

Yet Another Thing I Was Never Taught in School

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My paternal grandparents came to the United States from Italy in the 1910s, and my father is a first-generation immigrant. My grandfather, a wallpaper hanger, never attended school, and my grandmother, a cafeteria lunch lady, only attended grammar school. Like many first-generation European Americans, my father joined the military and had a successful career. He graduated from college when I was a young teenager, thanks to the GI Bill. My family, and my teachers, instilled in me the belief that if you worked hard, and played by the rules, you could improve your family's economic position.

I think many of us come from backgrounds of "work hard, play by the rules, and you will succeed." So, when we see largely divergent poverty levels within a community, we may assume that those in poverty are not working hard, not following the rules, or not making good choices.

Here in Lynchburg, we have an overall poverty rate of about 22%. But if we look closer, we see concentrated poverty in certain parts of the city, and in certain racial groups. For example, in the downtown area the overall poverty rate is 26%; however, 73% of the black residents in that neighborhood live below the federal poverty level, while only 17% of white residents do. In Garland Hill, my neighborhood, 41% of my neighbors who are black live in poverty -- 2.5 times the rate of poverty as my white neighbors. What might account for this disparity? Lack of industriousness? Making poor choices? Not playing by the rules? And whose rules? What if you are playing by the rules, but those in the dominant class aren't? The economic logic of rules tells us that if there is economic benefit to breaking a rule, unless there are significant negative consequences, the rule will be broken to further economic interests. Even if it means murder.

I don't know when I first learned about race riots, but it was certainly not a subject covered when I was in school. Not even as part of my economics, politics, and philosophy courses at Randolph-Macon Woman's College. Like so many troubling things, things that go against the idea of America as a fair and just country, race riots were yet another thing I was never taught in school.

A race riot is a mob-related domestic disturbance in which specific racial groups are targeted for violence. We use the term "race riots" but they were actually massacres to maintain white supremacy and economic dominance. Race riot implies that both blacks and whites might be equally to blame for the lawlessness and violence of these events. The historical record, however, documents a sustained assault on black lives and property, often by deputized white residents.

Between the end of the Civil War and today, acts of racial violence have taken aim at the roots of generational wealth, shaping the nation and its inequities in way we still see today.¹ There were over 175 racially motivated massacres in the United States between 1863 and 1951. There were over 65 massacres in 1919 alone. They took place not just in the South, but in over 22 states, including

¹ Hodge, Channon; Hare, Breeanna; Luhby, Tami; Goodstein, Elias; Krishnakumar, Priya; Lyles, Toby; Roberts, Amy and Alwahad, Clint. (May 30, 2021). Burned from the land: How 60 years of racial violence shaped America. <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/05/us/whitewashing-of-america-racism>. Retrieved June 2, 2021.

Nebraska, Maryland, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania. These massacres left thousands of blacks murdered, tens of thousands of black citizens displaced and resulted in incalculable damage to black property.

Though these massacres happened many decades ago, their economic impact has been widespread and long-lasting. The wealth disparity between white and black Americans is shocking. According to the Urban League, a typical non-Hispanic white family had a median net worth of about \$188,000 in 2019, while the typical non-Hispanic black family's net worth was only about \$24,000. Median wealth, or the wealth of the household at the middle of a distribution, gives the experience of a typical family but is not the average. It does not reflect the wealth of the richest households. According to the Brookings Institute, white average wealth in 2019 was nearly \$930,000 – almost seven times greater than black average wealth, which was \$138,000.²

The destruction of black towns, homes, and businesses over nearly 100 years “hampered black American’s ability to amass financial assets – particularly housing – and to pass them down to their children and grandchildren to help build wealth.” Whites are five times more likely to inherit than blacks. Among those receiving inheritances, whites received 10 times as much as black heirs.³

According to Chris Messer, professor of sociology at Colorado State University-Pueblo, “the average white American does not have a grandparent or great-grandparent whose home was burned to the ground – and who received no insurance proceeds or government aid.” Black Americans, reluctant to put their money in white banks [or prohibited from using white banks], kept their cash at home. They lost their life savings when their homes and businesses were destroyed, or they had to flee to other communities because of white violence. Messer says, “There are plenty of really wealthy individuals in America today – they would not be wealthy if it weren’t for their parents being able to give them wealth ... or hand their business down.” As a result of white violence against blacks in this county, “entire communities of people were ... effectively reduced overnight to the lower class.”⁴

