



A Few Red Drops: The Chicago Race Riot of 1919

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On a hot day in July 1919, five black youths went swimming in Lake Michigan, unintentionally floating close to the "white" beach. An angry white man began throwing stones at the boys, striking and killing one. Racial conflict on the beach erupted into days of urban violence that shook the city of Chicago to its foundations. This mesmerizing narrative draws on contemporary accounts as it traces the roots of the explosion that had been building for decades in race relations, politics, business, and clashes of culture.

A Few Red Drops: The Chicago Race Riot of 1919 Details

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From Reader Review A Few Red Drops: The Chicago Race Riot of 1919 for online ebook

Joyce Yattoni says

Just finished this nonfiction read about the Chicago race riots of 1919. I was naive before I read this book. I didn't realize that there were race riots in Chicago. After all, this was the north and I thought the north had a different attitude towards people of color. After the Civil War many African Americans migrated to the north to establish better lives. However, European immigrants did not welcome these individuals with open arms. In fact, many immigrants were given favorable treatment over African Americans when it came time for jobs and housing preferences. It is not difficult to see the connection between these race riots and what is happening in some Chicago neighborhoods today.

Carol says

After the initial setup of the story, the book sounds too much like a textbook until you get back to the information about the actual riots towards the end. It sounds like they had a lot of material to deal with. I wished they would have shared more anecdotal information about the riots as well.

Jennifer Mangler says

I really learned a lot from this book, and the history of race and ethnic relations in Chicago is fascinating, but it's not what I was expecting because the book is seriously mistitled. The very beginning and the very end of the book focus on the race riot, but the biggest central part of the book is devoted to setting the stage for the riot. That's necessary and important, because without this part the riot can't be fully understood, but it means that the book is about so much more than the riot. In fact, I would say the riot isn't even the focal point. Still, this is an important and informative book, and I would recommend it.

Rachel says

I received this book as an ARC. As other readers have stated, this book isn't only about the Chicago Race Riot of 1919. Over half the book is dedicated to Chicago immigrant history and race relations in the 19th and 20th centuries. The title would more appropriately be something along the lines of "Chicago Race Relations." It was a quick read with a lot of great historical photographs of Chicago landmarks and people; it was only lacking a map of Chicago and all the neighborhoods that were discussed. I wish the sources had been more precisely cited, but I was glad to see them included in the back of the book. Overall a decent micro-history on the event!

Kyle Pucciarello says

Informative, but a little dry.

The first half of the book is mostly dedicated to immigration and setting up Chicago's variety of ethnicities. This is important to set up the riots of 1919, but perhaps too much time was spent on this aspect.

Once we get to the riots, we get plenty of information. However, I easily could see this done as narrative non-fiction in a more intriguing way that might truly get to a YA reader.

I also would have liked more of a connection to today's issues, or some grander scope.

Chris says

Informative and important, but the narrative didn't really grab me. Heavy on background (Great Migration, Eastern/Central European immigration to the United States in the early 19th century) to the extent that the book feels mistitled. Will re-read.

Teenreadsdotcom says

In 1919, an horrific event took place in the city of Chicago that became known as the Race Riot of 1919. It was sparked by the drowning of a black teenager who, along with his friends, had "trespassed" into the waters of an all-white beach. It was an unspoken rule that the blacks could swim on one beach in the area and the whites used the other. Neither race was supposed to infringe on the boundaries of the other. But, on one hot Chicago day, a group of Black teenagers were swimming in "forbidden" territory. The day ended in tragedy for one young man who died, and for the city, as a whole, which erupted into a terrible riot killing dozens and injuring hundreds.

In *A FEW RED DROPS*, author Claire Hartfield not only tells about the events of that dark day in Chicago's history, but she goes to great lengths to provide the background and history of the riot, detailing the decades of events that led up to the turmoil. She provides many historical photos about this story that are scattered throughout the text. The end matter includes a copy of the poem, "I Am the People, The Mob," by Carl Sandburg (which is quoted some in the text), a detailed Notes section, a detailed Bibliography, a list of Picture Credits, an Acknowledgements page and an Index at the back of the book, showing the depth of the research and analysis that went into the writing of this book.

I wasn't familiar with this event, but I must say I have learned a lot about it. I read with interest the account of what happened that day and the events that led up to it. Hartfield writes a compelling story, full of facts and details.

This book would make a great addition to any discussion of Black History Month, particularly in regards to race riots and other clashes between African Americans and other groups of people.

