

## East St. Louis Riot 1917

This event was a series of labor and racially motivated acts of violence in 1917. This riot is considered to be one of the worst occurrences in labor-related bloodshed in 20<sup>th</sup> century United States history. It is also one of the worst riots in United States history.

Following the end of World War I, the United States was feeling the effects of a strong economy. During the war, many men were being recruited to fight, so positions were opening up for African Americans across the United States. Many of them had moved from the South to East St. Louis, Illinois, and other major cities in the North and Midwest. Many African Americans found employment with the Aluminum Ore Company and the American Steel Company. As a result, many white workers felt threatened by African Americans who were moving to the area, and potentially taking their jobs. Many of the whites resented the blacks, and tension between the two races grew. Many whites were also troubled with rumors of black men possible socializing with white women at a labor meeting.

One day in late May 1917, a group of 3,000 white men congregated in downtown East St. Louis and began attacking defenseless African Americans. The whites destroyed buildings and severely beat people. The governor of Illinois had no choice, but to call in the National Guard. Once it arrived, it contained the insurrection. Rumors began to circulate, however, that the African Americans were organizing their own attack.

On July 1, 1917, an 18-year-old black man shot his white attacker. The whites fired back. Once the police arrived, the young black man was still being fired upon. He mistakenly thought the police were shooting at him too. He shot at them as well. He killed two officers. The next day, a white mob of thousands marched to the black section of town and began to riot. They cut all the fire hoses at the fire departments. Then they began to burn the entire black section of town to the ground. Any blacks who tried to escape the burning buildings, they shot on sight. Many others were lynched. The National Guard was called in again; with various reports that the guardsmen were joining in the rioting. White women even began to take part in the violence. Wielding bats and clubs, they chased young black women. African-American journalist, civil and women's rights activist Ida B. Wells believed that more than one hundred and fifty African Americans were killed during the riots.



*Mr. President, why not make America safe for democracy?*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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1. Why were there some positions opening up for African Americans?
2. What was the original cause of the first riot?
3. What was the original cause of the July riot?
4. What was the role of the National Guards in the riots?

## East St. Louis Riot 1917

1. Why were there some positions opening up for African Americans?

*Following the end of World War I, the United States was feeling the effects of a strong economy. During the war, many men were being recruited to fight, so positions were opening up for African Americans across the United States.*

2. What was the original cause of the first riot?

*Already resenting blacks for stealing their jobs, many white men had their aggressions overflow when there were rumors of fraternization between black men and white women.*

3. What was the original cause of the July riot?

*The cause of that attack was when a young black man shot his white attacker.*

4. What was the role of the National Guards in the riots?

*The Guardsmen were called in to try and contain the rioting, but there were reports of some guards joining in on the rioting against the blacks.*