Rise and fall of an Industrial River Town*. St. Louis: Virginia Publishing, 2003, 150-151.

which an ambulance came to take an injured black man to the hospital. The driver was told by the rioters that he would be killed if he picked up the black man, and so the driver saved himself, allowing the rioters to throw the injured man into a nearby fire.⁸ Not only were bodies thrown into fires or the Mississippi River, but some reports attest that the total number of deaths reported also varied for the lack of substantive and reliable police reporting. For instance, after the riot the chief of police and night chief were suspended for inactivity during the riot as well as for not cooperating with the coroner's jury investigation.⁹ Such untrustworthy leadership in the police department of East St. Louis has led to historians relying upon other details of the riots, with the conclusions that although an exact number of dead will likely never be known, it is really the gruesome details of the inhumanity that took place and was allowed that historians focus on and analyze with regards to race relations and how communities reacted afterwards.

Surprisingly, this race riot occurred in an area that had historically been seen as a safe haven for African Americans. This was especially true for African Americans in the decades following the Civil War. Large numbers of African American migrants came through or settled in the greater St. Louis area including across the Mississippi River in East St. Louis. While people had commonly used the Mississippi River as a major route for travel, the first large group of African Americans to migrate collectively on the river were the Exodusters of 1879. Thousands of southern African Americans sought out Kansas as a refuge. Kansas became the land of choice mainly because of its promotion by Benjamin 'Pap' Singleton., a former slave who described the state as having ample

⁸ Elliott Rudwick. *Race Riot at East St. Louis July 2, 1917*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964, 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

amounts of available land on which African Americans could settle and live peaceably in their own newly formed communities.¹⁰ The typical route taken by most southerners would have included going through St. Louis, Missouri, as travelers could continue their journey quickest by going from the Mississippi to the Missouri River, which converged in St. Louis. Unfortunately, by the time nearly 1,400 people reached St. Louis only 400 of them had enough money to continue to Kansas City.¹¹ These people became refugees and experienced the gracious hospitality of the African American community that had been settling in St. Louis for decades. Citizens of St. Louis established the Colored Refugee Relief Board in March of 1879, which included blacks and whites helping raise money for those in need of immediate care as well as providing funds to send some onward to Kansas.¹² Thus, the people of St. Louis and East St. Louis seemed civil, respectful, and helpful to travelers as well as to those wanting to become permanent residents. St. Louis' demography became similar to New Orleans, as a diverse group of people traveled through and sometimes remained in their cities.

The change in demeanor towards African Americans can be seen during and after World War I as there began to be an influx of African Americans in St. Louis and East St. Louis, consistent with other major industrial centers of the Midwest and Northeast. The government needed factories to produce for the war campaign and in East St. Louis, the

¹⁰ Nell Irvin Painter. *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976, 114. Benjamin 'Pap' Singleton was an African American male born into slavery. He was granted his freedom later in life and after the Civil War worked tirelessly into his seventies, rallying for freed slaves to migrate away from the South. His largest and most successful solution was the Kansas migration.

¹¹ Susanna Grenz, "The Exodusters of 1879: St. Louis and Kansas City Responses." *Missouri Historical Review* 73, no. 1 (October, 1978), 57.

¹² *Ibid.*, 70.

Aluminum Ore Company and Western Cartridge were especially important. The Aluminum Ore Company was the sole provider of aluminum for the United States during World War One and Western Cartridge produced the majority of the brass shell casings.¹³ The success of the Aluminum Ore Company and Western Cartridge led to a migration to the area along with new types of job competition. As millions of white male soldiers were being sent overseas, valuable jobs in the aforementioned factories opened up to African Americans. Between 1910 and 1920 the number of blacks pursuing industrial jobs rose from 552,845 to 960,039.¹⁴ This huge jump could only be connected to the rise in new job opportunities for black men and women. For many, that meant moving out of the South and to the Midwestern and Northeastern cities that contained these well-paying factory jobs during World War I.

As more African Americans moved into East St. Louis, uneasiness, apprehension, and tension grew on the part of established white residents as well as recent European immigrants who feared greater job competition from African Americans. As people flocked to these industrial centers during the war, workplaces became more competitive. This became more evident as men returned home from World War I.

Concern about escalating racial tensions between blacks and whites prompted the Illinois Committee on Labor to issue a report assessing the situation. A meeting based on the report followed one month prior to the East. St. Louis incident. The Committee on Labor found that the overall population of East St. Louis was nearly 90,000, of which 10,000 to 15, 000 were African American. Within the past year, they believed the number

¹³ Theising, 118.

¹⁴ Lorenzo Greene, Gary R. Kremer, Antonio F. Holland. *Missouri's Black Heritage*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993, 143.

of African Americans, mainly coming from the South, increased from 6,000 to 15,000 new inhabitants.¹⁵ The committee used these figures to conclude that such a surge in population could be dangerous for newcomers and that southern African Americans should be discouraged from moving to East St. Louis, as it was already overpopulated and experiencing violence and tension between the races due to competition for housing and jobs.¹⁶

The committee's report proved prophetic, as attacks on black residents and neighborhoods by white men grew as the African American population within the area increased. The boiling point at which the riot occurred seemed to be directly connected to job opportunity. When white union workers began striking for better wages and working conditions at the local Aluminum Ore Company, they were enraged to find that black men were being hired as strikebreakers, working for less money.¹⁷ While several other incidents of white laborers attacking black laborers occurred during and after the strike, events climaxed in late June into early July of 1917, when a car of white men drove through a black neighborhood, randomly shooting into houses. When, what seemed like the same car driving through again, black residents opened fire, only to learn the second car was an unmarked police car. As that bullet-ridden car was then parked in front of city hall and word got out that two white policemen had been killed in the black part of town, white residents gathered by the hundreds and began inflicting violence on random black

¹⁵ Illinois Committee on Labor. *Report to the Illinois State Council of Defense on the Race Riots at East St. Louis*. Chicago, 1917, 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷ Lumpkins, Charles L. *American Pogrom, the East St. Louis Race Riot and Black Politics*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 107.

residents of East St. Louis. The sheer numbers of people killed and injured, along with the vivid descriptions of what many saw as mob participants taking pleasure in inflicting pain and violence, shocked the nation.

The topic of the East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917 has been addressed by many historians. While a very specific set of events transpired, it is important to realize that they are an example of the larger narrative of race relations in America. The riot is linked to the Great Migration of the early twentieth century wherein African Americans moved out of the South by the thousands. Many made their way to large industrial centers such as Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis. African Americans were ideal workers in the minds of industrial managers, as African Americans coming from the South were desperate and had no experience or unions, workers' rights, or the ability to complain about working conditions. Thus, these eager workers would work for less, undermining unions and their striking power.¹⁸ Upon arrival, African Americans were met with fear and frustration by the current residents. Physical spaces became potential flashpoints to interracial conflict. Many workers felt their jobs were at risk, especially when those same workers chose to strike. These major job sources also became the backdrop of rising racial tension and growing pains felt throughout the North. The East St. Louis Race Riot would be one of several riots in the North, similar to lynchings that occurred in the South, as both were often perpetrated by white groups scapegoating, as low income whites often blamed black laborers for taking jobs from them.¹⁹

¹⁸ Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, Random House: New York, 2010, 274.

¹⁹ Ibid., 273.

The aforementioned history does not provide details on how various African American communities experienced the East St. Louis race riot and pushed for race reforms in its aftermath. Black newspapers at the local, regional, and national level compensated for what the mainstream media lacked – empathy and illuminating that subjective perspective is the central focus of this thesis.

Historiography of the East St. Louis Race Riot

The East St. Louis Race Riot has only had only a few in-depth historical examinations. Coverage of the incident dominated the headlines of dozens of local and national newspapers and magazines for months following, but then it seems to have been forgotten in the larger chronicle of American history. Elliot Rudwick's *Race Riot at East St. Louis: July 2, 1917*, first published in 1964, is the first scholarly assessment of the riot. The sociological study focused on “intergroup” violence and how people allowed the riot to take place. The informational account includes maps giving general details such as bridges, streets, railroads, neighborhoods, and a principle map of where the main rioting occurred.²⁰ Both the white rioters and black victims are analyzed, with the focus on the black community, but the black media is barely utilized throughout the book, as mainstream, white media outlets are used as references. The black newspapers are only mentioned for being the voice of the African American community after the riot. Rudwick does well to acknowledge several different black newspapers from throughout

²⁰ Elliot Rudwick. *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), 42-43.

the nation, pulling quotes from each, but they are simply included in passing alongside mainstream media accounts of the aftermath of the riot.

The most critical question Rudwick raises about the black population is why there were not more counterattacks and resistance against the white mob. Why did the black community, specifically the residents of the major black neighborhoods, seem to be passive and not come to aid those being assaulted and in some cases killed? Rudwick answers his own questions using both location as well as social factors, as he explains that the riot occurred in the industrial part of town, not black neighborhoods.²¹ The location of the riot was mainly in the business sector, where black travelers, workers, or residents were easily outnumbered and thus defenseless. The fact that most of the ‘colored’ population lived two miles from the riot zone helps explain why those residents feared for their own lives and thus did not come to the aid of those being attacked. Rudwick makes it clear that if “Negroes” had mobilized there might easily have been an even larger riot and attack on all of the black citizens of East St. Louis.

Malcolm McLaughlin’s “Ghetto Formation and Armed Resistance in East St. Louis, Illinois” counters with the view of black residents not resisting or being seen as defenseless. McLaughlin took a closer look at the compelling evidence related to the self-defense activities that took place during the riot. The ghetto formation, that is the African American neighborhood came together, created new opportunities to organize collective resistance and coordinate action through community networks.²² While McLaughlin draws on social aspects of community and organized resistance, it also shines a light onto

²¹ Ibid., 56.

²² Malcolm McLaughlin. “Ghetto Formation and Armed Resistance in East St. Louis, Illinois.” *Journal of American Studies* 41, no. 2 (Aug., 2007): 441.

the importance of spaces and places, as people not only fought for their safety during the riot but also for their homes and properties. It became important and developed a sense of pride when establishing large parts of East St. Louis as strong, black, urban communities. This was accomplished in large part as a result of white males fighting in World War I, which led to a breakthrough for black workers across the northern labor market, going from 15 percent of the meatpacking workforce in 1910 to 40 percent by 1917.²³

The increase in industries hiring black workers would also lead to the neighborhood formation in East St. Louis. The neighborhood of Denverside had a rise in black migrants, creating a strong community that fought back against rioters.²⁴ McLaughlin acknowledges the importance of the neighborhoods and gives details and analysis on the creation of the neighborhoods and includes the ghetto formation in East St. Louis as a way to support his argument; that the white mob was met with black resistance. Emphasis can also be put on the people and their actions specifically within Denverside, the most powerful black neighborhood in East St. Louis. A point is made to reiterate the militant and armed resistance of the community members before and after the riot; black snipers, warning signals, and people ready to protect their families and their property were all as reasons why the white mob failed to penetrate deep into Denverside.²⁵ Thus, Denverside was not a contested area like other areas that were a mix of different ethnic and racial groups, specifically those areas closest to the contested factory centers.

²³ Ibid., 444.

²⁴ Ibid., 444-445.

²⁵ Ibid., 464, 467.

Neighborhoods such as Bloody Island, the Valley, Denverside, Rush Island, and South End were significant areas of black occupancy. Although black people were scattered across the city, McLaughlin states that “most low-income African Americans inhabited substandard housing nestled around railroad yards, factories, and open fields in the western half of the city.”²⁶ This shows the acknowledgement of the importance of where the migrants settled, as they are concentrated around two basic necessities: transportation and jobs. This is not well stated, but implied, as the author also includes an illustration of African American residency in 1900 based upon that year’s census records. Private, as well as public spaces, show how the black community gained institutional power and momentum in East St. Louis prior to the riot. The following section elaborates on the importance of black community building:

An expanding black East St. Louis brought a proliferation of African American institutions. Black townspeople established churches, the traditional and most important centers of black communities, as well as civic and fraternal clubs, lodges, and other organizations where they affirmed their dignity as a people and gained skills required for political leadership and agitation.²⁷

Black migration and the flourishing black communities being constructed within East St. Louis were seen by many in the local white community as a loss of their power. While McLaughlin’s article brings new material to light about the black community of East St. Louis during the riot, using first hand-accounts of residents, it is so specific that it hard to relate it to many other aspects of the riot. Despite its strength, McLaughlin’s

²⁶ Ibid., 17.

²⁷ Ibid., 18.

work would have benefitted from greater contextualization of the East St. Louis experience in all of the African American communities across the country.

Politics and unions also make their way into the narrative of the East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917. Within Charles Lumpkins' monograph, *American Pogrom, The East St. Louis Race Riot and Black Politics*, a new light is shed on why the riot might ultimately have occurred. While lower class whites may have feared for their jobs, Lumpkins' argument is that race riots had much more to do with white reaction to perceived social threats of freedom and equality than by black community building and politics.²⁸ The author describes the rise of African Americans' influence in politics over the years throughout the country, including St. Louis, and how the activism had a strong influence on why the riot happened.

Lumpkins' cites the fight over racial power and identity can be seen in the corporations and growing industrial parks in East St. Louis. The city became an especially heated area because it continued to grow in manufacturing as "manufacturers and local political leaders mutually benefited from low assessed commercial property values and tax rates, which contributed to the corruption of city government and to the financial weakness of East St. Louis."²⁹ It insinuates that the corporate use of land without being sufficiently taxed led to a lack of tax money, leading to inadequate social infrastructure, in club poling, and education, as the only tax revenue available came from the lowly factory workers who lived in areas surrounding the corporations within East St. Louis. But instead of white supremacists realizing this and blaming the corporations or

²⁸ Charles L Lumpkins. *American Pogrom, the East St. Louis Race Riot and Black Politics*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 3.

²⁹ Ibid., 48.

lack of taxation, they attributed the lack of resources in the area to an increase in black residents. So when the Aluminum Ore, the largest factory in town, experienced a strike in April of 1917, it became a lightning rod for resentment and racist anger. Local whites became infuriated at the presence of black workers being used as the strikebreaking labor force-even though they only comprised a portion of the strikebreakers employed by managers.³⁰ It was seen as a source of employment and betterment for black citizens but white workers striking felt threatened and upset, seeing the black strikebreakers as part of the problem. Similar to McLaughlin, Lumpkins' accounts are informative and insightful, but do not engage with the greater African American narrative that black newspaper coverage provides at the time of the riot.

Another interpretation of the riot by McLaughlin analyzes the role of white women; specifically, she considers gender relations within a working-class community and provides insights into notions of white womanhood during the Progressive Era. It concludes with the contribution made by black women in the resistance effort in East St. Louis and the significance of gender when the community faced the threat of a racial massacre.³¹ Prior to detailing the women that participated in the riot, the author assesses the domestic household and how it should not be considered in isolation from other "spheres" -- more specifically, the workplace. Although a female might have been a housewife, she still required that her wage-earning husband provide for her and her children. Thus, women went to the streets with their husbands and were as active in the riot as they deemed it essential to defend their husband's workplace so that they could

³⁰ Ibid., 452.

³¹ Malcolm McLaughlin. "Women in the Crowd: Gender and the East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 40, no. 2 (2007): 50-51.

maintain their domestic roles as housewife and mother. No one else had ever focused primarily on women, just as no one has focused primarily on the black newspaper men and women, which is essential in order to better analyze and understand the riot in East St. Louis.

Black Newspaper Reporting of the East St. Louis Race Riot

While historical accounts of the East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917 have included black newspapers as their sources and part of analyses, there is further need for research. To date, scholars have not placed black media at the forefront of their analysis. Newspapers and other media sources are optimal for determining and addressing that which is deficient in existing historical accounts. Focusing on black media sources of the day can also be a way to better understand how the East St. Louis black community, along with black communities throughout the nation, viewed and voiced concerns for justice and civil rights. Readers will also be able to gain a greater understanding as to how significant the riot was within the local black community as well as how people connected to the riot at the regional and national levels. This riot shows the importance of black media outlets in black communities and how they were trusted lines of information and guidance during incidents such as this riot.

Newspapers throughout the country analyzed and addressed the details of the riot for months thereafter. This thesis explores how and why black media coverage- including local, regional, national newspapers and periodicals- varied so much regarding the East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917. Each black media outlet had specific goals and purposes, and often competed with other publications to gain readership and subscribers in order to

stay in business. In doing so, media outlets had to know who their intended audience was and how best to meet their needs.

Black media sources can be traced to the antebellum era, with Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russwurm founding the New York weekly *Freedom's Journal* in 1827, the first black owned and operated newspaper in the United States. *Journal* editors rationalized that "blacks should plead their own cause since we know our condition better than anyone."³² While New York abolished slavery that same year, the institution remained legal in other states. Nonetheless, increasing numbers of literate freemen and women sought out news sources from within their community to counter perceived shortcomings in the mainstream or white press. Such publications typically left out any news or events involving black residents, while others printed only negative, prejudicial news about black people; thus, making a need for a black press to focus on the minority perspective or to include positive news about the black community.³³ As the mainstream press knew the majority of their readers were white, they made white Americans their focus and target audience, neglecting all other groups.

