

## Reading Guide for The 1857 Project Essays

“New lights shine on riots against blacks in East St. Louis and across America” by Harper Barnes, pgs 30-31 [Graphic organizer for this essay](#)

<b>Excerpt</b>	<p>“The East St. Louis race riot not only was the first but officially the deadliest of a series of devastating racial battles that swept through American cities in the World War I era. The death toll in East St. Louis was at least 48, a figure not exceeded in the 20th century until the 1992 Rodney King riot in Los Angeles, with 55 deaths. Officially, 39 African American men, women and children were killed in East St. Louis. But, as with other riots in the period, including those in Tulsa and Chicago, it is likely the official East St. Louis figures on the deaths of black men, women and children, many of them undocumented, are too low. Historians, journalists and civil rights leaders who have studied the East St. Louis riot believe more than 100 African Americans, and perhaps as many as 200, were killed in the slum-ridden industrial city on the east bank of the Mississippi, with many of their bodies, including those of small children and infants, burned beyond human recognition in gasoline-ignited shacks or dumped in the deep, fast-flowing waters of America’s largest river and its sewage-ridden tributaries. What happened in East St. Louis in the summer of 1917, wrote Gunnar Myrdal in “American Dilemma,” his landmark study of race in this country, was not so much a riot as a “terrorization or massacre,” a “mass lynching.” ...The terrible events of July 2, 1917 were the precursor to a horrific riot later that summer in Houston and to the Red Summer of 1919, when two dozen American cities and towns, including Chicago and Washington, D. C., exploded in riot. Two years later, a riot tore through Tulsa, and once again the official death toll—36 people, two-thirds of them black—was widely considered to represent only a fraction of the tragic reality of the racial massacre. The riots of the World War I period, one of the most violent times in the history of the world, were fueled by white resentment over blacks moving into previously segregated neighborhoods and jobs; sensationalist reports of black crime; lax, corrupt and biased law enforcement; exploitation of or capitulation to racism by business, labor and political leaders; overcrowded, crime festering slums; neglect of the central cities by absentee owners, and deep poverty among both races. Ultimately, of course, like all racial confrontations in America from its earliest history to the present, the riots were part of the deadly legacy of slavery.”</p>
<b>Key Names, Dates, and Terms</b>	NAACP, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida Wells-Barnett, Urban League, Marcus Garvey, United Negro Improvement Association, Red Summer of 1919, modern lynching, presumption of innocence
<b>Supplemental Texts</b>	<p><b>Primary Sources:</b>  <a href="#">First-Hand Accounts Show the Horror of East St. Louis' 1917 Race Riot</a></p>

[Emmett Till Anti-lynching Bill](#)

“200 Lynched in Missouri and Illinois” by Amelia Blakely, *Gateway Journalism Review*

[Ida B Wells-lynch-law-america](#)

[The Death of Emmett Till](#)

[Ahmaud Arbery, A Modern Day Lynching](#)

[Recent Accounts of Black Men Found Hanging from Trees](#)

**Image:**



*Black Massacres in the US. Map by Jordan Engel*

<https://decolonialatlas.wordpress.com/2020/06/20/black-massacres-in-the-u-s/>

<p><b>Guiding Questions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why was the World War I era considered one of the most violent times in the history of the world?</li> <li>• What is the difference between a riot and a massacre?</li> <li>• Why don't many U.S. history courses teach about race riots and/or massacres?</li> <li>• Why do we need to learn about and face hard history?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Discussion Questions</b></p>	<p>History shows that Black men were the majority of those lynched in Illinois and Missouri, many accused of murder or rape. However, this tactic was widely used in other areas to justify massacres and lynchings of Black men, women, and children. As written by Amelia Blakely, "There were no trials. The accusations were tried in the court of public opinion. The verdict was</p>

always guilty and followed by an execution.” In what ways are these historical trends evident in recent events and incidences of race-based conflicts? How is “the court of public opinion” still being used to execute Black people?

How do modern day lynchings and the “court of public opinion” conflict with the concept of “presumption of innocence,” a bedrock of the U.S. criminal justice system?