



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

The Crisis Vol. 14 No. 5

Extracted on Mar-28-2024 08:54:27

The Smithsonian Institution thanks all digital volunteers that transcribed and reviewed this material. Your work enriches Smithsonian collections, making them available to anyone with an interest in using them.

The Smithsonian Institution (the "Smithsonian") provides the content on this website (transcription.si.edu), other Smithsonian websites, and third-party sites on which it maintains a presence ("SI Websites") in support of its mission for the "increase and diffusion of knowledge." The Smithsonian invites visitors to use its online content for personal, educational and other non-commercial purposes. By using this website, you accept and agree to abide by the [following terms](#).

- If sharing the material in personal and educational contexts, please cite the National Museum of African American History and Culture as source of the content and the project title as provided at the top of the document. Include the accession number or collection name; when possible, link to the National Museum of African American History and Culture website.
- If you wish to use this material in a for-profit publication, exhibition, or online project, please contact National Museum of African American History and Culture or transcribe@si.edu

For more information on this project and related material, contact the National Museum of African American History and Culture. [See this project](#) and other collections in the Smithsonian Transcription Center.

THE CRISIS

other woman seized the Negress' hands, and the blow was repeated as she struggled helplessly. Finger nails clawed her hair and the sleeves were torn from her waist, when some of the men called, "Now let her see how fast she can run." The women did not readily leave off beating her, but they stopped short of murder, and the crying, hysterical girl ran down the street.

An older Negress, a few moments later, came along with two or three militiamen, and the same woman made for her. When one of the soldiers held his gun as a barrier, the woman with the broomstick seized it with both hands, and struggled to wrest it from him, while the others, striking at the Negress, in spite of the other militiamen, frightened her thoroughly and hurt her somewhat.

To this the St. Louis Republic adds:

Seized with the mob spirit, two young white girls climbed on a car at Broadway and Main Street at about 4 p.m. and dragged a Negress from her seat. As they dragged the struggling Negress through the door to the street, there was a great cheer from men on the sidewalk.

As the Negress attempted to break away from her assailants one of the girls—for they were only about 17 years old—pulled off her shoe and started to beat the victim over the head. The victim flinched under the blows of the girl and was bleeding when she was rescued by militiamen.

The girls were not arrested and started to walk away from the scene. There were bloodstains on their clothes and as they passed their friends they told about the part they had played in the riot.

But this sort of Negro-baiting did not make a strong enough appeal to the jaded senses of the mob. Surely there must be some other means of adding to such pleasurable excitement. Somebody suggested fire. The idea was immediately accepted. Says John T. Stewart:

The first houses were fired shortly after 5 o'clock. These were back of Main street, between Broadway and Railroad avenue. Negroes were "flushed" from the burning houses, and ran for their lives, screaming and begging for mercy. A Negro crawled into a shed and fired on the white men. Guardsmen started after him, but when they saw he was armed, turned to the mob and said:

"He's armed, boys. You can have him. A white man's life is worth the lives of a thousand Negroes."

A few minutes later matches were applied to hastily gathered debris piled about the corner of one of three small houses 100 feet from the first fired. These were back of the International Harvester Company's plant. Eight Negroes fled into the last of the houses and hid in the basement. When roof and walls were about to fall in, an aged Negro woman came out. She was permitted to walk to safety. Three Negro women followed and were not fired upon. Then came four Negro men,



and 100 shots were fired at them. They fell. No one ventured out to see if they were dead, as the place had come to resemble No Man's Land, with bullets flying back and forth and sparks from the fires falling everywhere.

A Negro who crawled on hands and knees through the weeds was a target for a volley. The mob then turned back to Main street and another Negro was spied on a Main Street car. He was dragged to the street and a rioter stood over him, shooting.

The crowd then turned to Black Valley. Here the greatest fire damage was caused. Flames soon were raging and the shrieking rioters stood about in the streets, made lurid by the flames, and shot and beat Negroes as they fled from their burning homes.