By the twentieth century, many mainstream media outlets in the North and Midwest were indifferent to the black newspapers of the area, but in some cases, the white press acknowledged and endorsed such publications. Chicago's white newspapers seemed to sometimes find use in including material from black newspapers. For example, the white mainstream daily, the *Chicago Tribune*, often printed editorials from

³² Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A., A Detailed and Understanding Report on What the Black Press is and how it came to be*. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1971), xii.

³³ *Ibid.*, 8.

the black newspaper, the *Chicago Whip*, as was the case when publishing a challenging editorial called ‘Who’s Afraid?’, in which the black editor wrote a passionate piece speaking of African American’s perseverance and steadfast ways of prevailing against discrimination. Several other black northern newspapers, including *The New York World*, *Cincinnati Times-Star*, and *Detroit Free Press*, were used by white newspapers to promote racial harmony by acknowledging that those black newspapers endorsed the white newspapers.³⁴ In Norfolk, Virginia, the black newspaper, *Journal and Guide*, was seen as a politically moderate, newspaper. As such, the news articles and editorials of *Journal and Guide* were used by the local white media as the voice of black opinion. More specifically, P.B. Young, the creator and editor-and-chief of the newspaper, was published in white newspapers, especially his editorials and speeches to white civic groups promoting black education, self-help, desegregation, and interracial cooperation.³⁵

While some Northern, Midwestern, and Upper Southern towns had black and white media outlets with open, working relationships, it would be harder to find in the Deep South, such as in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi. In the Deep South, white populations felt threatened by the black media, fearing the power and influence the black media may have on the black community, thus blaming the media for causing strikes, protests, riots, and upheaval of whites’ segregated, privileged way of life. White Southerners in Athens, Georgia went so far as to lynch a black news correspondent for circulating the *Philadelphia American*, a black newspaper.³⁶ Famed author and prominent

³⁴ Frederick German Detweiler. *The Negro Press in the United States*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 18-19.

³⁵ Henry Lewis Suggs. *P.B. Young: Newspaperman*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 168.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

Civil Rights activist Ida B. Wells Barnett even felt the South's wrath. Wells Barnett printed a paper, *Free Speech*, in Memphis, Tennessee, but received criticism from the white press and community for speaking out so strongly and militantly against race-based lynching and violence. Threatened openly by the white press and community, she shut down the paper and moved north.³⁷ Even if lives were not being outwardly threatened, the white press still played an active role in keeping the racial status quo. The white press by and large only found time and space in their papers to report crimes committed by black people, offers biased and slanted views to keep black people down and in their place.³⁸ The white press, including the Associated Press, was constantly criticized by the black press for advancing distorted views about black people.

As the white press continued to attack and belittle the black community, the need for a voice representing and affirming the black community rose, leading to a growing number of black media outlets within the country. By 1900, there were over 150 black newspapers and magazines being published in 30 states.³⁹ These media outlets were often consolidated as the black press, as if they were one homogenous entity. While the black press focuses on a minority group for readership, this thesis will show that there are keen variances in local, regional, and national newspapers, as well as periodicals of the time. While many of the black media in print in 1917 when the East St. Louis Race Riot occurred can no longer be found, there are enough to provide evidence as to how the riot was covered by different outlets. Over two dozen media sources, including newspapers

³⁷Charles A. Simmons, *The African American Press: A History of news Coverage during National Crisis, with Special Reference to Four Black Newspapers, 1827-1965*. (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 1988), 159.

³⁸ Wolseley, 54.

³⁹ Ibid., 12.

and magazines, regional, and national black media sources, survive, all of which covered the East St. Louis riots from their own unique perspectives.

Chapter One examines the riot at the local level. Readers will notice that, as can be assumed, there is generally more attention given to the riot at the local level, and for a longer amount of time, in terms of both depth of coverage and the continued coverage for months after the riot. The newspapers drew upon eyewitnesses, giving more emotional stories that connected readers to the situation. Local black newspapers that will be analyzed include *The St. Louis Argus*, *Advocate*, *Hannibal Record*, and *The Kansas City Sun*. The white newspapers that are most significant to the East St. Louis area, *-East St. Louis Daily Journal*, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and *The Republic-* will be used as references and analyzed as they also had a significant impact on the local African American East St. Louis community. These newspapers also covered the aftermath longer than the other news outlets since their readers were sometimes directly implicated in what would happen next and subsequent investigations of the riot. The local papers, as was typical for most local papers around the country, also provide practical information and travel guides related to the area of the riot, including information for victims along with aid for those in the local community who wanted to help. Surprisingly, the local newspapers did not cause as much of a public outcry and pushback as the regional and national newspapers. Instead, local black newspapers were seen as more informational and helpful for the community to connect, relate, and heal rather than retaliate or ask for more civil rights.

Chapter Two assesses regional black newspaper coverage of the East St. Louis Race Riot. As you will see, these regional papers' content and focus on the riot and how

they present the information can most strongly be attributed to the geographic origins of the newspaper. Even though the largest percentage of black people were migrating from the South to the North and perhaps, been in most need of knowing what was going on in East St. Louis, the Northern newspapers included more outrage against the violence of the riot. On the other end of the spectrum was the South, where editors had to be careful of what was published in their papers for fear of violence against themselves and their local black community, thus less was included. The riot still did not gain complete attention in regional newspapers. Those further away from the event were less likely to cover the riot, as was the case in the Western United States. Newspapers with a regional audience that will be included for analysis include major city black newspapers -- *Broad Ax*, *Cleveland Gazette*, *Birmingham Reporter*, *Savannah Tribune*, *Washington Bee*, *Denver Sun*, and *Cayton's Weekly* -- that possessed readerships and distributed in greater suburbs. These are seen as regional instead of local since most areas could not have more than one major black news source, as they would compete and harm one another's chances of gaining readership.

Chapter Three focuses on national newspapers and magazines, which had the most open and adamant voices on solutions and guidance of the larger black community related to the riot. These national publications sought to unite African Americans throughout the United States. This includes *The Chicago Defender*, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, *Afro-American*, and *New York Age*. The papers functioned as hybrid publications read by both the communities in which they were published and national audiences. They spoke out most prominently and aggressively against the atrocities that occurred during the riot. Specifically, the *New York Age* gave readers and today's

researchers a plethora of information, like its July 12th, 1917 edition featuring clips and articles from over a dozen other newspapers throughout the nation and many different individual reactions of the riot. Even though newspapers were the typical way for people to stay informed, periodicals such as magazines were significant as well. For example, the NAACP magazine, *Crisis*, devoted an entire issue to the East St. Louis Riot and what people should do going forward. These national publications, while different in writing styles, condemned the way in which the riot was handled as well as how the black community should use this event as a rallying point for civil rights legislation and to take up the cause for freedom and constitutional rights. The national newspapers, having a vast and diverse readership, had the responsibility to not only inform but be national leaders of the black community. This created challenges as editors were primarily tasked with producing news deemed relevant to the majority of its readership. How these leaders navigate through these tasks will be discussed in part three.

CHAPTER I: LOCAL MEDIA COVERAGE, “THOUSANDS LEAVE EAST ST. LOUIS, CARED FOR HERE”

The scene of destruction of life and property was not in the thickly populated district, the mob was too cowardly to invade it, but vented its fury on isolated spots and helpless victims. It had not a choice. It was a sporting crowd, hunting for game. Innocent men, women, and children fleeing from their burning homes, pled for mercy, but were shot down and their bodies thrown back to be consumed by the flames.⁴⁰

This horrifying depiction of the East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917 was from the first-hand accounts made by a reporter of *The St. Louis Argus*. They were one of the first newspapers, and likely first black newspaper, to have eye-witness reporters on the scene. This prominent black newspaper would focus the entire Friday, July 6th, 1917 edition on the race riot. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's *Crisis* was the only other publication to devote an entire issue to the riot. The riot happened just a few miles from the St. Louis paper's office, within its area of circulation. Even though East St. Louis, with a total population of 69,502 people, was said to have anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 black residents, it had no black newspapers. Only four white newspapers existed -- the *Journal*, *Sun*, *Tribune*, and *Truth*.⁴¹ The most widespread newspaper from East St. Louis was the *Journal*, listed as a progressive newspaper with an 9,602 subscribers. For the people of both East St. Louis, Illinois, and St. Louis, Missouri, *The St. Louis Argus*, or *Argus*, was the dominate black newspaper to which black residents turned. The other black newspaper printed and circulated in St. Louis, the *Western Messenger*, had only been in St. Louis since early 1917 and was a lesser known, more extreme source, known for openly criticizing the status quo for the sake of change

⁴⁰ Editorial, *The St. Louis Argus*, July 6, 1917

⁴¹ Ayer & Son's, 198.

and progress.⁴² While many would read the mainstream, white papers, including the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, as well as *The East St. Louis Daily Journal*, the *Argus* presented an alternative and addressed information omitted in the white press. The *Argus* was printed from the perspective of the black community of the greater St. Louis region, which included across the Mississippi River in East St. Louis. The *Argus* also served as the primary source for finding information on what St. Louis residents could do to help those pouring into their city. Most importantly, the *Argus* was East St. Louis residents' guide of what aid St. Louis provided for them and where to find it. The *Argus* included information on aid available at community shelters, and churches, as well as legal services provided by local lawyers and the NAACP.

The *Argus* was founded in 1912, as an independent newspaper printed every Friday through its own Argus Publishing Company, located at 2341 Market St., St. Louis, Missouri.⁴³ At the time of the riot in 1917, St. Louis had a diverse array of over a hundred periodicals published within its city limits, but the *Argus* and *Western Messenger* were the only black newspapers. While there were only two black newspapers from St. Louis at the time of the riot, several had been in publication prior to 1917. Missouri's first black newspaper, *Negro World*, was established in 1875 in St. Louis, followed closely by the *National Tribune* in 1876, the *Pythian Voice* in 1882, *Palladium* in 1884, and *American Eagle* in 1894, all of which had closed by the time of the riots. However, they are all significant as they show the increase in demand for black newspapers, as circulation

⁴² George Everett Slavens, "The Missouri Negro Press 1875-1920" *Missouri Historical Review*, No. 4 (July 1970): 425.

⁴³ N. W. Ayer & Son's Newspaper Annual and Directory, Philadelphia, 1917, 529.

numbers increased from 2,700 subscribers to a height of 4,500.⁴⁴ There was a need for a trusted source of news for the entire African American community of St. Louis, and the surrounding area, which is why there were journalists constantly trying to establish newspapers.

When the *Argus* opened its doors in 1912, it was the only black newspaper in St. Louis. Its predecessors had only survived for months or a few years at a time. Part of what proves the *Argus* as a strong, beloved pillar of the black community is that it became one of only three black newspapers in Missouri to last over four decades.⁴⁵ A newspaper's support and readership often depends upon the editorial positions and priorities it puts forth and writes about.

The creator and longtime editor of the *St. Louis Argus* was Joseph E. Mitchell. Mitchell was a Spanish-American War veteran from Alabama that was inspired to move to St. Louis after the city hosted the 1904 World's Fair. Having only a fourth grade education, Mitchell went on to attend night school, followed by undergraduate studies at Douglas College. After editing at an insurance company, he then started the *Argus* in 1912.⁴⁶ Mitchell created his newspaper to help the black community by acknowledging wrongdoing and abuse of its people, along with inspiring and rallying those same people to agitate for racial change.⁴⁷

At the beginning of Mitchell's run with the *Argus*, the newspaper lacked depth or scholarship, as it was a local paper that only spoke of small matters, like being the voice

⁴⁴ Slavens, 417.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 414.

⁴⁶ Edwina W. Mitchell, *the Crusading Black Journalist: Joseph Everett Mitchell*, Philadelphia: Farmer Press, Inc., 1972, 2-3.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.

of the local fraternal order of the Knights of Pythias.⁴⁸ It seemed that while Mitchell had intended for his newspaper to have a political voice, he needed help in achieving the goal. The significant year for the *Argus* was 1915, as it became more respectable and significant after it hired the distinguished, accomplished editor Phillip H. Murray.

Phillip H. Murray attended and graduated from Oberlin College, the nation's first college to admit students regardless of race, doing so in 1835.⁴⁹ After attending Oberlin College, Murray taught at Sumner High School, in St. Louis. He then went into journalism, serving as the editor of the *St. Louis Advance* from 1885 until it ceased publication in 1915, after which he joined the *Argus*.⁵⁰ During his career in journalism, Murray became a leader in the black community within the St. Louis region. Being a college graduate, former teacher, and then journalist, he saw first-hand what education could do to help an individual. It was his perspective that social welfare and advancement could be achieved through knowledge and education, as can be seen through well-composed editorials that he wrote on a weekly basis. As a highly-educated person in the community, he felt that he and the newspapers he edited should be an example of where to seek and find knowledge from someone in a leadership position.⁵¹ His guidance and leadership were demonstrated when he addressed the St. Louis area in the *Argus* as the race riots began as well as in the weeks thereafter.

⁴⁸ Henry Lewis Suggs, ed. *The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983, 218.

⁴⁹ "Best Colleges", US News and World Report, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/oberlin-college-3086>

⁵⁰ Slavens, 428.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Reporting of the East St. Louis Race Riot by the *St. Louis Argus*

The East St. Louis race riots occurred on July 2, a Monday, in 1917. The *Argus*, being a Friday newspaper, reported on the events four days after they had occurred. In that short time period, the local newspaper gathered various types of information and stories from the perspective of the victims, local law enforcement, and other government officials. The paper also tried to establish what started the riots, as well as what went on during the riots. The paper also served as a guide to what survivors and members of the black community should do in the immediate future. Not only did the newspaper report in the days following, but for weeks, which differs from both black and white regional and national newspapers that moved on to other issues of the day. The *Argus* was committed to seeing this local tragedy through, helping displaced victims as well as concerned members of the community abreast of what politicians were or were not doing in reaction to the riot.

On Friday, July 6, 1917, the *Argus*' front-page headline read "Riot: A National Disgrace," with a subheading stating, "East St. Louis Shrouds in Shame. Mob Commits Most Atrocious Crimes on Innocent Negroes While Police and Militiamen Look on With Apathy. President Called on to Stop Mob Violence. War Department Asked to Take Hand in Investigations."⁵² These gripping words showed just how important the events were to people within the readership of the *Argus*. It was assumed that East St. Louis was not even necessary to include in the title, for everyone in the St. Louis area was seeing first-hand what was going on across the river in Illinois. The editors made sure to clarify that the events, which occurred four days prior to the printing were so important that they

⁵² Editorial, *St. Louis Argus*, July 6, 1917.

still warranted taking up the entire front page. The font was made larger to accomplish this. Using words such as ‘disgrace,’ ‘shame,’ and ‘atrocious’ make it obvious that the views of the newspaper laid complete blame on the white mob and the police who stood by with reported ‘apathy.’ It was such a significant eruption of violence that the President was questioned by many papers, including the *Argus*, for not making a quicker decision to use federal force to end the rioting. Also, the headline concerning the War Department and an investigation suggests that the newspaper would keep readers informed about potential hearings and Congressional hearings in the coming weeks. Instead of the black community relying on other sources, the *Argus* made it clear that the people of East St. Louis and St. Louis would stay informed on every detail surrounding the riots.

There was also no tolerance or excuse for the white mob’s reasons for starting the violence, as the most prominent story that opened the newspaper stated “Negroes did not Start Trouble: Outbreak Caused by White Men in Automobile Shooting into Negro Homes Sunday Night. Policemen Mistaken for Rioters Are Slain.”⁵³ The newspaper left no room for showing any fault in the black community, rather that black residents had defended themselves in what they believed to be another attack of drive by shootings by white men. The *Argus* went on to say it would not restate the facts that had been given by the daily presses’ of the area that had written on the riot for the past four days. Instead, it had a duty to set the record straight as to the false reporting that had been done against the black community of East St. Louis. The *Argus* felt that it had a duty to be the voice and guide of the black community, as the mainstream press had shown bias in some cases against the victims and residents where the riot occurred. Since the *Argus* was the only

⁵³ Ibid.

local black newspaper at the time, it acquired the responsibility of showing the perspective of those victims and the community. The paper disagreed with other papers on details, including mainstream reports stating that the “Negroes” had been arming themselves and were planning their own riot or uprising. On the contrary, the *Argus* defended the residents, stating that eyewitnesses said many “Negroes” felt the need for self-protection but they did not plan the trouble that caused the riot.⁵⁴

Another point of contention the editor discussed was whether or not the black community of East St. Louis took up arms after a church bell was rung as a rallying cry. The *Argus* editor noted that the daily press (not specifically saying which daily press) had made the accusation but it had no witnesses to establish where the information came from. The *Argus* went on to say that they had found witnesses to counter the accusations of a church bell rallying a black mob, and that the only instance of a gathering was the black men of the community coming out of their homes to check on the commotion of the car of white men shooting at homes in their neighborhood.⁵⁵ Eye witnesses interviewed by the newspaper stated that after this first attack on the neighborhood, men armed themselves in case of another attack. They then mistakenly thought an unmarked, white police car was the same car and shot at it in self-defense. Two white policemen were killed as a result of the shootings, and the vehicle was parked in front of city hall, riddled with bullet holes, for the world to see.

