



Never Been a Time: The 1917 Race Riot That Sparked the Civil Rights Movement

Harper Barnes

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The dramatic and first popular account of one of the deadliest racial confrontations in the 20th century?in East St. Louis in the summer of 1917?which paved the way for the civil rights movement.

In the 1910s, half a million African Americans moved from the impoverished rural South to booming industrial cities of the North in search of jobs and freedom from Jim Crow laws. But Northern whites responded with rage, attacking blacks in the streets and laying waste to black neighborhoods in a horrific series of deadly race riots that broke out in dozens of cities across the nation, including Philadelphia, Chicago, Tulsa, Houston, and Washington, D.C. In East St. Louis, Illinois, corrupt city officials and industrialists had openly courted Southern blacks, luring them North to replace striking white laborers. This tinderbox erupted on July 2, 1917 into what would become one of the bloodiest American riots of the World War era. Its impact was enormous. "There has never been a time when the riot was not alive in the oral tradition," remarks Professor Eugene Redmond. Indeed, prominent blacks like W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Josephine Baker were forever influenced by it.

Celebrated St. Louis journalist Harper Barnes has written the first full account of this dramatic turning point in American history, decisively placing it in the continuum of racial tensions flowing from Reconstruction and as a catalyst of civil rights action in the decades to come. Drawing from accounts and sources never before utilized, Harper Barnes has crafted a compelling and definitive story that enshrines the riot as an historical rallying cry for all who deplore racial violence.

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