In A History of Race Riots in America, Arthur Garrison notes that white violence against blacks also “caused displacement of black expertise and talent, thwarting its concentration and increase.” The destruction of black wealth and social stability through the weapon of race riots was made worse by Jim Crow laws, the Great Depression, blacks being denied full access to the various New Deal programs of the 1930s and the benefits of the GI Bill in the 1940s, redlining and other discriminatory housing policies of the 1930s through 1960s, as well as the Drug War and mass incarceration of 1980 to today. Garrison goes on to say, “While whites were allowed to create intergenerational wealth and form wealthy

² McIntosh, Kriston; Moss, Emily; Nunn, Ryan and Shambaugh, Jay. (February 27, 2020). Examining the Black-White Wealth Gap. www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/02/27/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap/ Retrieved June 4, 2021.

³ Hodge, Channon; Hare, Breeanna; Luhby, Tami; Goodstein, Elias; Krishnakurmar, Priya; Lyles, Toby; Roberts, Amy and Alwahad, Clint. (May 30, 2021). Burned from the land: How 60 years of racial violence shaped America. <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/05/us/whitewashing-of-america-racism>. Retrieved June 2, 2021.

⁴ Ibid

communities both before and after the world wars, blacks were, as a matter of policy, prevented from doing the same. The policy outcome of a century of Jim Crow is systemic racism.”⁵

The Reconstruction Era lasted from 1861 to 1900. Reconstruction began when the first United States soldiers arrived in slaveholding territories and enslaved people escaped from plantations and farms. Some of them fled into free states, and others found safety with U.S. military forces. During the period, Congress passed three constitutional amendments – the 13th, 14th, and 15th, that permanently abolished slavery, defined birthright citizenship, guaranteed due process and equal protection under the law, and granted all males the ability to vote by prohibiting voter discrimination based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Reconstruction was aimed at reorganizing the Southern states after the Civil War, providing the means for readmitting them into the Union, and defining how whites and blacks could live together in a non-slave society. African Americans, however, faced white violence as they attempted to claim their newly won rights in both Southern and Northern states. Here are but a few of the massacres that occurred during the Reconstruction Era.

One of the first documented race riots was in 1863 in Detroit. In March of that year, tavern-owner William Faulkner, who local papers referred to as black, was found guilty of sexually assaulting a white girl. Outside the courthouse, a white crowd wrestled with officials, trying to get to Faulkner. The officials held the mob off. In frustration, they went out to the streets of Detroit, attacking blacks and setting buildings on fire. At least two men were killed, one white and one black. Nearly 200 black residents were left homeless.

Many race riots began with an accusation that a black man had raped or solicited a white woman, resulting in vigilante murder. Ida B. Wells-Barnette’s investigations determined that most accusants proved untrue, and that the charges were fabricated.⁶ Faulkner was actually Spanish Indian. Those who accused him of sexual assault later recanted and he was released from prison. While the immediate cause of the riot was vigilante justice, whites in Detroit were on edge due to displeasure with competing for jobs with blacks, some who were recent immigrants and others recently freed by the Emancipation Proclamation. As a result of the riot, Detroit established its first full-time police force, which was dominated by whites into the late 20th century.

The Ebenezer Creek Massacre occurred on December 9, 1864. During Sherman’s March to the Sea, thousands of black refugees joined in the march. Many of the refugees provided labor for the Union Army, clearing through marshes, and building roads. Sherman, however, was frustrated with the sheer number of refugees, and expressed concern that they were slowing down his army. After crossing Ebenezer Creek on the way to Savannah, Union General Jefferson C. Davis ordered the pontoon bridge taken down, stranding five thousand black refugees on the other side of the creek. Perhaps unknown to General Davis, Confederate troops were hiding in the woods along the creek. Thousands of refugees

⁵ Garrison, Arthur H. (June 12, 2020). A History of Race Riots in America. www.mcall.com/opinion/mc-opi-unrest-america-garrison-20200612. Retrieved June 2, 2021.

