

Excerpt from Walter White's report on the causes for the Chicago Riot of 1919 for the NAACP's Crisis.

In this October 1919 article in the Crisis, the NAACP national magazine, the organization's assistant executive secretary, Walter White, asserts that the black population had been made the scapegoat in the wake of the violence. He lists eight causes for the riot, with "race prejudice" being the foremost.

Many causes have been assigned for the three days of race rioting, from July 27 to 30 in Chicago, each touching some particular phase of the general condition that led up to the outbreak. Labor union officials attribute it to the action of the packers, while the packers are equally sure that the unions themselves are directly responsible. The city administration feels that the riots were brought on to discredit the [William Hale] Thompson forces, while leaders of the anti-Thompson forces, prominent among them being State's Attorney Maclay Hoyne, are sure that the administration is directly responsible. In this manner charges and counter-charges are made, but, as is usually the case, the Negro is made to bear the brunt of it all—to be "the scapegoat." A background of strained race relations brought to a head more rapidly through political corruption, economic competition and clashes due to the overflow of the greatly increased colored population into sections outside of the so-called "Black Belt," embracing the Second and Third Wards, all of these contributed, aided by magnifying of Negro crime by newspapers, to the formation of a situation where only a spark was needed to ignite the flames of racial antagonism. That spark was contributed by a white youth when he knocked a colored lad off a raft at the 29th Street bathing beach and the colored boy was drowned.

Four weeks spent in studying the situation in Chicago, immediately following the outbreaks, seem to show at least eight general causes for the riots, and the same conditions, to a greater or less degree, can be found in almost every large city with an appreciable Negro population. These causes, taken after a careful study in order of their prominence, are:

1. Race Prejudice.
2. Economic Competition.
3. Political Corruption and Exploitation of Negro Voters.
4. Police Inefficiency.
5. Newspaper Lies about Negro Crime
6. Unpunished Crimes Against Negroes.
7. Housing.

8. Reaction of Whites and Negroes from War.

SOURCE: Walter White, "Chicago and Its Eight Reasons," *Crisis* 17 (October 1919): 293-297. Reprinted at: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4978>. Last accessed Friday, December 5, 2008.