

Race Riots, 1919

Author Unknown



OVERVIEW

Many African Americans had moved North during World War I to find work. Returning soldiers faced tough competition for jobs, and race riots broke out in many Northern cities in 1919. One African American woman wrote a letter to *The Crisis*, a magazine published by the NAACP, explaining her reaction to the riot in Washington, D.C.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- How does this woman feel about the race riots?
 - Why does this woman react to the riots this way?
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The Washington riot gave me the *thrill that comes once in a life time*. I . . . read between the lines of our morning paper that at last our men had stood like men, struck back, were no longer dumb driven cattle. When I could no longer read for my streaming tears, I stood up, alone in my room, held both hands high over my head and exclaimed aloud: "Oh I thank God, thank God." . . . Only colored women of the South know the extreme in suffering and humiliation.

We know how many insults we have borne silently, for we have hidden many of them from our men because we did not want them to die needlessly in our defense . . . , the deep humiliation of sitting in the Jim Crow part of a street car and hear the white men laugh and discuss us, point out the good and bad points of our bodies. . . .

And, too, a woman loves a strong man, she delights to feel that her man can protect her, fight for her if necessary, save her.

No woman loves a weakling, a coward be she white or black, and some of us have been near thinking our men cowards, but thank God for Washington colored men! All honor to them, for they first blazed the way and right swiftly did Chicago men follow [during the 1919 race riot]. They put new hope, a new vision into their almost despairing women.

God Grant that our men everywhere refrain from strife, provoke no quarrel, but that they protect their women and homes at any cost.

A Southern Colored Woman