⁶ Barnett, Ida B. Wells. (September 13, 2011). [Southern Horrors: Lynch Law and All Its Phases](#). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform

were shot, stabbed, and clubbed by the Confederate soldiers, while Union troops were unable, or unwilling, to defend them. Many other refugees drowned attempting to cross the creek. It is estimated that over 600 black refugees died that day. While some accounts describe the Ebenezer Creek Massacre as being unavoidable, in a story in the Washington Post 20 years after the event, Colonel Charles Kerr of the 126th Illinois Calvary wrote that orders were given by Davis to not let any blacks cross and that a guard was placed to enforce the order.⁷

In response to public outcry and the demands of over 20 black pastors upon Secretary of State Edwin Stanton and General Sherman, Special Field Orders Number 15 was issued in January 1865, a month after Ebenezer Creek. The orders, which most of us were taught in school as “40 acres and a mule”, were intended to calm black anger after what was seen as a betrayal at Ebenezer Creek, but also to provide an alternative to the Army for food and shelter for the black refugees, and an attempt at reparations. Using his authority as a field commander to dispose of captured enemy property, Sherman redistributed 400,000 acres of coastline stretching from Charlestown, South Carolina to the St. John’s River in Florida from Confederate farmers to newly freed slaves. These new communities would be governed entirely by black people themselves. The orders stated, “No white person whatever, unless military officers and soldiers detailed for duty, will be permitted to reside. By the laws of war, and others of the President of the United States, the negro [sic] is free and must be dealt with as such.”⁸

The response to the order was immediate. Baptist Minister Ulysses L. Houston, one of the 20 black men who met with Sherman in Savannah, Georgia to craft Special Field Orders Number 15, led 1,000 blacks to Skidaway Island, Georgia where they established a self-governing community. By June 1865 40,000 freedmen had been settled on 400,000 acres of “Sherman Land.”⁹ It appeared that federal policy was about to enable the birth of a black landowning class.

Andrew Johnson, Lincoln’s successor, and a sympathizer with the South, overturned the Field Orders in the fall of 1865 and returned the land to the Confederate planters. The Federal government dispossessed the black landowners. Technically, they did not own the land, but had possessory title which granted them the right to use the land. Federal troops often evicted blacks by force, driving them away with guns. Those freed people continuing to occupy confiscated land were given a choice: sign work contracts and be bound in servitude due to debt, or leave. Most left.

Few decisions have had a more long-lasting negative impact on American society than the Johnson administration’s decision to force the freedmen off confiscated lands. “Could the nation have been induced to listen to those stalwart Republicans, Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner,” Frederick Douglass stated in 1880, “some of the evils we now suffer could have been averted. The negro would

⁷Dec. 9, 1864: Ebenezer Creek Massacre. www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/ebenezer-creek-massacre. Retrieved June 2, 2021.

⁸ Gates, Henry Louis Jr. The Truth Behind ‘40 Acres and a Mule’ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history. Retrieved June 4, 2021.

⁹ Ibid.

not today be on his knees...supplicating the old master class to give them leave to toil...[And] he would not now be swindled out of his hard earnings.”¹⁰

1866: Memphis, TN. In the first large-scale racial massacre in the post-Civil war South, white civilians and police murdered 46 blacks, raped five black women, and injured many others while burning black houses, schools, and churches. While the immediate cause of the massacre was a shooting between white police and black Union Army veterans, the underlying cause was economic. Since Emancipation, white landowners had attempted to hold their freed slaves to cultivate cotton for little or no pay. White planters wanted to drive freedman out of Memphis and back to plantations to work in peonage. Federal troops were sent in and restored peace after three days.

1866: New Orleans, LA. During the summer of 1866, a Louisiana constitutional convention considered disenfranchising former Confederates and enfranchising blacks. On July 30, a group of 130 black suffrage supporters were on their way to a reconvened Convention to finalize the vote. To block the supporters from holding the meeting, Mayor John Monroe called on members of the New Orleans police and a deputized group of ex-Confederates. The police and white mob members opened fire on the supporters, who attempted to protect themselves. By the end of the massacre, at least 200 Union War veterans were murdered and 48 were wounded. As a result of the massacre, there was a flight of hundreds of black residents from New Orleans.