The *Argus* also defended these residents with regards to the shooting being one of miscalculations, as they thought they were acting in self-defense. Roy Albertson of the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

white, mainstream daily newspaper, the *St. Louis Republic*, reported the opposite sentiments, writing that he had been with the two officers at the time of the shooting. He claimed

A cold-blooded murder of detective Sergeant Samuel Coppedge by an armed mob of Negroes...Coppedge was killed while offering his protection as an officer of the law to the Negroes and he gave them not the slightest provocation for taking his life. The fatal shooting of his walking partner Detective Frank Wodley, poured oil of fury on the growing fires of resentment of the whites. Mobs paraded in the streets, beating and shooting every Negro who happened in their way and shouting the battle cry: 'they go Sam and Frank: we'll get them.'⁵⁶

The *Argus* absolutely disagreed with the above statements by Albertson, giving the rebuttal that no one they interviewed saw the detectives speaking with anyone else before they were shot. If there truly were an 'army' of gathered "Negro" men after the signal of the church bell had rung out, it seemed miraculous that the police vehicle containing several men made it out of the neighborhood with only two men being struck and killed by the said 'army.' The newspaper report of the *Argus* went on to say that the white press kept mentioning the quote from a "Negro" stating 'we don't need your protection' to the police, had been taken from previous encounters that happened over a month prior to the situation. It seemed that the quote had been placed in the papers as a way to dramatize the situation, making it as if the "Negro" community wanted to be left to itself, seeing the police as big of an enemy as the ensuing white mob would be.⁵⁷ Such claims exaggerated, caused division, and even suggested blame be cast on the black community for why the riot started.

⁵⁶ Roy Albertson, *St. Louis Republic*, July 3, 1917

⁵⁷ Editorial, *St. Louis Argus*, July, 6, 1917.

The *Argus* openly criticized not just Albertson's claims, but the legitimacy and reputation of the entire *St. Louis Republic*. The *Argus* stated the other newspaper was "biased and bore the ear-marks of yellow journalism that incites mob violence."⁵⁸ By using the term yellow journalism, the editor was accusing the reporters of the *Republic* of not only reporting false claims about black citizens, but doing so in a dramatic, slanted way, so as to start or even cause the violence of the riot. Authors, Juan Gonzalez and Joseph Torres, agree to the *Argus*' negative claims against the *Republic*, as they stated in their book, *News for All the People*, that the *Republic* was known as a paper with openly racist views.⁵⁹ The *Republic* had written slanted accounts for months prior to the riots criticizing members of the black community, blaming them for the trouble in East St. Louis. The bias can be seen as the *Republic*'s headlines three days after the riot read "Inquest witnesses say East St. Louis Blacks Planned Reprisal on 'Fourth,' White Women Their Prey... One of Three Who Suffered Negro Insults Not Likely to Recover...Vote Dickering Assigned as Reason for 'Impudence' of Colored Population." The article went on to blame six 'race men' for all the trouble and violence started months ago.⁶⁰ If one only read the news from the *Republic* they would have been led to believe that members of the black communities were the agitators, offenders, and predators. While the paper did admit to the number of black residents killed, it focused on the members of the white mob that were harmed and killed during the riot, as if they were the innocent victims. Instead of concentrating on all the details of the riot, the newspaper

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Juan Gonzalez and Joseph Torres, *News for All the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media*. (London: Verso, 2011), 215.

⁶⁰ Editor, *St. Louis Republic*, July 5, 1917.

conspired to spin them so that the black population would not be trusted, that women were being targeted as ways to get revenge on the white community. The *Republic* went so far as to describe the ‘impudence’ of the colored population, even though it was the lack of remorse and boldness of members of the white community that enabled one of the worst riots in United States history. On July 6th, 1917, the paper continued to add to the paranoia and racism, with headlines stating that “Free Food Proves Lure: Police Say Blacks from Other Points Are Pretending to Be Refugees.”⁶¹ Again, instead of reporting on substance and meaningful accounts, the paper focuses on spinning negative press on the black community, as it wrote of untrustworthy bottom feeders taking advantage of the situation, seeking treatment and aid that the paper deemed unneeded. They took this biased opinion even though in the same article they admitted that the Red Cross and Negro YMCA said they seemed to think all the people were in fact victims from East St. Louis. This seems to prove that the *Republic* chose to write from a preconceived notion of not trusting members of the black community. Instead, they kept casting black residents as outsiders, not to be trusted. Having such a widely-distributed newspaper, with 100,000 subscribers, impressed the need for the black community to marshal advocates who could rebut such attacks.⁶² As a local newspaper representing the black community, the *Argus* tried to identify and critique papers within the region that peddled false and defamatory news, which unquestionably included the *Republic*.

The most widely read newspaper written in East St. Louis, the *Journal*, also drew criticism from the *Argus* as well as from white newspapers in the area. Although the

⁶¹ Editor, *St. Louis Republic*, July 6, 1917.

⁶² Ayers & Son’s, 529.

Journal's editor James Kirk claimed to be a progressive Democrat, known as an advocate for change, he was more of a sensationalist similar to the reporters found in the *Republic*. Respected editor of the *Post-Dispatch*, Harper Barnes, claimed that many reports written in the *Journal* blamed black migrants for the spike in crime and that the negative black stories in the paper were often absolutely false.⁶³ Having papers such as the *Journal* make it understandable as to why the *Argus* set out to act as the local black newspaper who would critique all other media sources in order to then debunk what they felt were accusations and false claims against the black community before, during, and after the East St. Louis Race Riot on July 2, 1917.

The *Argus* reporter on the scene during the rioting also felt the need to add his own first-hand accounts to the mainstream narrative. He provided details that other reporters would use later, like the fact that the mob had not gone into the heavily populated black neighborhood, stating that:

The mob was too cowardly to invade it, but vented its fury on isolated spots and helpless victims...it was a sporting crowd, hunting for game. A black face was the game. Innocent men, women, and children, fleeing from their burned homes, pled for mercy, but were shot down and their bodies thrown back to be consumed by the flames...all of this before the eyes of the police and militia, yet no effort was made to check the fury of the mob.⁶⁴

Such insight from its own reporter allowed the *Argus* to contradict what the daily presses had been publishing for days. The reporter added the details of his own first-hand accounts to support the paper's claim that the black community was innocent. The rioters were not simply seeking the apparent murderers of the two detectives. They were not questioning and asking for names and locations of the alleged assailants, but rather, the

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 213.

⁶⁴ Reporter, *St. Louis Argus*, July 6, 1917.

paper made the case that the rioters were taking advantage of the deaths of two white police officers as a way to condone violence and to avenge wrongful doing by the “Negro army” of East St. Louis. The *Argus* defended the black community of East St. Louis, as it showed through the testimony of its eye-witness reporter that the white mob was blood-thirsty, seeking out and harming people only due to their race, not for any actions previously committed by any of the victims.

In the Friday, July 6th issue of the *Argus*, the newspaper also acknowledged and appreciated the daily press that accurately reported the atrocities of the riot. The newspaper stated that the daily press did not exaggerate the violence of the July 2nd mob, as it was a mob that reached to the lowest forms of barbarity and grotesque brutality on innocent lives. After offering its own first-hand accounts and details of the rioting, the editor of the *Argus* complimented two local white daily presses in St. Louis for their reporting and support of the black community in the days following the riot. Those two newspapers were the *Globe-Democrat* and the *Post-Dispatch*. The editor advised its readers that these two newspapers could be trusted from the daily press. Specifically, that the *Globe-Democrat* wrote the most fairly and accurately and added that the *Post*’s Carlos Hurd along with the editors took the high ground in reporting honest, accurate statements of the mob actions. They appreciated the two daily papers so much so that sections of the editorials from the white papers were featured on page four of the July 6th edition of the *Argus*. The paper also acknowledged the weekly white St. Louis newspaper the *Star* as having joined the other two newspapers in condemning mob violence.⁶⁵ By the newspaper giving its stamp of approval to these white, mainstream newspapers, it

⁶⁵ Ibid.

shows that the newspaper was not there to deter readers from partaking in the mainstream, but rather, to guide the black community in knowing which presses were friends and allies that could be relied on, set apart from the racist, biased papers that the *Argus* spoke out so vehemently against.

The newspaper also explained what was being done for the victims and guided readers in what they could do to help. For example, the newspaper informed the community of a benefit matinee, in which all proceeds collected by the Booker T. Washington Theatre would go to the victims of the East St. Louis Riot. The newspaper did not simply print the notice, but also requested its readers to “do your part by attending.”⁶⁶ Again, the newspaper encouraged its patrons to be active, helpful members within the community. It urged them to not sit idle, but to go out and support a local black business, the Booker T. Washington Theatre, and the black community of East St. Louis. It was a way for people to rally, come together, take their minds off the chaos and calamities of the riot, all while trying to reach out and help care for the victims. The paper also informed the readers that church collections throughout the area for the next several weeks were going to be given to the local NAACP for aid.

In addition, the *Argus* acknowledged and praised the efforts of local organizations that helped victims after the riot. Those organizations, including the Red Cross, City Officials, YWCA, YMCA, and NAACP, gave aid, shelter, food, and clothing. Legal service was also provided by the local Bar Association free of charge for any victim seeking damages. Most ardently, the paper gave tribute to the local NAACP chapter. The NAACP were said by the *Argus* to have given the most guidance, structure, and

⁶⁶ Ibid.

instruction in regards to what victims should do and where they should go. The *Argus* noted that the chapter held an emergency meeting and formed a committee in order to be able to most effectively and efficiently help those coming in from East St. Louis.⁶⁷ Assignments given to committee members included finding and directing information, finance, employment, and press. Members also helped the mayor of St. Louis and Red Cross in opening the Municipal Lodging House to victims for the time being. The *Argus* praised the work of the mayor, police chief, and Red Cross for managing and seeking funds to feed and clothe the East St. Louis residents seeking help from St. Louis. It went on to even name over a dozen men and women who used their automobiles to transport victims from the bridges connecting the two cities, doing so for hours without any sort of compensations, just as a sign of generosity and empathy towards the victims.⁶⁸

These sort of facts and statements printed by the newspaper shows the perspective and focus of the paper. It not only gave details of the violence that other press may have left out, but also the good works that were performed by the local black community. Often, the mainstream press would only go so far to remain unbiased and not be racist at best. This black newspaper saw the need to take it a step further and highlight positive stories in the black community, something rarely reported on in the mainstream white media. It was also meant to show what editor Mitchell of the *Argus* felt was one the priorities of the paper, which included writing to help the community be well-informed and active.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Another priority of the local St. Louis paper was to continue reporting and keeping the spotlight on the riot. The July 13th, 1917 edition of the *Argus* continued to focus on the riot and its aftermath. Its front page headlines were all about the riot, reading “E. St. Louis is Quiet after the Race Massacre: three thousand military men in charge. “Negroes” urged to return. Protection guaranteed. Popular demand for government investigation.”⁶⁹ There was a constant push for more information both for citizens of St. Louis and the survivors of the riot that had come to the Missouri city. Although the newspaper reported that officials of East St. Louis were asking for its residents to return to their homes and jobs, the *Argus* did not take a position as to whether citizens should do so. They had served as a guide and leader to the community during the riot, but a week later they seemed to be there to give information as much as anything else. The report stated that East St. Louis officials had realized the horrors of the events on July 2nd and were guaranteeing safety and security for all of its residents, white or black, and that law would be enforced. City officials stated how ashamed they were of the recent attacks and that such criminals had been removed, again pushing for its black residents to return to a safer, stronger East St. Louis that was claiming to respect all people.⁷⁰ Simply reporting these claims made by the East St. Louis city officials makes it clear that the *Argus* was not trying to raise animosity or tension, but rather be a source that citizens could trust in helping them heal and move on, perhaps even returning to their homes and jobs that less than two weeks after the riot.

⁶⁹ Editor, *St. Louis Argus*, July 13, 1917.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

The paper also continued covering services provided by the local charities and organizations, including the NAACP, YMCA, and YWCA. As time went by, the city of St. Louis had begun to slowly eliminate the amount of resources available to the East St. Louis citizens that were still in Missouri. They shut the doors of the municipal building, as it was needed for city events. Those still dependent were taken in by the YMCA and YWCA, which had been organized through the guidance and assertiveness of NAACP leaders.⁷¹ The paper continued to detail what the NAACP was doing for East St. Louis survivors, as it was the leading organization to act on behalf of the black community after the riot. The *Argus* shared the NAACP's notices for practical advice survivors may need, including life insurance claims for those killed, reporting and receiving compensation for fire damage, and how to receive donations. It also recognized that W.E.B. Du Bois, founding member of the NAACP, was in St. Louis to investigate for the NAACP's magazine *The Crisis*, assist local leaders in any capacity, and to deliver a speech about the riot on Sunday, July 15th.⁷² The paper admired the NAACP for all of its relief work, being so important that nearly half of the front page was devoted to the news of the organization.

The *Argus* also focused the July 13th's printing on the political implications the riot was having on the area as well as the nation. A United States Congressman, L.C. Dyer, whose district had several black neighborhoods and was situated on the Mississippi River in south St. Louis, led the committee to investigate the East St. Louis Race Riot.⁷³ The paper offered no comment or opinion on to the committee, just included the purpose

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

of the committee and the official resolution it wrote. The purpose of the article was to show that steps were being taken and that people had not forgotten about the riot, nor were they trying to dismiss or ignore it. Rather, the United States Congress, both Senate and House, formed a joint committee devoted to investigating the causes of the riot, if the United States Constitution or any federal laws had been violated, and what, if any, legislation could be created to prevent similar riots from happening in the future.⁷⁴

Having such investigative information published in the local black newspaper served to show that the paper reported all angles and news stories relating to the riot. While the primary focus of the paper was in giving practical information on the daily needs of the survivors and the community helping them, it also served to touch on state and national actions being taken for the sake of those affected by the riot and for the entire nation. Even investigating the atrocities at a national level showed the severity of the situation, as it was in the national spotlight due to the level of deaths and destruction. Overall, the paper showed that East St. Louis had not been forgotten by the nation in the two weeks since the riot, and that it was important for the paper to concentrate on seeing the events and its people through until conclusions had been drawn.

By the next week's Friday edition on July 20th, 1917, the focus shifted from people trying to go back to East St. Louis to many leaving the Illinois town, as again the front page headline was occupied with details of the aftermath of the riot. The headline read "Negroes Leaving East Saint Louis: new Exodus due to the feeling of unprotection when militia quits ill-fated town. Best citizens leaving. Senator Sherman says "Citizens are living on edge of volcano." Insurance companies canceling risks. Landlords ask

⁷⁴ Ibid.

tenants to move.”⁷⁵ Details in the weeks after the July 2nd riot had went from somewhat of a positive light to new harsh realities. Those people who had been refugees in St. Louis and had returned to their homes, or at least neighborhoods in East St. Louis to find new homes, had to also cope with what to do after the militia left. The militia had planned to leave by July 25th, as they saw the city returning to a stable, calm, and quiet setting again, meaning their help was no longer needed.⁷⁶ As the militia made plans to leave, black residents, old and new, did not feel comfortable staying. There were rumors pouring in from various sources of more attacks happening as soon as the militia left, causing the black residents of East St. Louis to leave rather than remain and discover if such violence would occur. The *Argus* included a separate piece on the validity of the worries of another riot, as mentioned in the headlines, that senators on the investigation committee of the riot were being told that tension and hatred was still high in East St. Louis, and that another attack may be in the works.⁷⁷ Due to such reporting, residents were hitching their wagons and moving to nearby towns and the city of St. Louis. Again, the paper did not take a stance on whether or not such actions were appropriate, but rather it reported simply to keep the readers aware of what was going on around them. In addition, since so many were settling in St. Louis, the paper noted that housing in the black neighborhoods of the city was becoming scarce.⁷⁸

The paper also kept supporting the local NAACP, giving open appreciation and thanks to the organization for its continued work helping victims and keeping the riot

⁷⁵ Editorial, *St. Louis Argus*, July 20, 1917.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

relevant to state and federal lawmakers. Not only did they help provide the essential necessities of food, shelter, and clothing, but also on the legal side, the NAACP was making sure that law enforcement and investigators prosecuted as many of the rioters as possible, as the paper reported. In its July 20th edition, the *Argus* reported that six whites and six blacks had been indicted, and that authorities were trying to blame the “Negro” community for causing the riot, leading to the city not having to pay any damages.⁷⁹ It was reported that landlords in East St. Louis were evicting black residents from their properties and insurance company dropping coverage for the same people. Police were taking black residents’ weapons, fearing retaliation, but leaving residents without weapons for self-defense.⁸⁰ While the city had just been quoted in the past two editions for being ashamed of the riot and holding the rioters accountable, it seemed by the July 20th paper that the officials were now more concerned with financial concerns and claims. While the world was watching, the city officials mourned, but after the attention of the world had waned, the city was not as concerned with safety and justice for its black residents, but only in trying to save the city’s budget. Due to this lack of support from the city, the NAACP played a pivotal role in being the East St. Louis victims’ greatest advocates.

The last front page headline pertaining to the riot appeared in the July 27th edition of the *Argus*. No other paper would have four weeks straight of front page, headline news of the riot. Again, this shows just how important the local St. Louis paper felt the riot was for their readers. Many readers were the victims themselves, and so the paper still felt the

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

riot was the most significant story to report on, even four weeks after the event had actually taken place. This edition continued informing readers on the whereabouts of the militia, the actions of the NAACP, as well as providing new photographic evidence from the riot.

