

Knoxville's Red Summer: The Riot of 1919

Teacher's Guide

We believe that the film Knoxville's Red Summer: The Riot of 1919 offers teachers a unique opportunity to highlight an important, though painful, episode in Knoxville's history. The film seeks to connect the events in Knoxville to the larger picture of race relations in the early twentieth century and today. Teachers are strongly encouraged to preview the film and related materials before using them in the classroom.

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Discussion Questions

Use the questions below to lead a class discussion after viewing the film.

1. How did military service during World War I impact African American veterans? What role did veterans play in the African American community's response to the white mob?
2. What role did politics play in the accusation against Maurice Mays?
3. What role did the media play in the Knoxville riot?
4. Robert Booker uses the phrase "legal lynching" to describe the actions of the Knox County sheriff towards African Americans accused of crimes. What does he mean by that?
5. Why did some prominent members of the African American community not contribute to Maurice May's defense fund? Do you agree with their decision?
6. How did the film Birth of a Nation impact race relations and white society's view of African American men?
7. Why do you think that Robert Booker and others believe it is important to clear Maurice Mays name? Do you agree? Why do you think they have been unsuccessful?

Connections to Today

1. In 1919, Knoxville's African American community was segregated by law. "White flight" to the suburbs has resulted in economic segregation in most American cities. Discuss the challenges for communities in urban areas.
2. The 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri set off a series of protests and violent clashes between law enforcement and protesters. Discuss the similarities and differences between the events in Ferguson and the 1919 Knoxville Riot.
3. The 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman in the death of Trayvon Martin sparked the Black Lives Matter movement. In the following years, the Black Lives Matter Movement has grown into an international organization with chapters in 16 American cities and 1 chapter in Canada. Discuss the role of the Black Lives Matters movement in recent events and compare and contrast it with the role of the NAACP in the early 1900s.
4. Today, many individuals rely on social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter for news. Discuss the pros and cons of relying on social media for news compared to more traditional sources like newspapers.
5. Since 2015, the number of hate crimes based on race or ethnicity has increased. Discuss the possible reasons for the increase and effective strategies to combat hate crimes and hate speech.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. Research the Memphis Race Riot of 1866 and the Columbia Race Riot of 1946. Compare and contrast those riots with the Knoxville Riot of 1919.
2. Research the Tulsa Race Riot of 1919 which bore many similarities to the events in Knoxville. Compare and contrast the two riots.
3. Examine the early history of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) including its early successes and failures.
4. Journalist Ida B. Wells documented cases of lynchings in her books *The Red Record* and *Southern Horrors: The Lynch Law in All Its Phases*. Research the impact of Wells' work.
5. Research the impact of D.W. Griffin's 1915 film "Birth of a Nation".

Suggested Reading

Knoxville Riot

- [The Heat of a Red Summer: Race Mixing, Race Rioting in 1919 Knoxville](#) by Robert J. Booker - ISBN: 1-58244-150-2
- [A Dark Night: The Knoxville Race Riot of 1919](#) by Matthew Lakin - [The Journal of East Tennessee History](#), Number 72, 2000, pages 1-29
- [Tennessee Race Relations and the Knoxville Riot of 1919](#) by Lester C. Lamon- [The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications](#) Number 41, 1969, pages 67-85
- [Anatomy of Four Race Riots: Racial Conflict in Knoxville, Elanite \(Arkansas\), Tulsa, and Chicago, 1919-1921](#) by Lee E. Williams and Lee E. Williams II - ISBN: 978-1-60473-190-3
- [1919, The Year of Racial Violence: How African Americans Fought Back](#) by David F. Krugler - ISBN: 978-1-107-63961-4
- [From Race Riot to Sit-in: 1919 and the 1960's](#) by Arthur I. Waskow

Other Associated Readings of National Context

- Racial Violence, Lynchings, and Modernization in the Mountain South by W. Fitzhugh Brundage - Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South From Slavery to Segregation, pages 302-316 - ISBN: 0-8131-2173-6
- Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America by Elliot Jaspin - ISBN: 978-0-465-03636-3

Young Adult Fiction on Modern Day Race Relations

- The Hate You Give by Angie Thomas- ISBN: 978-1406387162
- Dear Martin by Nic Stone- ISBN: 978-1101939529
- All American Boys by Jason Reynolds ISBN: 978-1481463348