1871: Meridian, MS. Occurring over three days in March 1871, the Meridian Race Riot resulted in the murders of a white Republican judge and nearly 30 black citizens by a mob of vigilante whites led by the Ku Klux Klan. Racial tensions had been brewing in Meridian as white Democrats resented the growing political power of the newly freed blacks and the growing number of white Republican Northerners in the region. The riot followed the arrest of freedmen accused of inciting riot, and blacks organizing for self-defense. During the trial of black leaders, the presiding judge was shot in the courtroom and a gunfight erupted that killed several people. In the ensuing mob violence, whites killed as many as 30 blacks over the next few days. Democrats drove the Republicans from office, and no person was charged or tried in the freedmen's deaths. The state of Mississippi as well as the U.S. Congress investigated the riot, but no one was ever convicted of a crime. Fearing for their own safety, hundreds of blacks left Meridian.

1873: Colfax, LA. Armed white Democrats with small cannon overpowered Republican freedmen and black state militia protesting a contested gubernatorial election at the parish courthouse. White locals and white paramilitary killed over 150 blacks. Federal prosecution and conviction of a few of the perpetrators was appealed to the Supreme Court. The court ruled in *United States v. Cruikshank* that protections of the 14th Amendment did not apply to the actions of individuals, but only to the actions of state governments. After this ruling, the federal government could no longer use the Enforcement Act of 1870 to prosecute actions by paramilitary groups. Intimidation, murders, and black voter

¹⁰ Hodge, Channon; Hare, Breeanna; Luhby, Tami; Goodstein, Elias; Krishnakumar, Priya; Lyles, Toby; Roberts, Amy and Alwahad, Clint. (May 30, 2021). Burned from the land: How 60 years of racial violence shaped America. <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/05/us/whitewashing-of-america-racism>. Retrieved June 2, 2021.

suppression by such paramilitary groups were instrumental to the Democratic Party regaining political control in the Louisiana state legislature by the late 1870s.

1898: Wilmington, NC. As black citizens in Wilmington increased their political and financial capital, many white residents grew increasingly angry and organized to regain control of the city. At the time a biracial Fusionist government ran Wilmington. Three out of the ten aldermen were black and black people worked as policemen, firemen, and magistrates. Democrats, the party of the Confederacy, vowed to end this “Negro domination” in the 1898 state legislative elections. On election day, white mobs patrolled black neighborhoods with guns, suppressing the vote. Democrats won every state legislative seat. Emboldened, over 800 white citizens met at the county courthouse and produced the “White Declaration of Independence” which stated: “We ... do hereby declare that we will no longer be ruled and will never again be ruled the men of African origin.”

The following day, a mob of 2,000 armed white men set fire to the local newspaper. When rumors spread that a white man had been shot, the mob turned on the black residents. The Wilmington Light Infantry, the White Government Union, and the Red Shirts poured into the black neighborhoods with rifles, revolvers, and a Gatling gun. At least 60 members of the black community were killed, perhaps hundreds. White Democrats in Wilmington forced the resignation of the city’s white mayor and local government members of both races in a coup, as well as removing black employees from their municipal positions. More than 2,100 black residents fled during the massacre, and the homes of at least 1,500 black people were then taken by white residents a low cost. According to David Zucchino, “After the coup, for which no one was ever prosecuted or punished, more than 100,000 registered black voters fled the city. No black citizen would again serve in public office for three-quarters of a century.”¹¹ The Wilmington Massacre was the only successful coup d’état in the history of the United States and was a turning point in post-Reconstruction North Carolina politics. It ushered in more severe racial segregation and disenfranchisement. In 1900, the North Carolina legislature effectively stripped African Americans of the vote through the grandfather clause (which allowed white men to vote without passing a literacy test if their grandfather had voted prior to 1867 and gave registrars the ability to exclude blacks from registering to vote if their grandfathers had not been able to vote prior to the end of the Civil War).

1906: Atlanta, GA. The emergence of a thriving black community and a black elite in Atlanta, despite Jim Crow laws, led to tensions. Black-owned saloons fueled prohibition advocates in the city and many whites began to blame black saloon owners and their customers for rising crime rates, including sexual assault. Newspapers and political speeches during the governor’s race promoted these ideas, as well as the idea that blacks were seeking to achieve equality with whites. Four separate incidences of alleged assaults by blacks on white women in Atlanta in September (none of which were substantiated) were reported in Atlanta newspapers on Saturday September 22nd. Thousands of white men and boys gathered in downtown Atlanta, assaulting hundreds of black citizens. White mobs invaded black neighborhoods, destroying homes and businesses. Black residents were lynched from light poles. Mobs entered trolley cars and beat black men and women to death. The state militia was called in and the

¹¹ Zucchino, David. (January 7, 2020). Wilmington’s Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy. Atlantic Monthly Press; Illustrated edition

crowd disbursed. Police and militia guarded white property, but a smaller white mob continued to attack black neighborhoods over two days. At least 25, and maybe up to 100, blacks and two whites were killed. The value of destroyed black property is unknown.