The headlines read “Troops Remain in East St. Louis: An appeal by business men to Secretary Baker brings desired results. Plants operating with full force. Leading citizens say place is safe but employees are doubtful.”⁸¹ It would seem that again the focus is not on what should be done at a national level, but rather what was being done or not done at the local level for those that were affected during and after the riot. The business sectors were powerful enough to have swayed the state militia to stay longer in the city, allowing them to try to persuade more employees to return to their homes and jobs. The paper reported that although black leaders agreed with businesses that there was protection and security, many black laborers were still hesitating to return to the city, and many who did were there only to collect whatever they had left in their homes and leave the city forever.⁸² For many, it seemed that if a militia was still needed to keep the peace, then the city of East St. Louis was not safe and secure enough. At some point, the militia would leave and the black neighborhoods would again be vulnerable to attacks.

The *Argus* put the NAACP back on its front page for the fourth week in a row as well. The organization had been raising funds for legal representation of the victims. The paper openly criticized East St. Louis leaders and sought to rally its readers, stating that:

It is generally conceded that little or nothing is to be expected from the East St. Louis authorities in the way of bonafide prosecutions of the rioters. Therefore the burden falls upon us. The militant character of this organization will not allow it

⁸¹ Editorial, *St. Louis Argus*, July 27, 1917.

⁸² Ibid.

to remain passive in the face of so great a responsibility. All you who value your liberty and cherish the aspirations of the free born must lend your moral and financial support to the organization that will not keep silence in the presence of ruthless assault upon the lives and property of its people...Every man, woman, child of color is vitally concerned in the legal investigation and punishment of the East St. Louis rioters. Therefore without delay contribute your part of the two thousand dollars needed by the NAACP to do this work.⁸³

The *Argus* made a confident stand in this passage. It claimed that the East St. Louis authorities did little to nothing to truly help its black residents. Instead, the paper commended the NAACP for bringing about relief, aid, and justice for the victims of the East St. Louis Riot. It not only supported the NAACP, but urged its readers to donate to the organization. The writer held the establishment as one that not only was helping the victims, but all people of the black community. They bridged the gap between the victims and the onlookers by asserting that the riot was not simply an isolated event, but a threat to everyone's liberty and security. Thus, the paper advised all of its readers to do their part to help the NAACP and their efforts to provide legal representation against the atrocities of the riot. If successful, the NAACP would bring progress and change for the betterment of all, especially local black residents, having something positive come in the aftermath of one of the worst race riots in United States history.

In addition to the troops and NAACP, the July 27th edition of the *Argus* featured something unique and unusual, another local piece of information that no other paper reported. There would be 'moving pictures' of the race riot, to be seen at the Booker T. Washington Theatre that Saturday night, the 28th. The paper exclaimed that the moving pictures would 'be authentic and worth going miles to see.'⁸⁴ Though the paper does not

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

say where the moving pictures came from or who took them, they verified the authenticity, putting their reputation and trust on the community on the line. Such material made available within a month of the riots had to be considered a short amount of time for technology of that age, which was perhaps why the viewing made headlines. To view such footage in the Booker T. Washington Theatre, a black theatre in St. Louis, showed that the footage was important and relevant in the community. People of the area who had read about the incidents could now see the events for themselves. It would be used to show the truths of the riot, providing evidence as a way to show the validity of the claims made by victims, as well as for the neighboring residents to see what the victims had experienced. It also reiterates that the St. Louis black community had not forgotten about the riot and that it was still fresh on their minds and in their local newspaper.

In the weeks and months ahead, the *Argus* focused on other news of the day, both local and national. World War I, or the ‘Great War’ as it was being called in the papers during the conflict, was gaining most of the headlines, as the *Argus* kept its readers informed of the experiences of ‘colored’ men being drafted and their whereabouts while training and fighting. Despite becoming more removed from the days of the riot, the paper did mention the events a few more times. On October 26, 1917, it gave an update on the ongoing federal investigation that had been undertaken by Congress. Reports presented that the committee was startled by the evidence being brought in about the riot, writing “damaging evidence of political rottenness in East St. Louis given before Congressional investigators: mayor, police, and militia guilty of neglect.”⁸⁵ Readers then

⁸⁵ Editorial, *St. Louis Argus*, October 26, 1917.

saw that the investigation was being taken seriously and the local newspaper was keeping them updated on just what the investigation was doing with regards to the riot. It was also showing readers that investigators were not being partial towards the city or officials of East St. Louis, but as the headline suggested, that biased remarks were made, showing indications of foul play not on the part of the East St. Louis black citizens and neighborhoods, but rather on its officials. The paper reported on justice sought out by the investigation, not further blundering or corruption that seemed to be made by city officials. This would have been encouraging national information that was being relayed to local patrons of the paper, showing them that the paper is not just about local information, but also included national matters pertaining to the community.

As an update on the local level, the paper reported just beneath the national investigation that eight whites had been sentenced for the riots, charged with arson, and that eighteen total had been arrested related to the riot. The *Argus* reported as stated that many charges against white men had been dismissed as the militiamen present for the riots were needed for war efforts and were no longer available for testimonies. The final details of police reports stated that ten “Negroes” had also been arrested and found guilty of killing two detectives, one of those “Negroes” being Harry Robinson. The *Argus* noted having several witnesses who swore Robinson was elsewhere at the time of the crime.⁸⁶ All of these details made the front page of the paper, showing importance and priority. These police reports of having nearly the same number of black men arrested as white men during the riot seems unimaginable, but the *Argus* does not question the reports, rather it only questioned the conviction of Robinson. The *Argus* kept the reader informed

⁸⁶ Ibid.

on statistics and reports of the riot as investigations continued, arrests made, trials started and concluded.

The final front page mentioning of the riot by the *Argus* focused on black soldiers representing St. Louis, away serving the country during the Great War. The men had heard of the need for funds from the NAACP. They took it upon themselves and several other black troops to raise money and send it back to the local St. Louis NAACP chapter.⁸⁷ The NAACP needed funds to continue legal actions representing victims as well as those black residents arrested during the rioting. The paper acknowledged the generosity of the black soldiers who were already giving so much for their community, as well as again supporting the efforts of the NAACP for the community, specifically pertaining to their leading efforts after the riot.

Reporting of the East St. Louis Race Riot by Neighboring Newspapers

While the *Argus* was the closest and largest black newspaper to East St. Louis, there were also others nearby that raised their own unique concerns and perspectives of what to do after the riot. The next closest black newspaper, with which its writings can still be found, was the *Hannibal Record*, a paper printed 120 miles northwest of East St. Louis. While the paper in its entirety is unavailable, its editorial comments about the East St. Louis Riot of July 2nd are part of the collective feature that was published in the July 12th, 1917 issue of the national paper *New York Age*. Within the *New York Age*, the *Hannibal Record* did not report like the *Argus* did on basic needs, as its readers were not victims of the riot. Instead, the *Hannibal Record* focused its attention on blaming what

⁸⁷ Editorial, *St. Louis Argus*, December 7, 1917.

they called ‘metropolitan journalists’ for not speaking out against racial prejudice, lawlessness, and lack of unity in East St. Louis prior to the riot.⁸⁸ They felt that there had been so much unrest before the major riot that people could have prevented such atrocities from ever happening. To give such harsh judgement against fellow journalists goes to show that there was little unity in regards to the press of the day. One could also infer that due to there being a lack of black journalists in East St. Louis, the *Hannibal Record* was not blaming black newspapers such as the *Argus*, but rather the white, mainstream press, for not doing enough to promote change and solutions to ongoing racial problems of East St. Louis.

In addition, even though Kansas City, Missouri is 250 miles to the west of East St. Louis, two black newspapers and their editors of Kansas City felt a close enough connection to include the riots in several weeks of their headlines and were more similar to the *St. Louis Argus*. Specifically, the *Kansas City Sun* appealed to its readers in a comparable way to the *Argus*. At the time, Kansas City was the second largest city in Missouri, only behind St. Louis. Like St. Louis, Kansas City was an industrial center, railroad hub, and the site of several federal buildings.⁸⁹ The two cities were also connected to the black community through the Exodusters that left the South in the late 1800’s to travel to Kansas. As stated in the introduction, many Exodusters stayed in St. Louis or traveled further, settling in Kansas City, Missouri or Kansas City, Kansas, towns that are only separated by the Missouri and Kansas rivers. In 1917, Kansas City, Missouri had three “Negro” newspapers, *The Kansas City Sun*, *The Kansas City Rising Son*, and

⁸⁸ Editorial, *Hannibal Record*, quoted from the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917.

⁸⁹ N. W. Ayer & Son’s Newspaper Annual and Directory, Philadelphia, 1917, 513.

The Western Christian; Kansas City, Kansas had *The Advocate*. The *Kansas City Sun* and *Advocate* are the only two still known to have 1917 issues of their circulations available to researchers today. The *Kansas City Sun*, the racially conservative newspaper, had the highest readership, but was often the target of the *Kansas City Rising Son*, as the latter newspaper was known for aggressive racial militancy for change, and felt the *Sun* was too invested in the Republican Party instead of being an advocate of the black community.⁹⁰ While the *Rising Son* readers may have agreed to sentiments generally raised against the *Sun* not doing enough, it was still a paper that gained the most readership, led the community with efforts such as raising money for a ‘colored hospital’ with ‘colored doctors’, attacked poor school conditions, and spoke out against segregation.⁹¹ The paper led in everyday efforts, information, and stories with the perspective of the black community instead of the white mainstream view, again making it similar to the *Argus* and the prototype of the general black local newspaper found in cities throughout the country.

The *Sun* did change its temperament when it came to the East St. Louis race riot, becoming openly outraged. The paper’s weekly edition that came out the Saturday after the riot, on July 7th, 1917, focused nearly the entire front page on the riot. Most newspapers put the name of their paper at the very top of the page, but the *Sun* had a unique design in which their very top was used as the headline. That Saturday, the headline read “Fiends Incarnate! Cowardly Police and Militia Search Negroes’s Homes, Disarm them, and Then Turn Them Over to the Blood-thirsty Demons Clamoring for

⁹⁰ Slavens, 430.

⁹¹ Ibid, 424-425.

Their Lives. Without Arms or Protection 38 are Killed, More than 200 Wounded and 325 Negro Homes are Burned and Looted.”⁹² The newspaper continued to bash authorities and stood-up for the black residents of East St. Louis. They spoke of brutality, severity, and how the victims were average American citizens trying to work and live a peaceful life. The newspaper felt empathy towards the black men that were not able to defend themselves or their families. The men being disarmed were then not only outnumbered, but were also fighting the psychological effects of having to compromise their manhood and sense of pride. Instead of being able to protect their community, black men were forced to become vulnerable and at the mercy of law enforcement and the white majority that were allowed to keep their weapons. Even though the *Sun* is supportive of the residents, it also called them to retaliate and gain justice for themselves, reporting that:

One big Pole last night said he had lost his job in an aluminum factory, his wife and two daughters had lost their places and his son had been shot by a Negro. “I killed seventeen last night,” he said, grinning as he shifted an ax he was carrying from one hand to the other. “And I am going to get a few more if I get a chance.” The Sun believes and fervently prays that God will damn every male Negro in East St. Louis yet living if that Pole is not sought out and brought to justice.⁹³

Such an extreme threat and challenge to the black community to seek revenge and fight violence with violence is unique as contrasted with other media. While most newspapers rallied and spoke out against the riot, calling for city and law enforcement officials to be held accountable, the *Sun* seemed to take it a step further, promoting citizens to take it upon themselves, not to wait on the same authorities that had let them down in the first place.

⁹² Editorial, *Kansas City Sun*, July 7, 1917.

⁹³ Ibid.

In the following week's edition, the *Sun* continued its focus on the riot, this time including a response by former President Theodore Roosevelt, a political cartoon, and what Kansas City residents were doing to help. Its headline read 'What Roosevelt Said!' writing of former President Roosevelt's remarks about the riot. He took a stand against the riot, calling for an investigation and justice, while the current President Woodrow Wilson remained silent on the matter. Roosevelt went on to criticize labor leader Samuel Gompers for calling it a matter of "Negro" strikebreakers causing the issue, instead of simply admitting that it was a race riot.⁹⁴ The *Sun* praised Roosevelt for being such a powerful politician speaking out against racial violence. The newspaper capitalized on this theme by including a political cartoon about the race riot right next to the article about Roosevelt. The political cartoon, by William Charles Morris of the mainstream white daily paper the *New York Evening Mail*, depicted a "Negro" mother and her two children kneeling before President Wilson who held a newspaper with his quote "The World Must Be Safe for Democracy." The mother counters the president's famous foreign agenda, exclaiming "Mr. President Why Not Make America Safe for Democracy," with East St. Louis burning in the background. The paper made the point that it is unacceptable for the president of the United States to ignore such atrocities as the East St. Louis Race Riot. By the time this newspaper had been printed, it had been nearly two weeks since the riot had occurred, which gave the president ample time to gain accurate reports on the situation, then acknowledge and comment on the riot itself as well as the state of race relations in the nation.

⁹⁴ Editorial, *Kansas City Sun*, July 14, 1917.

The *Sun* concludes its remarks about the East St. Louis Race Riot by connecting it to the local community. The heading below the headline about President Roosevelt stated “K.C. Negroes Send \$111.33 to Refugees.”⁹⁵ The paper was proud of its patrons and all black citizens of the Kansas City area who had donated money to organizations providing relief to the victims of the East St. Louis Riot. While the paper did not report of any victims coming so far as Kansas City, it was still close enough and in a city similar to Kansas City as far as industry and trade goes, that it was easy to empathize with its neighbors who had been attacked. The paper also praised the Missouri governor for speaking out against the atrocities, reminding locals that East St. Louis is not a Missouri town and that Illinois and its governor should be ashamed of the actions of their citizens.⁹⁶

The paper closed trying to rally its readers in realizing that although it did not happen in their state, it still mattered and that they could learn from their neighbor’s faults and shortcomings. Specifically, the *Sun* wrote that Kansas City, like East St. Louis, is a city dependent upon major factories and that if black employees had been part of a union, the massacre of East St. Louis would not have happened. When whites strike, they blame black workers, seeing them as strikebreakers and part of the problem. Therefore, the *Sun* believed that black workers must be allowed to join the same unions.⁹⁷ This was different than what the *Argus* had presented. The *Sun* took the focus away from a pure race riot and put some blame back on labor and industry. This supports the spatial theory of contested spaces since the issue of not allowing black workers to join major labor

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

unions seemed to be creating hostile work environments. Instead of coexisting and sharing the work space, it was a challenged space between union workers and what they saw black workers as, the strikebreakers breaking the union's chances of having their demands met. Overall, the paper rallied for citizens to fight for justice and safety especially in the surrounding area of Kansas City.

The Kansas City, Kansas newspaper, *The Advocate*, also focused on the labor issues of the riot, stating in their Friday, July 6th issue that "38 negroes murdered in East St. Louis because they wanted to work" and that a poll showed 85% of "Negroes" planned to stay in East St. Louis.⁹⁸ This smaller but still significant newspaper of neighboring Kansas, shows that for many, the riot stems from the battle over jobs and that "Negroes" are being accused of trouble-making, when they are hard-working citizens trying to make a living just as any other American. So it is unfair to say that they are the troublemakers. Also like the *Sun*, the *Advocate* praised its governor, Arthur Capper, by publishing the letter he had sent to President Wilson, which asked for a full, unbiased federal investigation to be carried out in order that justice be served to the people of East St. Louis.⁹⁹ The paper informed its readers of further details of the riot, but after the first two issues immediately following the incident, the paper returned to more local news in Kansas City, Kansas.

All of the newspapers above felt the strongest connection to the East St. Louis Race Riots due to their proximity. It made sense that the closest newspaper to the events,

⁹⁸ Editorial by Thomas Kennedy, *The Advocate*, July 6, 1917, accessed October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

⁹⁹ Editorial by Arthur Capper, *The Advocate*, July 13, 1917, accessed October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

the *Argus*, would provide the most information as soon as the riot happened and keep up with events long after every other newspaper in the country had moved on to other news. For the *Argus*, many of its readers were the victims themselves, and so there was a responsibility to take care of and inform the people of any and all matters relating to the riot, be it where to go, the organizations available for financial and legal help, as well as whether or not the East St. Louis area was safe to return to. For the other papers relatively close to the riot, their missions seemed to be to raise awareness, offer financial aid to their neighbors, and to lead in seeking guarantees from officials to protect residents in their own communities from ever having similar atrocities happen to them.

CHAPTER II: REGIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE, “THE STIGMA, SHAME ILLINOIS”

As local newspapers reported intricate details concerning the East St. Louis Race Riot and relayed to readers how it directly impacted their lives -- with many having been victims of the violence -- regional black media coverage did not share such a clear, common narrative. A regional newspaper is a sort of hybrid between the local and national newspapers. These newspapers are written at a local level and audience, but serve a very large geographic readership, but not so large that they are distributed at a national level. They are read in several nearby towns, but not across the country. Each regional paper serves its unique readers and their priorities, which often differ based upon their geographic location. A regional black newspaper provided a different perspective on the riot if they hailed in the Industrial Belt of the Midwest, South, Coastal South, nation's capital, or isolated West. These regional differences will be analyzed via such papers as the *Broad Ax*, *Cleveland Gazette*, *Birmingham Reporter*, *Savannah Tribune*, *Washington Bee*, *Denver Star*, and *Cayton's Weekly*.