Reviewed by Christine M. Irvin

Kristin says

Although titled *The Chicago Race Riot of 1919*, most of this book focuses on building the background of what led to these riots: building tensions between blacks, white Protestants, and Irish immigrants. The division between blacks and whites, rich and poor, American-born and immigrants became deeper by the day in Chicago. Finally, on an unseasonably hot September day, a group of four black teenage boys was attacked by a white teen throwing rocks as they were swimming and rafting on Lake Michigan. One of the boys was killed when a rock hit him in the head and he drowned. Frustrations snapped and several days of riots ensued. 38 people died and 537 were wounded. The teen who threw the rocks was tried and acquitted.

This is a part of history I don't recall learning about. My memories of learning about these types of topics fall into the Civil Rights Movement. Although our country has progressed a lot from these important time periods, I did witness the L.A. riots in 1992 after the acquittals in the Rodney King verdict. This happened again in Ferguson after the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown. There is still much to be done in the work towards race relations and equality.

Although this wasn't always the most engaging read, it was extremely informative. I appreciated the many photographs, historical documents, and political cartoons that were featured amongst the text to better visualize and understand the time period. I also liked how the author's epilogue connected events from over 100 years ago into the present. I think this would be a great reference in any U.S. History classroom.

Trixi says

While the focus of the book is the Chicago race riots of 1919, it does a great job in covering the late 1800s/early 1900s changes in Chicago that lead up to the 1919 riots. The influx of immigrants to the city, the meat packing industry and the big bosses who definitely took advantage of the workers as well as the individual ethnic communities all were components that played a part. As the industry became more automated, the workers were being paid less and finally unions took off, but some people still did not trust the union leaders. As WWI took away a large part of the work force, African Americans moving from the South and women were picking up the slack and the unions saw hope in having the African Americans join, but then the big bosses would fire them and have the women at the ready to take their places. These and other events brought things to a boiling point in the hot summer time when a young African American boy was killed when he drowned after being hit by a rock thrown by a white man.

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

A few boys drift too far outside the racially-designated beach at Lake Michigan one summer and trouble ensues. A boy dies and rumors fly and it is soon black against white and white against black. Many die as the destruction goes on for days, fed by lies subtly shared by standing city gangs and by those who profit most from conflict.

It's a dark story of people against people as pressures increase in the city after the war for jobs, for housing. It's a cautionary tale for today as well, with lies and innuendo shared on social media and through organizations of hate, of what can happen.

Katarin says

A quick, interesting and enjoyable read. A Few Red Drops spends the majority of it's time not on the riot itself, but in setting up the context for why such a deadly riot occurred. By building up the history of Chicago at the time, and how the great migration, WWI and Unionizing efforts in Chicago Meat Packing industry stoked tensions along racial and ethnic lines, A Few Red Drops gives a much fuller picture of the 1919 riot. Solid rec.

Peter Kilkelly says

Too kind to Chicago authorities and whites, even the idea of a "race riot" is somewhat misleading. This was white's using terroristic violence to enforce the boundaries of where black Chicagoans could go, with the help of the police. Still, it does include a lot of good historical detail and photography, for those unfamiliar with this event.

Jamie says

*** I received an e galley from Netgalley in return for an honest review.***

I do not read much nonfiction, but I was interested in the topic having read The Hate U Give and All-American Boys. I agree with other readers that most of the book discusses the issues and the history of Chicago leading up to the riots and little on the riots themselves. I thought it was a good read and would make a good pairing with the books previously mentioned.

Melissa says

It started out great, but then it stopped the riot story to give 120 pages of back story. It then finished with another 10ish pages of the riot outcome. By then I had lost interest and I think many kids will too.

Ms. Yingling says

Public Library Copy

There's a good deal of information about the events of the Red Summer, but the best part of this book is the extensive background of Chicago's Packingtown and Black Belt neighborhoods, starting in the 1850s and continuing on. It discusses living conditions in both the north and the south for African-Americans, and describes the black middle and upper class in a way that is very hard to find. For students who may only ever have read about blacks in slavery or being denied rights in the south, this is a refreshing change! Ida Wells Barnett is discussed quite a bit, and there are other historical figures, such as John Jones, about whom I would love to have biographies!

There's also a lot of discussion about the Irish immigrants in Chicago, and the prejudices that they faced. I think it's important to read these accounts, because most students have NO idea that the Irish were ever considered an important "minority" group that were not particularly welcome in the country. It is a somewhat hopeful note that opinions, in some circumstances, can change, enough so that a generation or two later, no one remembers. There was also a lot of information about the Chicago meat packing industry, but I would bet that this larger history of Chicago was NOT covered in my daughter's class when they read Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. (Which, for some weird reason, she absolutely loved. It made her a vegetarian six years ago!)

This book was beautifully formatted, with comfortable text size and white space, a fair number of period political cartoons and photographs, and was very engaging and easy to read.

This is a great book to use to set the stage for Shabazz and Watson's *Betty Before X*.