1908 Springfield, IL. The white population reacted to reports that a white woman had been assaulted by a black man in her home. Soon afterwards another instance of alleged assault by a black man on a white woman was reported. These incidents, coming within hours of each other, inflamed a gathering mob. Two men were arrested for the attacks. A mob of about 5,000 white residents assembled at the courthouse to lynch the two men in custody. Unable to get to the accused men because the sheriff had moved them to an undisclosed location, the mob turned on two other black men who were in the area and lynched them. One was an 84-year-old cobbler who had been married to a white woman for over 30 years. The mob then moved on to burn homes and businesses of black families, leaving white homes and businesses untouched. Six black people were shot and killed, two lynched and hundreds of thousands of dollars of property destroyed. About 2,000 black people were driven out of Springfield. This event was one of the catalysts for the formation of the NAACP.¹²

The Springfield riot, in the “Land of Lincoln”, stands as a prototype for many smaller riots that left communities all-white between 1900 and 1940. The Illinois State Register reported, “At Auburn, Theyer, Virden, Girard, Pawnee, Spaulding, Buffalo, Riverton, Taylorville, Pleasant Plains and a score of other places in central Illinois a negro is an unwelcome visitor and is soon informed he must not remain in town.”¹³

1919: The Red Summer. The summer and fall of 1919 marked the culmination of steadily growing tensions surrounding the great migration of African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North during World War I. When the war ended in late 1918, thousands of white servicemen returned home from Europe to find that their jobs in factories had been filled by newly arrived Southern black people or immigrants. Amid financial insecurity, racial and ethnic prejudices ran rampant.¹⁴ Meanwhile, African American veterans who had risked their lives fighting for freedom and democracy found themselves denied basic rights such as adequate housing and equality under the law, leading them to become increasingly militant. As many historians note, soldiers’ and black civilians’ actions to defend lives and property in 1919 can be held as the start of the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁵ At the same time, in the South the Ku Klux Klan was responsible for over 147 lynchings in 1918 and 1919 alone¹⁶. Race riots erupted in 65 US cities during 1919, including DC, Knoxville TN, Longview TX, Elaine AK, Omaha NE, and Chicago. The most destructive of the 1919 massacres was in Chicago.

¹² Aug. 14, 2908: Springfield Massacre. www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/springfield-massacre. Retrieved June 5, 2021.

¹³ Loewen, James. (October 3, 2006). Sundown Towns: Hidden Dimension of American Racism. Touchstone; unknown edition.

¹⁴ <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/chicago-race-riot-of-1919>

¹⁵ Tabel, Tamara. (July 14, 2019). The Red Summer of 1919: Causes of the Race Riots. <https://tamaratabel.com/2019/07/14/the-red-summer-of-1919-causes-of-the-race-riots/>. Retrieved June 4, 2021.

¹⁶ Chicago Race Riot of 1919. www.history.com/topics/black-history/chicago-race-riot-of-1919. Retrieved June 4, 2021.

1919: Chicago, IL. The African American population of Chicago had increased from 44,000 in 1909 to more than 100,000 as of 1919. There was intense competition for jobs between whites and African Americans. Tensions were particularly high on the city's South Side, where most black residents lived in dilapidated housing¹⁷.