The first of the regions to be discussed is the industrial Midwest, represented by the *Broad Ax* of Chicago and the *Cleveland Gazette* of Cleveland, Ohio. Both of these black newspapers were published in leading industrial centers of the nation. At the time, Chicago was the largest center of trade in grains, livestock, and lumber in the world.¹⁰⁰ Cleveland, an industrial heavyweight in its own right, was the world's leading petroleum refiners and headquarters of the Standard Oil Company.¹⁰¹ These industrial giants could

¹⁰⁰ Ayer & Sons, 177.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 742.

relate to East St. Louis, as it too was an industrial center. As the focus on the residents of these areas were on factories, so were their newspapers. The Cleveland black newspaper focused on labor issues related to the riot. Chicago's *Broad Ax* also prioritized labor issues, but included social concerns, including racism, discrimination, and inequality, similar to the *Argus*. The reason for this is that both Illinois cities are situated in the Midwest, separated by just 300 miles.

The *Broad Ax*, an independent, weekly black newspaper published on Saturday, followed the events of the riot for five consecutive weeks. Something unique to the *Broad Ax* was that it printed an early Friday edition, citing the importance of getting the word out on the details of the East St. Louis Race Riot. Their special edition, on Friday, July 6th, 1917, was all about the riot, featuring gruesome details and first-hand accounts, as well as coverage of labor issues. The *Broad Ax*'s lengthy editorial states that "the big packing companies and other major employers of colored help must from this point on furnish police protection for them for one thing is certain, that is that the civil authorities are too cowardly to do so."¹⁰²

This issue of labor makes sense for the industrial newspaper to focus on, and it also reiterates how contested spaces were a part of why the race riot happened in the first place. The industrial center was the priority of all of its workers, and as such, when those workers began having conflicts amongst one another, specifically white immigrant union members placing blame on black laborers for weakening their bargaining position, they attacked. Thus, papers like the *Broad Ax* highlighted the importance of factories providing security for black laborers. Having such a diverse group of workers in a time

¹⁰² Editorial, *the Broad Ax*, July 6, 1917, accessed October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

where divisiveness thrived created racial tensions that escalated into the race riot in East St. Louis. The paper did not see the black laborers as being safe at work since they were attacked right outside of the factories. Providing safety and security to all workers was thus seen as essential to helping subdue racial tensions.

Similarly, the *Cleveland Gazette* focused two weeks' worth of headlines to the riot, explicating its relationship to the Great Migration and labor issues. *The Gazette* saw the black labor force specifically as the target of the employers of the South reaching out or scaring those thinking about going to the North into staying in the South. The *Gazette* only mentioned the riot in a small paragraph on the front page, but made a powerful statement against the South and labor agitators, saying

It seems that prejudiced person in that city (East St. Louis), undoubtedly encouraged from the South, are determined to promote and inaugurate if possible, similar riots throughout the North against all newcomers of color from the South. The emigration of our people from that section to this has given the South a much-needed lesson and deserved punishment that has apparently wounded deeply, we are pleased to say.¹⁰³

While other newspapers previously analyzed agreed on blaming labor, this paper took it a step further, connecting the South to reasons why the riot happened. The Southern employers had been in an uproar since the mass exodus of the Great Migration began. The *Gazette* linked such people to the animosity shown in East St. Louis. Black migrants were leaving, finding factory jobs that paid much more than what they were receiving in the South. Although the South was being taught a lesson, it was also seen by the paper as trying to take revenge, encouraging the North to take discriminatory actions similar to lynching found in the South, through race riots in industrial centers newly

¹⁰³ Editorial, *Cleveland Gazette*, July 7, 1917, accessed October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

settled by black migrants. The way in which they wrote the above comments served to not just make the East St. Louis black residents victims, but in a way, activists and martyrs for the greater good of equality and liberty. The *Gazette* believed it to be a sign of the South clinging to a waning, dying idea of racial prejudice, that perhaps this was the beginning of the end of such harsh racial tensions, the last efforts of extremists, both in the North and the South.

Concerning the South, the newspaper the *Birmingham Reporter*, had its own agenda when reporting the East St. Louis riot. It too was tied to labor, but told its region to beware of the union leaders. In a town with a population of over 166,000 residents, there were twenty-one periodicals, four of which were deemed “Negro.” The “Negro” papers all had different points of interest. These include the religious *Baptist Leader*, the independent *Reporter*, the non-political *Voice of the People*, and the Republican *Wide-Awake*.¹⁰⁴ Having several newspapers in town meant that there would have been more representation for the entire black community of Birmingham as well as diversity of material for different groups also found within the black community. As for the information pertaining to the East St. Louis Riot, the *Reporter* did not include much in their paper. Rather, there was only a small clip of an editorial that mentioned the events, with that excerpt being included in the national *New York Age*’s July 12th edition. Although the riot was such a large event involving the African American community of East St. Louis and the surrounding area, the subject was not brought to the forefront of the black newspapers of the South available during that time period. The *Birmingham Report*, for example, wrote about the riot as primarily a labor issue that led to a distrust

¹⁰⁴ Ayer & Sons, 27.

and dispute between the races.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly enough, while most of the South was less industrialized than the Midwest, Birmingham was a town known for its railroads pumping out the products from its enormous steel industry and machine shops.¹⁰⁶ It makes sense then that the *Reporter* would question union leaders of the North, saying that black workers should not trust white union leaders, as “white men are white men” who protect one another first.¹⁰⁷ The newspaper reflected race and labor relations in the region. The *Reporter* not only attacked the union and its leaders, but also made a generalized statement about white males, stating that they were untrustworthy, as was evident by their actions during the East St. Louis Race Riot. The paper presented the riots in East St. Louis through the point of distrust of white men in Birmingham.

The South was known for segregation, discrimination, and even violence through lynching via the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups. The North, on the other hand, featured more subtle forms of discrimination, such as segregated neighborhoods and whites-only clubs and organizations. The newspaper went on to state that they were disappointed in both union and labor, as they had been hopeful for the ability of black workers to move North for more employment opportunities and equal treatment prior to the East St. Louis Riot.¹⁰⁸ The Southern black newspaper was then making a point to say that black men and women were leaving the South because of harassment, only to then meet similar animosity in the North. This was especially

¹⁰⁵ Editorial, *Birmingham Reporter*, within the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

¹⁰⁶ Ayers & Sons, 27.

¹⁰⁷ Editorial, *Birmingham Reporter*, within the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

harmful due to the fact that for generations the North had criticized the South for allowing discrimination and violence, but as the Great Migration took place, so did Northern race riots. The North then began to have to answer to its own issues of violence towards the expanding black communities within its region. Again, this is the greater issue of race relations being situated around contested spaces. In this case, the *Reporter* agreed that white labor unions and newly arrived black laborers from the South were in a dispute over shared space found within the industrial centers. Specifically that the white union leaders perceived the factories as solely theirs, becoming resentful at the increased presence of minorities. Such tension created what spatial historians call territorial spaces, in which those first to establish themselves at a place of power resisted unwelcome outsiders.¹⁰⁹ These unwelcome outsiders then were minority workers, specifically black men, who saw Northern factories as opportunities for economic advancement. The *Reporter* had connected the racial tension to territorial disputes and thus instructed its readers to beware of northern white union leaders, should they travel and search for jobs outside of the *Birmingham Reporters* readership, as the labor disputes were unlikely to be only found in East St. Louis.

The black regional newspaper available for research from the Coastal South is the *Savannah Tribune*. The *Tribune* has stark differences from the *Birmingham Reporter*. It is located in Savannah, Georgia, part of the Coastal South. This city is on the Southeastern Coastline, where over a hundred miles of Georgia's border is connected to the Atlantic Ocean. Birmingham was a unique destination in Alabama, as it was a centrally located, highly populated area fueled by industry. Savannah too was unique in

¹⁰⁹ Pagan, 233.

Georgia, as it served as a major port of the United States, being the largest exporter of ship building and maintenance items in the world and second largest exporter of cotton in the US¹¹⁰. Being such a large, significant port town with thousands of jobs related to importing and export, meant that they too had a massive amount of jobs atypical from the rest of the rural, remote, agrarian South. There was also a greater diversity of media publications. With a population of over 69,000 residents in 1917, there were eleven newspapers at the time, including nine white mainstream, one “Negro”, and one German.¹¹¹

The *Tribune*, started in 1898, was a weekly Republican black newspaper that had over 1,400 subscribers by 1917.¹¹² While it claimed to be a political newspaper, the issues researched during the time of the riot made it seem more like a light social edition for the coastal region to find the latest reminders, resolutions, regional school information, weekly church news, and personal advertising. The only mention of national news was not directly tied to the East St. Louis riot, but rather to Mrs. Booker T. Washington’s closing address of Summer School at Fort Valley.¹¹³ Including this newspaper demonstrates that not all black newspapers felt the need to cover the race riot. While the *Savannah Tribune* was more preoccupied with coastal news of the day, it seemed to neglect the national, state, regional, and local news of race issues. Should members of the black community have wanted more information, such as details of the

¹¹⁰ Ayer & Sons, 156-157.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Editorial, *Savannah Tribune*, July 7, 1917, accessed October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

East St. Louis riot, from a black media outlet, they had to turn to those of the national level.

Up the eastern coastline from Savannah is Washington D.C., in which there were even more periodicals published than in previously discussed areas, as it is the United States capital. As such, it is not surprising that the major regional black newspaper, the *Washington Bee*, was a well-established, outspoken political entity, connecting the importance of voicing opinions of change and progress to the nation's capital. The *Bee* gave a large amount of attention to the East St. Louis riot, specifically drawing its readers' attention to how it directly affected them. The *Bee* wrote that because the white National Guard had been called to East St. Louis, the "Negro Guard" had been called in to guard Washington, D.C. railroads and stations.¹¹⁴ This was a distinctive story that only people of the Washington, D.C. region would mostly likely find interesting as it may have caused disruption in families, as black National Guardsmen would have been called to serve the area as a result of the riots. In this way, black residents of the D.C. area would have seen the most direct effect of the riots outside of the immediate East St. Louis area.

The July 14th edition of the *Bee* went on to further examine the riot, providing a political cartoon comparing the riot to the events that had occurred thus far in World War I. It, like the political cartoon featured in the *Kansas City Sun*, questioned the United States fighting for liberty and justice abroad but not guaranteeing such freedoms within its own country.¹¹⁵ It called out the hypocrisy and character of the government officials

¹¹⁴ Editorial, the *Washington Bee*, July 7, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

¹¹⁵ Political Cartoon, the *Washington Bee*, July 14, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

that worked within the same area as the paper. The shame and disappointment towards elected officials sworn to protect its citizens was well-described in the political cartoon. The paper boldly did not hold back and censor itself for being in the national's capital, but rather, it sounded off, hoping to be seen by those criticized in its publication.

The *Bee* continued, saving its sharpest criticism and solutions for its editorial column. For it too saw the problems of the black community tied to the disputes found within industry and labor. The *Bee* saw that:

Stripped of all frills, the East St. Louis riot was an economic manifestation. It related mainly to bread and meat. 'The world belongs to those who take' is a proposition as true as it is brutal and cynical. Whenever bread and meat is sharply the issue, Christian morals and boasted civilization are temporarily laid aside...this whole sad trouble relates to labor...everywhere the poor colored people are simply hired men. Some of them have jumped out of the frying pan into the fire...we have been preaching some sort of commercial independences...such as to avoid certain kinds of competition and consequently friction.¹¹⁶

The editor is writing about how the riot stemmed from people trying to all survive and meet their basic needs, as they put it 'related mainly to bread and meat.' That when people are in survival mode, the brutal and cynical truth sometimes prevails, rather than Christian morals, as was the case in the riot. They also mention, as others have earlier, that many 'colored' people migrated from a discriminating South, only to find a similar force of hate in the North, as described in the saying 'out of the frying pan into the fire.' The solution to racial issues, tension, and territorial disputes over the industrial centers was, according to the author, more companies owned and operated by members of the black community. That way the issues of job competition and workplace disputes would

¹¹⁶ Editorial, the *Washington Bee*, July 14, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

not be a problem based on racial issues. Independence from the white company owners and union leaders would mean breaking from the racial implications brought into the workplace. There would then be no labor unions to accuse the black laborers of being strikebreakers, but rather, there would be a more peaceful, safe workplace for black laborers working in black businesses. The *Bee*'s editorial went on to say that it would be best for black community members to show support by promoting, working at, and buying from as many local black businesses as possible.¹¹⁷ This would show even more independence for the black community, as to endorse and patronize black shops would help the entire community.

The final region to be discussed is the West. In 1917, few periodicals were published in the West, as there were not many heavily populated areas. Of these areas, there are two black newspapers from the time that will be analyzed, the *Denver Star* and *Cayton's Weekly*. These two newspapers were far away from one another, with the *Denver Star* having readership all over Colorado, *Cayton's Weekly* being out of Seattle, with subscribers throughout Washington. Denver was a diverse city, being the largest city in Colorado and the capital. It had over seventy periodicals that were not only black and white, but from a wide array of other ethnic groups, including newspapers in Italian, Japanese, German, Spanish, and Swedish. There were also newspapers devoted to solely to businesses, including four periodicals about mining. The *Denver Star* was only one of two "Negro" newspapers publishing in Denver in 1917, the other the *Colorado Statesman*, having a subscription amount of 500 compared to the *Star*'s 1,200.¹¹⁸ While

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ayers & Sons, 104-105.

the *Statesman* was known as a Republican newspaper, the *Star* claimed to be politically independent. Both were well established papers, being founded in 1889 and 1888, respectively.¹¹⁹

While it is unknown what the *Statesman* had to say about the East St. Louis Race Riot, the *Star* is still accessible and its pages had plenty to say to its readers. The regional paper spoke of how the East St. Louis Race Riot could not come at a worse time, as the world is watching the United States and its efforts in the World War. Our government officials preached democracy and freedom, while anarchy occurred on the home front, instead of law-abiding, safe, and secure environments.¹²⁰ The paper did not trust the government, viewing it as being at best apathetic or cold towards the victims of the riot. The United States had put itself at the forefront of being an international advocate for justice and peace at the same time as it experienced one of the worst attacks on human rights. The writer went on to use analogies of current events of the day. One example, was that the barbarous white mob members were similar to the Belgians in the Congo, or that the rioters had fashioned themselves after the KKK, which was glorified in the film 'Birth of a Nation.'¹²¹ The *Star* seemed disgraced and disgusted by the actions of the East St. Louis rioters and the lack of action by the federal government. Instead of an editorial article, the *Star* featured the first-hand accounts provided by St. Louis reporters of the

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Editorial, *the Denver Star*, July 7, 1917.

¹²¹ Ibid. The Belgium government were known to have slaughtered thousands of residents of the Congo in order to gain control of the region, as they saw it as valuable for the materials found there, including rubber, minerals, and crops. The film 'Birth of a Nation,' one of the most popular and well known film of the decade, glorified the Ku Klux Klan, making pillages, violence, and discrimination against the black community sensationalized and glorifying.

Argus, *Globe-Democrat*, and *Post-Dispatch* in the July 14th edition. Its editor then circled back to its focus on the President, telling its subscribers that the best thing that will happen to members of the black community is the day Wilson's term ends.¹²² This focus on international affairs and the president within the Western state of Colorado can be attributed to the various peoples around the world that resided in Denver. The city hosted ethnic newspapers featuring seven different languages. Black editors were influenced by Denver's diverse populace. While it was still a black newspaper and made the victims of East St. Louis a priority, the editor also argued that the federal government was not only failing African Americans in their handling of the riot, but also failing all Americans and the international community.

Further west, in the most Northwestern corner of the United States, the state of Washington saw an even smaller black population, as was seen in the fact that the entire state only had two black newspapers in 1917, the *Searchlight* and *Cayton's Weekly*, both published out of Seattle. *Cayton's Weekly*, named after the editor, Horace Cayton, was formerly known as the *Seattle Republican*, but as Cayton became less and less supportive of the Republican Party, he renamed it to a less partisan name.¹²³ Seattle itself was a sea port connecting the United States to Alaska as well as the continents of Asia and Australia. The major city had a number of large industries, including lumber, coal, iron, and minerals, and was home to one of the largest fishery in the world.¹²⁴ *Cayton's Weekly* connected Seattle and the state of Washington to the East St. Louis Race Riot by

¹²² Editorial, the *Denver Star*, July 28, 1917.

¹²³ Library of Congress, accessed March 7, 2018, <http://www.loc.gov/chroniclingamerica/lccn/sn87093353/issues>

¹²⁴ Ayers & Sons, 1010-1011.

addressing race relations in Washington, as well as giving praise and a warning to future residents. In the July 21st issue of the paper, Cayton printed the editorial of a white newsman, Walter Seaberg of the Ilwaco, Washington paper *The Telegram*. The editor devised a plan of action to help prevent any further race riots from happening, which was to not try and let black people see themselves as equal, and that in an ideal situation, to deport them all to Cuba as a way to guarantee peace in America.¹²⁵ *The Weekly* then gave a rebuttal stating that the ‘characteristically Southern’ idea with its methods of racism, discrimination, and white supremacy is not felt by many white Americans, as they would fight just as hard as the black population, at removing racial and ethnic groups for the sake of peace, as it is breaking the very foundations of the American Constitution and spirit.¹²⁶ Thus, the black newspaper of the Seattle region did not simply address its black residents, but also openly fought against the blatant prejudice exhibited among whites in Washington.