This district today was a waste of smouldering debris. Firemen fought the flames all night. In this stretch were burned the Southern Railroad freight house, the Hills-Thomas Lime and Cement Company plant and the Broadway Opera House. By desperate effort, firemen saved the Public Library Building, the Bon Bon Baking Powder Company, and the J. C. Grant Chemical Company. The warehouses of the latter contained 1,000 gallons of gasoline and coal oil.

It was rumored that many Negroes were burned to death in the Broadway Opera House, an abandoned theatre structure. Bystanders claimed to have seen men, women and children seek refuge in the basement of the building.

Rioters formed in gangs and trooped through the street, chasing Negroes when they met them, and intimidating white and Negro men alike, if they attempted to offer resistance.

Here again according to the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, the women and children took a hand:

They pursued the women who were driven out of the burning homes, with the idea, not of extinguishing their burning clothing, but of inflicting added pain, if possible. They stood around in groups, laughing and jeering, while they witnessed the final writhings of the terror and pain wracked wretches who crawled to the streets to die after their flesh had been cooked in their own homes.

Where was the militia? At best they stood idly about in tacit sympathy with the rioters. It was not their business to protect Negroes against white men. Richard L. Stokes makes their attitude plain in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat. He says:

I wish to point out that in these riots all the antipathy toward the Negro was not confined to East St. Louis. Among the first militia to arrive from Central and Northern Illinois, were not a few who declared feelingly their understanding they were not here to protect Negroes against whites, but to guard whites against Negroes.

THE MASSACRE OF EAST ST. LOUIS

[[image]]
[[credit]] St. Louis Globe Democrat. [[/credit]]
[[caption]] BROADWAY OPERA HOUSE AFTER THE FIRE. \$700,000
DAMAGE WAS DONE IN THIS VICINITY [[/caption]]

Subsequent testimony conflicted with this statement and showed that most of the militia, as one would suppose from the location of East St. Louis, came from Southern Illinois.

And John T. Stewart continues in the St. Louis Star:

The major riot ensued at 4:30, with not a Negro in sight. A crowd of fifty young men and boys dribbling aimlessly south on Collinsville came to a pawn shop. At once there were shouts of "get his guns," and the whites crowded through the shop doors and looted the shop of every weapon and all its ammunition. A boy not over fourteen years old emerged with a rifle and several rounds of cartridges. Another boy dragged a shotgun too big for him to carry.

A detachment of militia came along and made a half-hearted effort to disarm the civilians. The only persons who gave up their arms were boys. One white man walking beside me patted a large revolver in his shirt bosom. It was fully loaded. Another handed him two additional rounds of cartridges. Two guards passed.

"You've got nothing on me," the rioter said, and showed the militiamen his revolver and shells. When the militiaman laughed, the rioter threw his disengaged arm around the guardsman's shoulder and they disappeared around the corner.

Some of the militia were active in the fray. Miss Gruening tells of the two soldiers, members of Troop L, from Olney. She passed them a few days after the riot near Cahokia Creek and entered into conversation with them. They boasted that here "seven niggers" were thrown into the creek, "and every time the niggers came up people rocked them till they was all drowned." She imitated their vernacular. "And how many 'niggers' did you boys actually kill?" she asked. They were modestly uncertain—they were not quite sure how many, but they had certainly shot to kill. That had been their orders.

"What!" asked Miss Gruening, "to shoot and kill 'niggers'?"

They grinned cheerfully. "Oh, no. Only to kill all we saw starting fires."

The Crisis Vol. 14 No. 5
Transcribed and Reviewed by Digital Volunteers
Extracted Mar-28-2024 08:54:27



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

The mission of the Smithsonian is the increase and diffusion of knowledge - shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world. Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, consisting of 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park, and nine research facilities. Become an active part of our mission through the Transcription Center. Together, we are discovering secrets hidden deep inside our collections that illuminate our history and our world.

Join us!

The Transcription Center: <https://transcription.si.edu>

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SmithsonianTranscriptionCenter>

On Twitter: [@TranscribeSI](https://twitter.com/TranscribeSI)

Connect with the Smithsonian

Smithsonian Institution: www.si.edu

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Smithsonian>

On Twitter: [@smithsonian](https://twitter.com/smithsonian)