Riots broke out after a black teen on a raft drifted into a swimming area unofficially restricted to whites. After he was murdered, violence raged for days from July 27th through August 3rd. During the riot, 23 blacks and 15 whites were murdered, and 537 people injured, two-thirds being black. Between 1,000 and 2,000 homes were destroyed, mostly black. In the report by The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, the Commission concluded that the actions of Chicago's white, Irish athletic clubs began and continued most of the violence during the riot. The athletic clubs were sponsored by city aldermen. This led to the club members' feeling of impunity as they knew there would be no repercussions for their murders.¹⁸

The Chicago Race Riot led to more formal separation between blacks and whites in the city. Segregation, while no longer officially sanctioned today, remains pervasive and has led to a 30-year difference in life expectancy between a mostly black Chicago neighborhood and a mostly white one less than 10 miles away, according to Helen Gayles, CEO of the Chicago Community Trust. It fostered discriminatory real estate practices, such as redlining and contract home buying, that made it more difficult for black residents to purchase property and build wealth. Gayles states, "as a result of these riots, what once was an imaginary line became codified in law, it was determined that the only real way to prevent this (race rioting) from happening again was to segregate the races. The solution of segregation was inspired by racism and fueled a system of inequity that continues today."¹⁹

1919: Elaine, AK – Estimates of the number of blacks murdered by whites during the Elaine Massacre range into the hundreds, while five white people lost their lives. About 100 African Americans, mostly sharecroppers on the plantations of white landowners, attended a meeting of the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America at a church just north of Elaine. The purpose of the meeting, one of several by black sharecroppers in the area during the previous months, was to obtain better payments for their cotton crops from the white plantation owners. Black armed guards were placed around the church to protect attendees. Accounts differ about who fired the first shots, but it started between the armed guards and three men in a vehicle in front of the church. The result was the death of a white security officer for the railroad, and the wounding of a white county deputy sheriff. The next morning the county sheriff sent out a posse to arrest those suspected of being involved in the shooting. African Americans outnumbered whites in this area of the county by ten to one. Although black residents offered little resistance, the fear of an African American uprising let an estimated 500 to 1,000 armed

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Chicago Commission of Race Relations. (1922). *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot*. <https://archive.org/details/negroinchicaost00chic>. Retrieved June 4, 2021.

¹⁹ Hodge, Channon; Hare, Breeanna; Luhby, Tami; Goodstein, Elias; Krishnakumar, Priya; Lyles, Toby; Roberts, Amy and Alwahad, Clint. (May 30, 2021). *Burned from the land: How 60 years of racial violence shaped America*. <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/05/us/whitewashing-of-america-racism> Accessed June 2, 2021

white people, mostly from the surrounding counties but also from across the river in Mississippi, to travel to Elaine to put down what was characterized by them as an “insurrection.” County authorities requested federal troops and 500 arrived October 2nd. With their arrival, the white mobs dispersed. But the federal troops “engaged in indiscriminate killing of African Americans and in torture to make them confess and give information.”²⁰ Several hundred African Americans were held stockades until they could be questioned and vouched for by their white employers.

1921 Tulsa, OK. Dick Rowland, a young African American shoe shiner was arrested for allegedly raping Sarah Page, a white elevator operator. A newspaper article prompted both whites and blacks to gather at the courthouse. Armed Black WWI veterans assembled to stop any lynching attempt. In Greenwood, a relatively affluent black neighborhood in Tulsa, deputized whites killed more than 300 African Americans. They looted and burned to the ground 40 square blocks of 1,265 African American homes, including hospitals, schools and churches, and destroyed 150 businesses. White deputies and members of the National Guard arrested and detained 6,000 black Tulsans who were released only after being vouched for by a white employer or other white citizen. 9,000 black residents were left homeless and lived in tents well into the winter of 1921. Later authorities dropped all charges against Dick Rowland.²¹

1923: Rosewood, Levy County, FL. The massacre was instigated by a rumor that a white woman had been sexually assaulted by a black man in her home in a nearby community. A group of white men believed that the assailant, Jessie Hunter, was hiding out in Rosewood and went to capture him. The group captured and jailed a black man thought to be an accomplice and lynched a second black man. A mob of 20 to 30 white men went to the home of Sylvester Carrier, who they thought was harboring the assailant, who was his cousin. There was a shoot-out that resulted in the death of two white men, Sylvester Carrier and his mother. The remaining survivors at the home fled to the swamps for refuge, joining many other black Rosewood residents who were hiding from the mob. The next day a group of 200 men from surrounding towns attacked the town, slaughtering animals and burning buildings. At the end of the massacre, at least six blacks and two white were killed, and only two buildings remained standing in Rosewood. Black residents fled Rosewood, and the town was left deserted. Initially, law enforcement claimed there was insufficient evidence for prosecution of any of the mob members.²²

1943: Detroit, MI. In the 1940s, Detroit was a segregated city. Before and during World War II, Detroit saw significant migration of African American workers looking for factory jobs. According to the Detroit Historical Society, “Because black Detroiters were still treated as second class citizens, they suffered disproportionately from wartime rationing and the overall strains on the city. Factories offered employment, but not housing, and because whites violently defended the borders of their segregated

²⁰ Cooper, Weston W. (September 20, 2018). Elaine, Arkansas Riot (1919). www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/elaine-arkansas-riot-1919/. Retrieved June 4, 2021.