Although the paper fought against discrimination and racism, in a way it also sent a mixed message as it warned black people about moving to Washington. The editor wrote of strikes going on in Seattle, including the street car drivers, shingles factories, and lumber yards which are all fueled primarily by white workers. The newspaper reported that the white organized strikers and white unorganized strikebreakers were already hostile enough, that a riot similar to East St. Louis may break out, strictly a labor riot.¹²⁷ Fear of general strikes led the editor to then include in the next issue of *Cayton’s*

¹²⁵ Editorial, *The Telegram*, accessed in *Cayton’s Weekly*, July 21, 1917.

¹²⁶ Editorial, *Cayton’s Weekly*, July 21, 1917.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Weekly a warning saying “No Car-Loads Wanted.”¹²⁸ Although Horace Cayton praised the strong, capable, prosperous members of the black community who were succeeding in the North, West, and East, those seeking similar success should proceed with caution. Cayton went on to say that there were few black laborers within the state of Washington, but that those who were there were doing well. However, if more black laborers traveled in large numbers to the state seeking jobs, they would ‘be attacked like those of East St. Louis as soon as they piled out of the car.’¹²⁹ Thus, you have the black editor of a newspaper praising those who were successful, but at the same time trying to guide those trying to get out of the South carefully, so as not to have violent repercussions like those found within East St. Louis. It is then again an acknowledgement of not wanting to challenge the system too much in Washington, as it was going smoothly for the small population of black people who were not contesting or challenging spaces like lumber mills or factories of Seattle that were dominated by both organized and unorganized white laborers.

Regions throughout the United States had similar and distinctive news coverage of the riot. All of these regional newspapers were printed in major urban centers, as there was a large black population in the larger general populations of Chicago, Cleveland, Birmingham, Savannah, Washington D.C., Denver, and Seattle. The newspapers set out to acknowledge the Great Migration and link labor and race relations, as they could all relate to such issues. The Savannah newspaper seemed to be the most unique, as it was a coastal paper only providing information of social organizations and clubs, leaving out

¹²⁸ Editorial, *Cayton’s Weekly*, July 28, 1917.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

the negativity and seriousness of the riots. It seems that news coverage for the other papers depended upon a particular region's needs and priorities. In the following chapter, the largest, most well-known black national periodicals will be analyzed for variations in their coverage.

CHAPTER III: NATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE, “URGE THE PRESIDENT TO ACT!”

National media coverage by the black press raised more concerns about the national civil rights efforts related to the riots going compared to its regional and local counterparts. A national newspaper had to discern what would be relevant not only to the readers of the city in which it published, such as New York with the *New York Age*, but to readers across the United States. The newspapers also had the greatest responsibility in framing how the wider black community should view such a volatile event such as the East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917.

Also, as there were only a handful of national publications, it was common for them to print each other's editorial pieces or provide unique first-hand accounts of major events such as the East St. Louis Riot. However, they were not always in agreement with one another. It is true that they all were publishing with what they deemed to be the best interest of the black community at the time in mind, but what that looked like varied amongst the publications. For example, the *New York Age*, owned by Booker T. Washington, was often criticized in the *Crisis*, whose main editor was W.E.B. DuBois. Rather than call for the immediate end to legal race segregation, Washington endorsed a gradualist strategy, wherein the goal of race integration was achieved over time. Thus the biggest difference in the *Crisis* and the *Age* was that the *Crisis* called for action versus

passivity.¹³⁰ Chicago *Defender* editor Robert S. Abbott criticized both Washington and DuBois, as he added another element, outspoken protesting, to the national scene.¹³¹ The *Afro-American*, located in Baltimore, Maryland, also added a different perspective to the mix, as it was a paper founded with religious ties, specifically Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal churches which first published the paper.¹³² The distinctive political ideology of editors influenced how national papers grappled with informing and guiding their subscribers through the East St. Louis Race Riot.

As stated above, the *New York Age* was seen as the most conservative of the national publications since it did not print as many controversial stories and editorials, instead it had the priority of simply informing readers of the news of the day. The *Age* was created in 1890 and was first called the *Rumor*, serving as the leading New York black tabloid. Booker T. Washington was quoted as saying there was a need for a national black newspaper in 1903 and by 1907 he purchased the *Age*, having editors transform the paper into a reputable, straightforward news source.¹³³ Washington was known as being a practical realist; concerning race; thus, his newspaper would endorse such sentiments.

¹³⁰ Wolseley, 32. With regards to action versus gradualists, Du Bois notes in the chapter “of Mr. Washington and Others,” in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, instead of advocating for justice and equality, Booker T. Washington made the “Atlanta Compromise” in saying that the South could be racially separate and striving for black and white people to achieve progress, pp 23. Such a view was deemed as being accommodating to segregation, or to promote gradual advancement of racial policies. While Washington was the model of such a view, Du Bois did not support them, but focused on action towards demanding civil rights.

¹³¹ Ibid, 35.

¹³² Ibid, 30-31.

¹³³ Ibid.

After purchasing the *Age*, that same year, Washington made Fred Moore the editor of the Thursday weekly. Moore was a successful businessman, starting at age eighteen as a messenger in the United States Treasury Department, followed by working in several banks, ultimately organizing the Afro-American Building and Loan Company. Due to success in the banking industry, he was elected organizer of the National Negro Business League in 1903.¹³⁴ Moore also was an active member of the Republican Party, serving on the Advisory Committee of the National Republican Committee in 1912 and 1916.¹³⁵ These background details of the editor are important for understanding the purpose and focus of the paper that they published. Based on Moore's background, one imagines the *Age* to have an emphasis on business and politics, specifically promoting the Republican Party, which Booker T. Washington had to have known when he selected Moore as editor in 1907. Also similar to Washington, Moore had a great working relationship with countless members of the white community, including the Republican National Committee chairman who praised Moore and the *Age* for their help in the Presidential election of 1920.¹³⁶ Such praise from significant white politicians sometimes made Washington and Moore targets of others within the black community, who labelled them lapdogs of those in power and supporters of a conciliatory approach to race segregation and racial injustices. Moore and Washington would contend throughout their lives that they were working towards equality and justice by not antagonizing influential members of the white community, as could be seen when the white *New York World*,

¹³⁴ Detweiler, 56.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 18-19.

often included articles from the black *Age*, in their papers for moderate, accommodating views that both papers shared.¹³⁷

By 1917, Moore still claimed editorialship of the *Age*, two years after Booker T. Washington's death on November 14, 1915. Moore continued to publish the newspaper as Washington had set out to do, which can be seen with the coverage of the East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917. In the July 5th edition, three days after the riot, the paper noted the significance of Independence Day related to the riot, as it printed the *Declaration of Independence* and called for a reminder that members of the black community are to be included in the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. It went on to explain that the men and women killed in East St. Louis were only seeking those essential human rights written in the Declaration. Also, that the President, sending troops to fight and die in order to end atrocities in Europe, should denounce "the atrocities practiced by Americans upon American citizens."¹³⁸ The *Age* was not denouncing the entire white population, only criticizing the actions of the people of East St. Louis. It was also staying away from sensationalizing details, only mentioning the events as a whole and why any random American should care about the riot. As a moderate political paper, it connected to the national agenda of unity against the enemies in Europe, as the United States had officially entered the war just months before the riot occurred. Finally, from a political standpoint, the *Age* said it was best for the Democratic President Wilson to rally the nation to rise above racial divisions and tensions, to promote Democracy in the United States, just as he vowed to do on the international stage.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Editorial, the *New York Age*, July 5, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

A week later, the *Age* continued covering the riot. What the paper included was consistent with its editor's relationship with the white community. It started by praising former Republican President Theodore Roosevelt, with the headline: "Country Applauds Roosevelt."¹³⁹ It included letters to Roosevelt that had been written by members of the black community, mainly church leaders. These leaders connected Roosevelt and the riot to their own congregations, speaking of courage, convictions, moral character, and integrity as things the former President no doubt had and were appreciated by the black community throughout the nation.¹⁴⁰ The *Age*'s front page headline shows that it held racial harmony as a priority. The *Age* went on to promote inclusion and a working relationship with the white community by praising those white mainstream publications who came together with the black press in criticizing the actions of the rioters. The newspaper used reports by the *New York Evening Mail*, *New York Globe*, *New York Evening Post*, and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, specifically, to show the support of some mainstream white papers.

The *New York Evening Mail* was a paper that published daily updates on the riot since it occurred, including raising questions about the governor of Illinois and openly criticizing the police for not stopping the violence as soon as it started. The paper made the conclusion that if a city or state cannot protect its citizens from riot and violence, then it is the duty of the federal government to step in.¹⁴¹ This was an early critical assessment by one of many mainstream papers against the riot. The *Age* appreciated a fellow New

¹³⁹ Editorial, the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Editorial, the *New York Evening Mail*, accessed in the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

York newspaper agreeing that the riot was poorly handled and should not have occurred. It was not a call to arms, but rather asking the federal government to step up and lead with regards to race relations, something that it had shown inconsistent leadership on ever since the Emancipation Proclamation.

The *New York Globe*, another daily mainstream newspaper, was also included in the *Age*'s July 12th edition, for it too praised Roosevelt. It wrote that it was glad at least one public figure has enough integrity to speak out publicly, as all should, for the "Negro" to have justice and protection as all Americans are said to be guaranteed.¹⁴² The *Globe* also took the route of calling for the national government to enforce the laws of the land, as laid out by the Constitution, which protects all of its citizens.

In addition, the *Age* included comments made by the *New York Evening Post*, as it tied the remarks made by Roosevelt into the national conscience. The *Post* wrote that the former president "expressed only what every decent American feels...and will help to bring about a better public sentiment. Already the citizens of East St. Louis are putting on sack-cloth and ashes and are pledging themselves-though a trifle late-to give ample protection to every laborer, black or white."¹⁴³ While it was debatable whether or not East St. Louis was really going to start protecting all of its workers, the most impressive statements in the writing above was that the *Post* was saying that every decent American felt disgusted and ashamed of the riot. The paper felt connected as it was a riot that raised concerns about human rights and safety. It did not say how many decent Americans

¹⁴² Editorial, the *New York Globe*, accessed in the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

¹⁴³ Editorial, the *New York Evening Post*, accessed in the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

existed, but by saying public sentiment, it would suggest a majority. This brought some sort of comfort, relief, and hope for all Americans, but most significantly those of the black community.

The *Age* included such sentiments made by the *Post* to show that many, perhaps even the majority, of white Americans were empathetic and concerned with at least these most essential human rights of justice and safety. Perhaps it also signified that the riot was producing a change in the mainstream white press, as it excluded the racial discrimination, segregation, and violence found in the South for years, as most national mainstream papers, including the dailies found in the urban centers of Detroit, Chicago, Boston, and New York City, were published in the North. Now the papers were seeing new issues as populations of minorities, including African Americans and immigrants, shifted within the Midwest and North, leading them to becoming stronger advocates for the rights of all citizens, as was stated in the *Post*. Such inclusiveness appealed to Moore and the *Age*, as the conservative businessman was a black man who rose to prominence through working with both black and white Americans on a daily basis. Thus, it behooved him to include a unifying message, reiterating that the riot should be taken seriously by white and black leaders at the national level, to bring black citizens the rights they should have been given when slavery ended decades before.

The *Age* not only included what the New York mainstream papers had written about the riot, but also the mainstream daily newspaper the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. The *Post-Dispatch* was described by the *Age* as being a trusted friend of the black community, citing its reporter, Carlos Hurd, as a reliable source.¹⁴⁴ Hurd and the *Post-*

¹⁴⁴ Editorial, the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

Dispatch differed from the other mainstream papers, as Hurd had put himself in harm's way, to provide an objective eye-witness account, complete with photographs. Hurd also gave firsthand accounts from both the victims and the rioters. The *Age* made few comments on the disturbing details of the riot, only including such details so its readers could be informed. As noted in the thesis introduction, in the weeks following the riot, many mainstream papers tried to say that the events had been blown out of proportion or were misleading. Thus, although the *Age* included the testimony of a mainstream reporter to show the harsh realities of the events, not to sensationalize so as to cause people to start another riot, but also not to overlook what had actually happened in East St. Louis.

Not only did the *Age* include the mainstream newspapers mentioned above in its July 12th edition, most of the paper gave attention to what it entitled a section "The Negro Press on East St. Louis," in which it included over thirty other black newspapers' perspectives on the riot.¹⁴⁵ Many of these editorials and reports had similar messages. The *Age* most likely printed similar sentiments over and over to show unity and a collective sense that was shared throughout the nation. In the following pages, only these collective themes will be analyzed, not each of the thirty newspapers themselves, as the same conclusions can be made. The topics ranged from national unity and justice, to religion as a coping mechanism, and various instances of distrust.

Continuing the *Age*'s call for national unity and justice, black newspapers that wrote similar editorials were the *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Jackson Searchlight*, *Rockhill Messenger*, *Topeka Plaindealer*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, and *Indianapolis Freeman*. The *Journal and Guide* made the most compelling arguments for justice, stating that if

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

the national government did not seek justice for the victims of the riot that there was no point in being in World War I, as they would be the greatest hypocrites of all time.¹⁴⁶ Justice seemed to be important to all of these newspapers since it was part of a larger issue, not a local one, as all citizens should be guaranteed their rights. However, as seen in the riot along with other riots that would occur in Tulsa, Chicago, and in rural Arkansas, black citizens were not receiving such equality. Unity went hand and hand with calls for justice in all of these newspapers, rallying America to come together to fight against racism so that it could also successfully defeat Germany. The United States needed to unite to support its troops, both black and white to win World War I, as stated in the *Topeka Plainsdealer*.¹⁴⁷

Other newspapers, mainly those commonly affiliated with or published by pastors or religious sects, took to writing about the riot from a religious standpoint. Religion has always played an important role in the lives of many Americans, but even more so in the lives of African Americans. Even during slavery, when everyday routines and schedules were regulated and restricted, religion was allowed. When race segregation laws were implemented after Reconstruction, Southern churches became community centers. Black newspapers like the *Associated Negro Press*, established in 1919, often included prayers and sermons available to readers throughout America.¹⁴⁸ Thus, there were many religious black periodicals published in the early twentieth century, serving just as other periodicals, to lead and influence its readers, only in a spiritual way.

¹⁴⁶ Editorial, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, assessed through the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

¹⁴⁷ Editorial, the *Topeka Plainsdealer*, assessed through the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

¹⁴⁸ Detweiler, 48 & 215.

The *Southern Christian Recorder* and *National Baptist Voice* both advocated faith as a way to cope with the race riot. Faith and patience in God and the majority of Americans were advocated in order to deal with the murderers. The *Houston Observer* took it a step further, saying that judgement day will come for the governor, mayor, police, militia, and rioters of Illinois.¹⁴⁹ With such a disturbing event as the riot, it should not be surprising that people looked towards their religious leaders for consolation and guidance. These religious newspapers gave such guidance, as they believed that a higher power was the solution to the issue. Prayers were being printed throughout the nation, asking God to provide healing and peace after the riots, in a time the *National Baptist Voice* called a disgrace in a Christian civilization.¹⁵⁰

The *Age* also included the editorial remarks of newspapers' distrust and dismay in America. For example, the *Houston Freeman* wrote about its animosity towards the 'best white people' for their indifference and apathy towards the race riot specifically, as well as poor race relations in general.¹⁵¹ The paper stressed how efforts had to be made by every American to help create change. That complacent white people who were not racist, but who did nothing to stop racism, were still part of the problem. The *Raleigh Independent* took a different route of not blaming indifferent, well-off white Americans,

¹⁴⁹ Editorial, the *Houston Observer*, accessed through the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

¹⁵⁰ Editorial, the *National Baptist Voice*, accessed through the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank. The historical relevance of the black church cannot be underestimated. This can be seen in C. Eric Lincoln's *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Published in 1990, Lincoln interviewed over 1,800 clergy found throughout seven main black denominations. Such a large amount of knowledge allows readers to see just how essential church has been historically in terms of guidance, aid, and safety for the black communities.

¹⁵¹ Editorial, the *Houston Freeman*, accessed through the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

but rather the “foreign immigrants with unpronounceable names,” for trying to undermine and distract the United States by starting a race war, American against American, instead of focusing on World War I.¹⁵² In this rare instance, a black newspaper was singling out immigrants, saying that they are to blame for the riot. Such sentiments of black news correspondents being anti-immigrant could have been used to show that this black newspaper was loyal to the United States, as it was a time in which German immigrants were subjected to skepticism and criticism due to people being paranoid about spies and subversives. German was often times removed from churches and not spoken in public as a way to oppose Germany on the home front. While it is true that many of the workers in East St. Louis were immigrants, there has never been any legitimate evidence laid forth to say that immigrants started the riot, or that they did so to distract Americans from World War I. No enemy spies were ever connected to the riot, as most historians would agree that immigrant workers were part of the riot, but as a part of the labor strike and dispute, not as part of a greater conspiracy to tear America apart.