²¹ Oklahoma Historical Society. Tulsa Race Massacre. www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=TU013. Retrieved June 9, 2021.

²² Goodloe, Trevor. (March 23, 2008). Rosewood Massacre (1923). www.blackpasat.org/african-american-history/rosewood-massacre-1923/. Retrieved June 9, 2021.

neighborhoods, black residents had little choice but to suffer in repulsive living conditions.”²³ In Detroit’s east side, 200,000 black citizens lived in only 60 square blocks. There was no space left to build in existing African American neighborhoods, so the city attempted to build a black housing project in an adjacent white neighborhood. In 1942, a mob of more than 1,000 whites, some armed, lit a cross on fire and picketed the construction of the housing.

Black citizens of Detroit faced racism on the job, as well. In June 1943, white workers at major factory halted production to protest the promotion of African American co-workers. “Other factories faced habitual slowdowns by bigoted whites who refused to work alongside African Americans. Humiliation and resentment on each side spilled over into all facets of Detroit’s wartime struggle and by the early 1940’s, racially motivated street fights were common,” according to the Historical Society.²⁴ The Ku Klux Klan was active in the region.

On June 20, 1943, nearly 100,000 citizens were at an amusement park called Belle Isle. A fistfight broke out between a black young man and several white young men. The situation escalated when rumors about violence against black and white women circulated, and both white and blacks engaged in retaliatory attacks that moved from the park into the city proper. Both white and black homes and businesses were burned and looted, and people were beaten and shot. White mobs overturned cars owned by blacks, set them on fire and beat black men as white policemen looked on. A white doctor was beaten to death while making a house call in a black neighborhood. The fighting raged for three days, and 6,000 US troops were brought in at the request of African American citizens. The troops arrived in tanks with automatic weapons. About 25 blacks and nine whites were killed. No white individuals were killed by police, whereas 17 African Americans died at the hands of police violence. 675 people were reportedly injured, with damages estimated at over two million dollars.²⁵

1951: Cicero, IL – Cicero is a western industrial suburb of Chicago. In the Chicago area, aspiring African American professionals looked to the suburbs for improved housing beyond the increasingly overcrowded South Side of Chicago. Those attempting to move were frequently greeted by attempted arsons. In 1951, the family of Harvey Clark, a black man, moved into a Cicero apartment building, several days after having been accosted by Cicero police officers who warned “Get out of Cicero and don’t come back in town or you’ll get a bullet through you.” Word spread in town that a black family had moved in and a crowd of 4,000 whites attacked the apartment building. 60 police officers were assigned to the scene to control the rioting. The 1951 Cicero riot lasted several nights and resulted in property damage,

Racial violence to segregate blacks, systemic racism brought about by Jim Crow, public policy after the dissolution of Jim Crow laws, along with crime control policies of the 1980s and 1990s, explain the modern physical design and poverty concentration within various American neighborhoods.

²³ Detroit Historical Society. Race Riot of 1943. <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/race-riot-1943>. Retrieved June 9, 2021.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Public policies, including racial neighborhood exclusions in the early 1900s, legal restrictive covenants from 1920 to 1948 and the Federal Housing Authority policies of redlining black neighborhoods from 1934 to 1968, along with the practices of blockbusting, real estate value manipulation, and racial steering by the insurance and real estate industry, concentrated blacks into urban neighborhoods during the Second Great Migration. This concentration and isolation were institutionalized by policy choices: investment in highways over public transportation; limiting public transportation between black communities and the suburbs where middle-class jobs were being placed; the use of highways and street design to break up black neighborhoods; and the policy of public education funding being tied to property values.²⁶