Just as unique of a perspective as the above conspiracy, was the *Chicago Idea*’s solution to the race problems that had been magnified in East St. Louis. The *Chicago Idea* wrote that it was “neither discouraged nor angry about the riot in East St. Louis. There are millions of good whites and millions of good blacks in all walks of life. The only regret we have is that the tough whites and the bad blacks cannot be turned loose among themselves until the entire lot on both sides are wiped out of existence. The good

¹⁵² Editorial, the *Raleigh Independent*, accessed through the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

should not be classed with the bad.”¹⁵³ Even if others may have agreed with such extreme sentiments, no other paper made such dramatically violent and unrealistic suggestions of somehow eliminating the ‘bad’ people in society. Most all suggestions made by newspapers were to be taken seriously as ways to move forward and be helpful, whereas the *Idea*’s comments just seem to be more of a rant. Even though readers could have easily agreed with such an attitude as to wish for all the ‘evil people’ to be rid from the world, it was more likely to be perceived as a type of wishful thinking.

The *New York Age* went on to follow the riot for several weeks, continuing its call for the President and Congress to act. The paper also continued to publish a variety of views on the riot, including a pastor’s sermons from an A.M.E. church, continued coverage in St. Louis about the victims, clean-up, and the state and federal investigations by Carlos Hurd of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. A point of interest that the *Age* uniquely focused on was the women’s perspectives on the riot, the only paper known to do so. In the July 19th edition, the *Age* praised local, regional, and national women’s auxiliaries and civic leagues for their work collecting money to send to East St. Louis as well as their writing letters of protest to the President.¹⁵⁴ Jeannette Carter, a managing editor of the Washington Bureau of the *Age*, wrote an editorial explaining that black women throughout Washington D.C. had started going to special prayer vigils. This showed the united front black women were partaking in, showing their own type of support and concern for the victims of the riot. Also, that the local black theatre, the Howard Theatre,

¹⁵³ Editorial, the *Chicago Idea*, accessed through the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

¹⁵⁴ Editorial, the *New York Age*, July 19, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

along with the white theatre, raised \$105 to go towards the East St. Louis victims.¹⁵⁵ The *Age* followed the special Congressional committee's investigation into the riot for weeks to come, keeping their readers informed.

Similar to the *Age*, was the national newspaper the *Afro-American*. Based out of Baltimore, the *Afro-American* began as a religious publication by John H. Murphy in 1892, later becoming a secular newspaper.¹⁵⁶ The newspaper was a major publication, having five editions, four regional and one national, making it one of the oldest and most powerful black newspapers. Like the *Age*, it was considered a moderate newspaper serving to inform and educate its readers.¹⁵⁷ It then is not a surprise that the *Afro-American* covered the riot in a manner similar to the *Age*, not advocating extreme action or solutions like some of the newspapers analyzed above, which called for revenge, action, and the condemning of the local, state, and federal governments for their handling of the riot. They included details of the riot, not by Carlos Hurd, but of another mainstream white journalist from the *Chicago Herald* who was on the scene. They praised the paper for its fact-finding methods and authenticity and that the *Herald* condemned the riot as much as any other newspaper, black or white, stating simply that “during the riot, a black skin was a death warrant.”¹⁵⁸

Along with having a strong working relationship with mainstream newspapers, the *Afro-American* also published perspectives of other newspapers, but instead of citing

¹⁵⁵ Jeannette Carter, the *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, accessed on October 8, 2017, Newsbank.

¹⁵⁶ Detweiler, 54-55.

¹⁵⁷ Wolseley, 30-31.

¹⁵⁸ Editorial, the *Chicago Herald*, accessed through the *Afro-American*, July 7, 1917, accessed on March 12, 2018, Google Newspapers.

them, they would write that they had received telegrams and then went on to relay the information. Such information included the barbaric nature of the rioters, of which they made their subheading of the front page about the women of the riot. How the “cream of civilization,” white women, were actually as wild, vulgar, and inhumane as any male in the riot, jumping on streetcars and pulling off black women, bragging about hitting people over the head with bricks, and lighting houses on fire, waiting to attack the occupants as they ran out.¹⁵⁹ When white men for decades had justified lynching black men in the name of protecting the sanctity of white womanhood, this riot showed just how far from the truth such sentiments often were from reality. In an age where women, particularly white women, were held to a higher standard of purity, civility, and dignity, it seemed that the women of East St. Louis had stooped as low as the men, as details of their violence towards black women and children were like those of a horror story.¹⁶⁰

The newspaper also gave details clearing up hearsay or rumors of the riot, as it reported that no rioter was known to have been intoxicated at the time, admonishing any claims of incoherency, that the attackers were of a clear mind, knowing exactly what they were doing.¹⁶¹ This piece was most likely needed since people around the nation were trying to make excuses or justify the acts, as a way to soften the raw, violent truth of the

¹⁵⁹ Editorial, the *Afro-American*, July 7, 1917, accessed on March 12, 2018, Google Newspapers.

¹⁶⁰ One of the ways to which the Southern hierarchy historically worked was through the rhetoric of instilling a fear of black men as a sexual predator towards white women. Within Crystal Feimester’s book *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching*, the argument is made that lynchings were often excused or accepted as white men would lynch black men for supposedly harassing white women. Thus, Southern white men were seen as doing due diligence of protecting white women as using lynching as a deterrent for black men to stay away from white women.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

matter. Newspapers like *the Afro-American* then felt it necessary to clarify that there had been no justification for the violent riot, including all sorts of details to ensure readers knew this was a race riot that had been done on purpose, not accidentally by incoherent actions of a drunk mob. Such innocence or absent mindedness did not exist in the riot.

The *Afro-American* also mirrored the *Age* as it stressed that the rioters were causing people to lose focus on the war that the United States had just gotten directly involved in. The *Afro-American* stressed that the riot was not only causing people to be divided on the home front, but that it made black men less likely to choose to enlist in the military in World War I, only helping Germany's chance for victory.¹⁶² As black men around America read about the injustice of the riot, they may have felt less inclined to see it as their patriotic duty to serve and defend America.

The *Afro-American* continued to inform its readers on investigations and any new details that arose from the riot, including possible causes and solutions, all of which were similar to those analyzed by other newspapers. An interesting perspective, one that will be the only link between the more sensational *Chicago Defender* that will be analyzed later, is that the riot would not have been as large or occurred at all had it not been for the black men of East St. Louis having their firearms taken away from them days and weeks earlier. The article, included by an unknown source from Chicago, stated that black men of Chicago are armed and will not allow for their weapons to be taken, since such an atrocity as the East St. Louis Race Riot was magnified by men and women not having weapons to defend themselves.¹⁶³ Such an aggressive tone was felt throughout the pages

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Editorial, accessed through the *Afro-American*, July 7, 1917, accessed on March 12, 2018, Google Newspapers.

of the *Defender*, but such instances were unusual in the *Afro-American*. Due to the upsetting and alarming nature of the riot, newspapers went out of their typical realms of reporting and instead published different theories being discussed throughout the nation.

Another unique storyline found in the *Afro-American* was an article by William English Walling, a black Socialist leader. Walling framed the riot as part of a larger Southern plot. He gave details of how the South was against unions and labor leaders. These leaders sought better pay, treatment, and working conditions in industrial centers, such as East St. Louis, which could potentially help all workers, white and black. Those improvements could lead to more blacks leaving the South, creating a worker shortage.¹⁶⁴ Even though the South had been accused of using scare tactics to keep people in the area, Walling took it a step further, implying that the Southern leaders were the masterminds of the riot, not labor leaders. He did not name any specific officials or even details, leading to pure speculation, but it obviously gained the *Afro-American*'s attention enough to put it onto its front-page. At the time, most papers blamed white labor leaders, so it actually pulls the *Afro-American* away from the mainstream white newspapers that it typically supported.

Due in part to its rallying, sensational, dramatic calls to action, the *Chicago Defender* has become one of the most well-known and researched newspapers in American History, black or white. The *Defender*, a weekly black newspaper created and made popular by its editor Robert S. Abbott, boasted the highest weekly subscribers by any black newspaper in America, having a reported 150,000 copies sold per week

¹⁶⁴ William English Walling, accessed through the *Afro-American*, July 7, 1917, accessed on March 12, 2018, Google Newspapers.

nationwide by 1920.¹⁶⁵ To put this number into context, the second largest black newspaper in 1920 was the *Afro-American*, with only 18,916 subscribers and the NAACP monthly magazine, the *Crisis*, only had 62,417 subscribers.¹⁶⁶ Another interesting statement made about the *Defender* and other newspapers alike, was that for every subscriber it was believed that another ten people read that same paper, as businesses typically subscribed, leading to many patrons reading the same copy of the paper.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, newspapers and magazines would reach many more readers than simply the amount of copies they sold.

The *Defender* gained such a large national audience in part because of the innovative design of the paper. It was one of the first newspapers to use big, bold headlines, which gained people's attention at newsstands.¹⁶⁸ With so many newspapers to choose from, a newspaper had to stand out and take chances, which was something Abbott felt comfortable doing. Within the 2016 publication *The Defender, How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America*, Ethan Michaeli identifies the Atlanta Riots of 1906 as a defining moment for Robert Abbott. Abbott created the *Chicago Defender* in reaction to the lack of black perspective on the race riots.¹⁶⁹ Such outrage carried over on a weekly basis in the newspaper. Abbott gained readership through

¹⁶⁵ Detweiler, 6.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 64.

¹⁶⁹ Ethan Michaeli, *The Defender, How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 22. The Atlanta Riots of 1906 occurred as a result of local newspapers reporting about supposed sexual assaults of white women by black men in the Atlanta area. After the reports, thousands within the white community took to the black neighborhoods, assaulting the community for three days straight, finally ending, much like the East St. Louis Race Riot, when the state militia was instated.

dramatic headlines that stirred outrage and other emotions, which increased after J. Hockley Smiley became lead journalist, editor, and designer for the paper. He employed similar tactics used by Hearst and Pulitzer, well-accomplished white newspaper publishers, including separating the news into sections, having large font headlines, and taking it a step further by using red ink for the headlines to really catch a person's attention.¹⁷⁰

Another tactic used to excite and bring curiosity to the paper was its focus on the South. While Abbott and Smiley reported on national news of the day, the headlines were often focused on the racist events of the South, including headlines such as "100 Negroes Murdered Weekly by White Americans," "Texas has a Bloody Spree," and "Fifty Years of Frenzied Hatred."¹⁷¹ Such attacks of the South by the *Defender* would often elicit threats from Southern white leaders. They also blamed an article in the *Defender* for inciting a riot in Longview, Texas. The Governor of Arkansas, Charles Brough blamed both the *Defender* and the *Crisis* for being responsible for the Arkansas riots, saying he would be asking the Postmaster-General to stop distributing the publications.¹⁷² Even more hostile writings and threats would continue to pour into the *Defender* and its extremely open protests and rallying cries. Reports of the *Defender* receiving threats, calling them agitators as well as many racial slurs, stated that as long as they kept up their so-called propaganda, members of the black community will continue paying the price.¹⁷³ These threats only seemed to add to the mission of the *Defender*, to write against the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 26.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² H.J. Seligman, *the Negro Faces America*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 288.

¹⁷³ Detweiler, 21.

ideas and actions of the very men who were threatening the publication. The newspapers' writings were encouraged and welcomed by the black community, specifically those residents of the South, where the *Defender* had its highest number of subscribers.¹⁷⁴ The Southern black community read about opportunities outside of the South, as the newspaper often spoke of factory work, especially the opportunities during World War I, at a time when immigration was decreasing or halted entirely from many countries, which the *Defender* cited as giving black workers increased chances at obtaining better jobs in the industrial centers, which would make jobs the center of the controversy that started the race riot.¹⁷⁵

When the East St. Louis Race Riot occurred, the *Defender* did not shy away from recommending that Southern black men continue to come to the North to seek factory jobs. Instead, it took to its same themes of not backing down and incited outrage and protest, calling people to rally and fight for change. In its July 7th Saturday paper, the *Defender* included the riot in its headlines, writing "Troops Quell Illinois Riot."¹⁷⁶ The paper gave details of the riot, (writing an enticing cliffhanger that much more would be written in next week's edition), including a large picture of the town on fire with the caption "The East St. Louis Horror."¹⁷⁷ The paper also mentioned that the sixth Illinois militiamen looked on and laughed as black women were stripped and men and children were killed.¹⁷⁸ Such actions being allowed and not stopped sooner were blamed on the mayor of East St. Louis and the troops. The paper went so far as to say that if the troops

¹⁷⁴ Simmons, 30.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 29.

¹⁷⁶ Editorial, *Chicago Defender*, July 7, 1917.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

were this unorganized and spineless, letting the rioters take their rifles to be used to kill black men and women, that the United States troops would not stand a chance against the Germans in World War I.¹⁷⁹ The paper continued to take aim at the entire white race in its editorial column entitled “The White Man’s Burden.” Written by an anonymous author, it expressed sorrow for the entire white race, which awaited atonement for being prejudice or allowing such feelings and actions to be taken by those who were.¹⁸⁰ Such bold statements led the *Defender* away from the moderate papers like the *Age* and *Afro-American*.

The paper did praise members of the white community, just not nearly as often or adamantly as the moderate papers. For instance, the *Defender* mentioned in a small article on the front page that the Illinois governor was doing the right thing in sending in more troops, which stabilized East St. Louis, as well as organizing a meeting with leaders of the black community of Chicago, including the *Defender*’s own Robert Abbott, to discuss how to move forward after the riot.¹⁸¹ The paper had mixed emotions about former President Roosevelt’s remarks towards the riot. While they felt that he had good intentions of bringing international attention to the riot during the meeting he attended with Russian diplomats, they said that they wished he would have focused more on the racism versus attacking labor leader Samuel Gompers and organized labor.¹⁸² Labor leaders may have been upset at black workers for being strikebreakers. They may have felt that the strikebreakers were impeding their workspace, taking their jobs out-from-

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Editorial, *Chicago Defender*, July 21, 1917.

under them. Such thoughts may have helped spark the riot, but the disturbing attacks, rage, and brutality carried out by thousands of white men and women from throughout the area were more than just agitated laborers, it was a racist, bloodthirsty mob.¹⁸³ Within the same edition, political columnist W. Allison Sweeney, published an article from what they deemed the “*Detroit Journal*: Otherwise a Michigan Ass,” going on to say that the racists “racing each other to hell,” are not just in the South, referring to the article in the *Journal* that indicated that the black people of East St. Louis were just becoming too bold politically, ending in rioters putting them “back in their place.”¹⁸⁴ The *Defender* typically preyed on the Southern racists, but now they were having to challenge the Northern ones as well, as after the race riot there were all sorts of inconsistencies and fallacies about the details of the riot.

The *Defender* continued to cover the riot for months after, just as other papers had, as it kept up with the ongoing investigations and trials. Several editions of the paper included news of indictments, trial proceedings, and testimonies given to the Congressional investigative committee. Even though other reports coming out of East St. Louis claimed that the city was safe and peaceful, the *Defender* warned that its own correspondents were telling them that many felt it best to stay in St. Louis, Missouri, where it was more welcoming, and to only go to East St. Louis if black men could not find work elsewhere.¹⁸⁵ The paper also continued to cover national outcry about the riot, as it gave front page coverage of the July 28th silent protest parade in New York City, in which anywhere from a reported 10,000 to 15,000 black men, women, and children

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Correspondent, *Chicago Defender*, September 22, 1917.

dressed in white, held hands, carried signs, and marched down the streets as a show of a united front against lynching and riots like the one in East St. Louis.¹⁸⁶ While other moderate newspapers mentioned the parade, the only other publication that gave so much attention to the event was the NAACP's magazine, the *Crisis*. Overall, the *Defender* seemed to be acknowledging the pride it felt in black New Yorkers' abilities to organize and hold such an impressive protest.

The *Defender* also praised the actions of the NAACP, at the local and national level. Four months after the riot had occurred, the NAACP local branch of St. Louis was still working with the national New York branch to continue efforts to help the victims of the riot. By that time, the main focus was on legal representation, as victims were trying to secure compensation for damages, both medical and property. For some, it also meant legal representation, as several black men were being tried for attacking white men during the riot, as the *Defender* claimed "ten innocent men had been jailed."¹⁸⁷ Thus, the newspaper stressed that donations and funds be sent to the NAACP, for their legal teams were essential in helping the victims of the riot.

The NAACP legal teams were not the only ones within the organization who were concerned with the East St. Louis Race Riot. As word spread about an apparent race riot, W.E.B. DuBois took it upon himself to travel to East St. Louis. DuBois, along with Martha Gruening, a staff writer of the *Crisis*, were said to be special investigators of the riot. The testimonies and pictures they gained while in East St. Louis were then published in a special edition of the NAACP's monthly periodical, *Crisis*. The magazine, primarily

¹⁸⁶ Photographs and captions, *Chicago Defender*, August 8, 1917.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Abbott, *Chicago Defender*, November 24, 1917.

edited by DuBois, showed how he actively encouraged readers to abandon Booker T. Washington's gradual and conservative models of the *Age* and *Afro-American*. DuBois felt that the black press needed to be doing more in answer to the increasing number of segregation laws and the disenfranchisement of black men and women. Thus, the *Crisis* would become DuBois' tool used to rally the black community at a national level, calling for people to demand change and progress immediately, in the economic, social, or legal arenas which remained unequal for African Americans.¹⁸⁸

In the August monthly issue of the *Crisis*, the riot is mentioned several times. Upon opening the cover, just under the listing of the board of directors, in large red font, people are called to "ENLIST! With Memphis and East St. Louis fresh in our memories, we know that the fight for humanity and democracy abroad is not more important than the fight for humanity and democracy at home. Enlist now in the N.A.A.C.P. Your support was never more needed than now."¹⁸⁹ This call to become a member of the NAACP could also be seen as a plea to fight for the black community in general. DuBois went on to include a unique take on the riot, a letter written to DuBois signed "Sincerely Yours, An Asiatic Gentleman." The writer stated that when he was in the Midwest he could not believe how awful people were being treated simply based upon the color of their skin. He went on to call Americans hypocrites for saying they would make the world safe for democracy, ending his remarks by praising the magazine and giving them a financial donation.¹⁹⁰ In an editorial, Du Bois praised Theodore Roosevelt for

¹⁸⁸ Simmons, 22.

¹⁸⁹ "Enlist," *Crisis*, August 1917, 158.

¹⁹⁰ "A Protest from the Orient," *Crisis*, August 1917, 163-164.

demanding an investigation and justice for the black men and women of East St. Louis.¹⁹¹ Du Bois followed suit, devoting over three and a half pages of the magazine to provide the facts, causes, circumstances, results, and general comments about the riot, from both white and black newspapers. Most white newspapers were prominent dailies of New York, friends of the NAACP, whose headquarters were in New York. These papers included the *New York Herald*, *New York Times*, *New York World*, *New York Call*, *Evening Sun*, and *New York Tribune*. Black journalists included in the magazine were C.W. Wallace, an editor of an unnamed “Negro religious publication,” and the *Afro-American*. All of these papers added details, both numbers calculated by officials as well as testimonies of the victims, leading to the largest compilation of information to compose a general narrative of what happened, drawn from sources that DuBois and the *Crisis* held as reputable.¹⁹² Only the *Crisis*’ September edition and the Congressional Committee’s published investigation would offer larger completions of information.

That September edition included DuBois and Martha Gruening’s reports and photographs of the victims of what they deemed the “Massacre of East St. Louis.”¹⁹³ It was considered a unique double edition due to the riot, having sixty pages instead of the typical thirty. DuBois and Gruening included over twenty pages of testimonies and photographs of the East St. Louis Riot and constructed a blow by blow account of the event. They wrote in a storytelling fashion, captivating their readers, making it easy for them to picture the riot as it happened. For example, they told how the riot started, describing that

¹⁹¹ “Roosevelt,” *Crisis*, August 1917, 164.

¹⁹² “The Riot in East St. Louis,” *Crisis*, August 1917, 175-178.

¹⁹³ “The Massacre of East St. Louis,” *Crisis*, September 1917, 219-238.

On the evening of July 1, white ‘joy riders’ rode down a block in Market Street, which was inhabited by Negroes, and began to fire into the houses. The Negroes aroused by this, armed themselves against further trouble. Presently a police automobile drove up containing detectives and stopped. The Negroes, thinking that these were the ‘joy riders’ returning, opened up fire before this misunderstanding was removed.¹⁹⁴

Such descriptiveness allowed readers to have empathy over such a misunderstanding, as presented in the *Crisis*.

The article also included an entire letter written by the secretary of the Central Trades and Labor Union out of East St. Louis, Edward F. Mason, condemned by the *Crisis* for criticizing Southern black laborers for moving North. Mason stated that “No less than ten thousand of undesirable Negroes have poured in and are being used to the detriment of our white citizens.”¹⁹⁵ Such an attitude of resentment articulated by the labor union, reinforced by setting a meeting the night before the riot occurred, would lend itself as proof that labor disputes related to race relations were part of why the riot happened. Mason also stressed over the community being taken away from the white workers and residents, which connects to the undertones of spatial conflicts that have been cited throughout this study. The labor leader went so far as to say that he was not protesting against long-time black residents, but the large influx of new Southern migrant workers.¹⁹⁶ It can then be determined that the labor leader is not only making a case of racial conflicts related to space, but also fearing the outsider, taking on a territorial instinct of holding his ground against those encroaching on what was once a strong-hold of the white laborers of East St. Louis. Du Bois found such claims ironic, as Mason was

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 19.

¹⁹⁵ Letter of Correspondence from the Central Trades and Labor Union, accessed through the *Crisis*, September 1917, 221.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

not speaking out against the Czechs, Slovaks, Lithuanians, and countless other foreigners that had settled in East St. Louis for jobs, thus it really did come down to the issue of race.¹⁹⁷

The article went on to include the eye-witness accounts of the local St. Louis papers, including the popular and respected Carlos Hurd of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Hugh L. Wood of the *St. Louis Republic*, the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, and the *St. Louis Star*. Nearly four pages were filled with their narratives being woven together as to relay just how the mob acted, telling of the racial slurs being found in all phrases, chants, and rally cries as the white mob tore through and pillaged East St. Louis.¹⁹⁸ Nothing was withheld or censored, for the magazine wanted its readers to know the true nature of the riot, thus beatings, deaths, and slurs were accurately depicted and relayed to the *Crisis* through the journalists of St. Louis.

Their article was unique not only in scope and descriptiveness, but in the way in which they conducted their own interviews. The attention, thoughtfulness, and sensitivity that they must have shown each and every person they spoke with is evident, as the testimonies seemed to have been written verbatim. Ms. Gruening is given most of the credit for the testimonies, as her name appeared countless times as a sort of narrator for the dozens of people's accounts she wrote about in eight pages. Gruening wrote of the unique testimony of a white woman, Mrs. Luella Cox, as she was only in East St. Louis on business when the riot started. As she tried to get herself to safety in St. Louis, she recalled seeing a "Negro beheaded with a butcher's knife by someone in a crowd

¹⁹⁷ "The Massacre of East St. Louis," *Crisis*, September 1917, 220.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 221-225.

standing near the Free Bridge. The crowd had to have its jest. So its members laughingly threw the head over one side of the bridge and the body over the other.”¹⁹⁹ Gruening also interviewed victims, who relayed tales of torture and murder. Lulu Suggs, a twenty-four year old at the time, told of seeing children being thrown into her house that was on fire.²⁰⁰ While most newspapers would censor and remove such disturbing material, the *Crisis* continued on, reciting similar accounts in the pages that followed. The magazine was not trying to protect its readers, but instead felt the need to include every single detail so people could not ignore harsh realities of the riot. If such brutal facts as the ones given above would not have been printed due to their unsettling nature, the riot would not have been taken as seriously. The severity and amount of violence and lack of empathy for human beings on the part of the rioters made people become ever more vigilant in their demands for the country to provide justice, safety, and security for African Americans of the riot, as well as to help prevent future issues from happening. Considering it was so heinous, the magazine wanted people to read about it so nothing like it could ever happen again.

Mixed in with these written accounts were seven pages of photographs, allowing for subscribers to see for themselves. Du Bois historically used photography earlier in his career to advance the status of African Americans. Within Shawn Smith’s book *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture*, details are given for the 1900 Paris Exposition. Du Bois used the exposition as a platform to give international attention to race representation, striking down stereotypes that had prevailed

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 226.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 231.

for generations. They contained information with captions describing “a colored man in front of a car (streetcar), being mobbed as the militia looked on,” “Mineola McGee: shot by soldier and policeman, her arm had to be amputated,” and “Narcis Gurley: 71 next birthday, lived in her home 30 years, afraid to come out till the blazing walls fell in (causing severe burns).”²⁰¹ Such graphic photographs of events and victims instantly connected readers to the brutality of the events. One may be able to ignore or challenge written testimonies, but it is much harder to dismiss the facts, as seen through the photographic evidence.

The September issue also highlighted the silent protest held in New York. The *Crisis* again used a news correspondent from the *New York Times* to report the occasion. As the correspondent watched the protesters march by, they were given an informational program by a member of the march. The pamphlet read:

We march because by the grace of God and the force of truth the dangerous, hampering walls of prejudice and inhuman injustices must fall. We march because we want to make impossible a repetition of Waco, Memphis, and East St. Louis by arousing the conscience of the country, and to bring the murderers of our brothers, sisters, and innocent children to justice. We march because we deem it a crime to be silent in the face of such barbaric acts. We march because we are thoroughly opposed to Jim Crow cars, etc., segregation, discrimination, disfranchisement, lynching, and the host of evils that are forced upon us... We march because we want our children to live in a better land and enjoy fairer conditions than have fallen to our lot... We march because the growing consciousness and solidarity of race, coupled with sorrow and discrimination, have made us one; a union that may never be dissolved in spite of shallow-brained agitators, scheming-pundits and political tricksters.²⁰²

Such powerful sentiments could have been written by Du Bois or at least influenced, as he, along with ten others (five being reverends) were listed as leaders of

²⁰¹ Photographs, “The East St. Louis Massacre,” September 1917, 225-236.

²⁰² “The Negro Silent Parade,” *New York Times*, accessed through *Crisis*, September 1917, 241.

the parade, and marched amongst the thousands.²⁰³ The purpose of the march was such an eloquent, yet fierce, message calling for unity and strength by every black man and woman in America to be inspired to work for change and justice, eliminating the chances of another racial atrocity occurring. The pamphlet's contents and message were only strengthened by the *Crisis* publishing inspiring full-page photographs of the enormity of the silent parade, shutting down all of 5th Avenue, a street of significance in New York, for thousands of bystanders, both black and white, to see their demonstration.²⁰⁴ Such a large, peaceful protest had never been seen before in the history of race relations in the United States, but would be emulated again and again during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

CONCLUSION: THE DIVERSITY OF THE BLACK PRESS, “THE NEGRO PRESS ON EAST ST. LOUIS”

As depicted in the details above, the details of the East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917 were debated at the time, as they still are by researchers today. Sources disagree on what started the riot in the first place. Many attribute the main cause to have been the labor disputes between white union workers and black workers who were paid less to work as strikebreakers. It was a true spatial issue of union leaders feeling like their territory was being encroached upon and stolen away, leading them to fight for what the physical space of industrial centers like the Aluminum Ore plant was to them: their livelihood. Others disagreed, saying that it was strictly racial tension found within the town. In a town that was accustomed to some black workers, they felt their entire communities were threatened as newcomers from the South, black laborers, were coming in at record rates. Some reported that the riot started after a car of white men drove through a black neighborhood shooting into the houses, when the next car of white men, seeming to be the same car, drove by, it was shot into by black men defending themselves. That second car contained white detectives, two of which were shot and killed, thus the white mob broke out in retaliation. Still, yet others refused to believe that story, saying that the black men had attacked the two detectives after speaking with them, which led to the detectives' deaths and the riot. Others would even argue that the riot started due to political leaders trying to gain more power by pushing down the black population as a show of the race 'being put back in their place,' having enjoyed too much freedom and power after helping elect those same officials.

Such variations show the complexity and importance of the events. It was not an open and shut case. There were so many different factors and events going on before, during, and after, that it made the need for a Congressional investigation clear. Even as testimonies were given, there were still no easy questions to answer. People continued probing and asking all sorts of questions because of the severity of the riot. Dozens or perhaps even hundreds of people had been brutally murdered in the streets for no other reason than for the color of their skin. On top of such heinous details was the fact that it all occurred out of the South, where violence against blacks had long been common. Racial violence perpetrated a white community in an industrial Midwestern city was something new that people around the nation had to come to terms with. While people speculated about why the riot occurred in the first place, they also came up with different conclusions and solutions. Depending upon their priorities, people focused on ways to frame the riot, often exaggerating some details, while at the same time, withholding some information in order to write about their own agenda's causes. This was demonstrated by both the mainstream white press and the black press, although there were differences in each. It seemed that the mainstream white press made three different choices: either to immediately condemn the riot, calling for justice and safety for the black community; to assert that that riot was caused by provocateurs from the black community responded to by whites; to blame the Great Migration for overpopulating the industrial town, creating unrest and violence between the newcomers and those that had been there for years. Solutions also ranged from justice for victims of crimes to blaming and forcing Southern black workers to leave.

As focus and opinions varied amongst the mainstream media, the same could be said for the black press. The black press did agree about one major, overarching purpose: fighting the lies that were coming out about the riot. Many black newspapers printed word-for-word the racist articles and editorials that were being written by mainstream newspapers throughout the nation. One of the most important purposes of black media outlets during that time period was to write accurate news featuring black men and women. In a time when black men and women typically only made the mainstream news in negative context, the black press served as a gatekeeper calling out false information and headlines about members of the black community. The East St. Louis Race Riot was no different in this regard. If anything, it was more important than many other issues, as it was an event receiving national attention about race relations and violence, which made it a priority for black newspapers to sift through mainstream white newspapers to ensure that the nation was gaining what truly occurred at the riot. Many mainstream newspapers tried to conceal information, barely mentioning the events or making them out to be less than they actually were. The black press had the imperative role of publishing fact and refuting fiction, which included the status of the victims and keeping up to date on the investigations and trials.

While the general focus was to accurately inform the black community of the riot, there were clear differences in how to do so. The priority of the local newspaper of the victims of East St. Louis was to give as many practical details during and after the riot. Things such as where to find shelter, food, clothing, and which community centers were open and taking victims were all vital to people coming from East St. Louis, finding safe harbor in St. Louis. The paper also made it a priority to inform its St. Louis residents of

ways they could help, such as where volunteers were needed, what was being collected, and where donations could be given. The local NAACP branch was also praised for its early assistance with victims to start the legal process of making financial claims and filing for financial compensation for their physical injuries as well as many of their homes being damaged or ruined during the riots.

The regional black press varied based upon where they were based as to how they would respond to and report the riot. Newspapers based in large industrial cities typically meant that they would take a similar focus of relating to jobs, labor, and competition as to why the riot occurred. While they all condemned the attacks, some merely relayed a short commentary on the riot, while others seemed more concerned, following the events for months after. One regional newspaper did not even mention the riot, as it was more of a social club newspaper that did not worry itself with including such violent news in its publication. Due in part to the race riots also having been a labor dispute in a Midwest industrial town, the social club newspaper made it seem as if the story were beneath their readers' class and priorities. The club did not connect or empathize with the victims, for the social club newspaper was intended for those above the ranks of the lower-class factory worker that were the main target of the riot. The Western regional newspapers gave two separate views, as one came from a very diverse background, which could be seen by the amount of empathy shown by it. Meanwhile, the other paper in the far Northwestern corner, mourned the tragedy but also cautioned against black people moving to its area by the carload, as that would cause trouble for the few already there who were peacefully making a living. Thus, the regional papers took to the East St. Louis

riot in a varied approach based upon their own prior dispositions found within their geographical area and its priorities.

Unlike the more varied regional papers, the national black press fell into two categories: gradual and radical. Conservative or gradual newspapers were those that felt the need to present reliable, straightforward news to their readers. They also had a working relationship with the white mainstream press, as both used one another's articles and editorials as evidence of trust and respectability. This was seen during the race riot, as the black conservative papers relied heavily on the white correspondents they trusted to deliver articles about the events. They also focused their own articles and editorials on justice, safety, and unity. Most contemporaries viewed these ideas as human rights that should be guaranteed; thus, these papers did not receive criticism from their white counterparts. Unity was a unique topic of interest, as many articles were written acknowledging how the nation should be coming together to fight the common enemy that was Germany, instead of being torn apart. They also praised former President Theodore Roosevelt for being the most outspoken public figure to denounce and condemn the riot, making conservatives feel that they are being supported by many in the white community. At the same time, these national black papers felt the need to publish what regional and local newspapers were writing about the riot. One newspaper included thirty other newspapers' viewpoints, ranging from religious, to militarism, to blaming immigrants or white pacifists. While most of those views were most likely not similar to those of the conservative national papers, they printed them anyway, to inform the nation of the different attitudes towards the riot from within the black press.

As gradualists set out to simply inform and try to connect with the mainstream, the radical black press would do just the opposite. They would use sensationalism to rally and protest for change. They would gain large readerships through the use of bold, dramatic, colorful, eye-catching headlines, often times about violence and crime. The radical press behaved in a type of tribalism, as they had an us-against-them mentality. These papers stressed action, some even for retaliation. The most extreme made it clear that they wanted every single detail printed about the riot so as to show just how bad it was. Censorship of any kind was left out, as vulgar scenes of violence were reported in vivid, first-hand testimonies given to the reporters that had made a point to go to East St. Louis themselves to investigate. Not only were there detailed newspapers, but they also included the NAACP's monthly magazine. They went to such great lengths as to include a letter from a union leader telling of a meeting scheduled right before the riot started, along with minute-by-minute details recreating the riot. Over twenty pages were devoted to the riot, including seven pages of photographs. The use of photographs showing burn victims, amputees, mobs attacking, and the city on fire gave subscribers the real, raw truth of the riot. The magazine also spoke of the silent parade, as did many newspapers, as the parade became a symbol for the black community, just as the messages the media was trying to convey. The priorities were about safety, justice, freedom, and pushing for change and progress so nothing resembling East St. Louis would ever happen again.

As the black press has often been seen as one homogenous group, it serves as an injustice to all those involved to label it as such. It could be argued that the underlying reason as to why the black press came to be and thrived for decades was the need of a reliable, honest news source about the black community. It is also accurate to say that

there were many different ways in which members of the black press could express the news to its audience. There were religious, political, independent, social, conservative, and radical outlets that served many different groups within the black community. How they analyzed an event and what they focused on varied at local, regional, and national levels, even leading to subgroups within those general categories. All of these unique sources were seen through analyzing them during the East St. Louis Race Riot. Having a diverse group of writing styles and categories within the black press made for layers of rich variances that only added to the depth of knowledge that historians can now use to have a better understanding, not only of the riot, but how the black press was the voice of the black community.

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