Through the practice of redlining, communities of color were segregated and labeled as undesirable to lenders, many of whom refused to issue mortgage and home renovation loans there. Redlining was banned by the 1968 Fair Housing Act, but in 2019, homes in formerly redlined areas across the country were sold for an average 29% less than the homes in historically white communities, according to a recent realtor.com analysis.²⁷

Arthur Garrison notes, “The paradox of American exceptionalism and greatness is that it melded the idea of individual freedom and government for the people ... with a multigenerational social policy that ... [prevented blacks] ... from growing with America.” Garrison goes on to say “Adult thinking acknowledges two that are true at the same time: America is a great nation based on great and noble principles, and it became great with the intentional adoption of the structural policy of racism. This history of Jim Crow enforced by the Klan provides context for the hard truth: In America race riots are used to settle social discontent. The origin of race rioting begins with southern whites, resenting black advancement, attacking them to disenfranchise them of both the vote and economic prosperity. The result: The ability of former slaves to create intergenerational wealth – the key to all success in a capitalist nation – was systematically destroyed for generations.”²⁸

Shortly after the Civil War, during the Reconstruction Era, blacks made significant economic and political advances. White physical violence against blacks in the form of massacres, as well as legal and policy violence against blacks during Jim Crow, destroyed these advances. While race massacres are no longer mechanisms of racial suppression, the goals of the massacres – furthering white supremacy; winning the capitalist zero-sum competition for jobs, housing and other resources; and suppressing voting rights – have continued on in politics and public policy.

Yet another thing I never learned in school.

²⁶ Garrison, Arthur H. (June 12, 2020). A History of Race Riots in America. <https://www.mcall.com/opinion/mc-opi-unrest-america-garrison-20200612>. Retrieved June 3, 2021.

²⁷ Redlining Was Banned in '60s, but Its Effects on Black Communities Linger. <https://www.realtor.com/news/trends/redlining-was-banned-decades-ago-but-its-effects-on-black-communities-cant-be-erased> Retrieved September 18, 2021.

²⁸ Garrison, Arthur H. (June 12, 2020). A History of Race Riots in America. <https://www.mcall.com/opinion/mc-opi-unrest-america-garrison-20200612>. Retrieved June 3, 2021.

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Synopsis

Shortly after the Civil War, during the Reconstruction Era, blacks made significant economic and political advances. White physical violence against blacks in the form of massacres, as well as legal and policy violence against blacks that began during Jim Crow and continue into this century, destroyed these advances and blacks' ability to amass generational wealth.

Reconstruction was intended to provide a means for readmitting Southern states into the Union and to define how whites and blacks could live together in a non-slave society after the Civil War. Sherman's Special Orders Number 15 provided land to newly freed slaves. Granting freedmen land confiscated from ex-Confederates was an attempt at reparations and provided hope that newly freed blacks would join the landowning class. When President Johnson overturned the Special Orders, and blacks were driven from the land granted by the orders, it became clear that public policy would also create significant obstacles to blacks achieving economic equality.

There were over 175 racially motivated massacres in the United States between 1863 and 1951. There were over 65 massacres in 1919 alone. They took place not just in the South, but in over 22 states, including Nebraska, Maryland, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania. These massacres left thousands of blacks murdered, tens of thousands of black citizens displaced and resulted in incalculable damage to black property.

This presentation summarized the impact of hundreds of race riots and described the specific effects of 13 of these massacres on the lives, rights and property of black Americans. The review demonstrated that while the immediate cause of these massacres was often vigilante justice, the real motivation was typically white anger and frustration with competing for jobs, housing and political power with blacks. The presentation also outlined the public policies and practices that blocked the growth of wealth and political power for blacks, including Jim Crow laws, restrictive covenants, redlining, crime control, and community development.

The economic impact of white racial violence in the form of massacres, along with the effect of Jim Crow laws and other public policy, has been widespread and long-lasting. In United States in 2019, the typical white family had a net worth of almost eight times the net worth of a typical black family. The destruction of black towns, homes, and businesses over nearly 100 years hampered black American's ability to amass financial assets – particularly housing – and to pass them down to their children and grandchildren to help build wealth.

While race massacres are no longer mechanisms of racial suppression, the goals of the massacres – furthering white supremacy; winning the capitalist zero-sum competition for jobs, housing and other resources; and suppressing voting rights – have continued on in politics and public policy. As a result, the ability of former slaves to create intergenerational wealth and political power has been systematically destroyed.