

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 204

“1919 – The United States II”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

On February 17, 1919, three thousand African-American soldiers of the US Army’s 369th Regiment paraded up New York City’s Fifth Avenue from 23rd Street to 110th, and then along Lenox Avenue through Harlem to 145th Street. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, mostly white, thronged the sidewalks and cheered as the regiment marched past.

In the words of the *New York World*: “[T]he dusky heroes...marched with the air of victors...along with the jazz that had proved a revelation in France and to the music of which the Germans danced and ran...White folks mingled with their colored brethren in the lower part of the avenue...No more joyful, cheerful, enthusiastic reception was ever accorded anywhere to heroes returning from wars that that which took place to-day.”

Some believed the Great War would lead to a new era of racial goodwill in the United States. Alas, the year 1919 would in fact see more racial violence than any other in US history.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 204. 1919, the United States, part two.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the neighborhood called Harlem in upper Manhattan was populated mostly by Jewish and Italian immigrants. But the demographics of Harlem shifted dramatically during the Great War. Immigration from Europe had dwindled to nothing and the wartime boom had led to a demand for workers, which in turn led to a new kind of immigrant appearing in New York: African Americans from the southern United States, many of whom settled in Harlem, driven from their old homes by increasing oppression and restrictions on their rights in the South and drawn to the greater freedom and the wider economic opportunities offered in northern cities like New York.

By 1919, the population of Harlem was about one-third African American, and there were blocks that were almost entirely black. Harlem hosted African-American writers and artists, magazines

and movie houses, musicians and poets. New African-American churches were established in Harlem, and older churches in other parts of the city relocated there. Harlem boasted theatres that produced plays with African-American casts—not crass minstrel shows, but serious theatre. It was the beginning of what would be called the Harlem Renaissance.

This story would be repeated across the United States. Jazz music, which originated among African-American musicians, was sweeping the country, and white Americans loved it just as much as their African-American neighbors. The 369th's regimental band became famous for introducing jazz to the French, who also loved it, as alluded to in the New York *World* article I quoted from at the top of the episode. Immigrants from Jamaica and the West Indies also came to Harlem and shared with their African-American neighbors their music, their poetry, and their political ideas.

Books and novels on the African-American experience were getting published and widely read. Black clubs and lodges sprang up. Membership in the NAACP soared. The year 1919 saw the introduction of the first mass-market black dolls intended for African-American children, including soldier dolls dressed in US Army uniforms. “Teach your children pride of race,” said the advertisements.

At Rutgers College in New Jersey, the 1919 class valedictorian was also the school’s only African-American student. The six-foot-two, 200-pound man had endured racial harassment and beatings to excel academically as well as athletically. He was the star player on the school football and track teams and was accepted into Phi Beta Kappa. He won prizes on the school debating team. He also sang well enough to make money at it, which helped him pay his way through college. His name was Paul Robeson, and his commencement address, delivered to an all-white audience, was a call for racial equality.

So there were good reasons for African-Americans, for all Americans of good will, to feel optimistic about the future. And indeed, you could argue that in the long run of US history, these heartwarming developments I just outlined for you will weigh more heavily than the racial violence that I’m going to recount in a few minutes. As the 19th century Unitarian minister and abolitionist Theodore Parker once declared, “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, [but] I am sure it bends toward justice.”

But in the short run. Oh, in the short run...The summer of 1919 would become known as the “Red Summer.” That’s not red as in socialism, that’s red as in blood, because of the thousands of deaths and injuries due to racial violence this year would see.

On Sunday, April 13, 1919, *The New York Times* printed a letter from the 62-year-old James Dillard, a white educator in Louisiana who had left a professorship at Tulane University to lead a philanthropic organization that raised money to build schools and libraries and vocational programs for African Americans. The *Times* titled the letter “After-the-War South: An Improvement in Social Temper and Racial Feeling with Return of Troops.” In his letter, Dillard

acknowledged that the South had a race problem, but predicted that wisdom would prevail and race relations would inevitably improve. Race violence, he argued, was declining. He cited as an example an elderly white Alabama Baptist minister who, upon encountering a group of African-American soldiers returning from Europe, declared that if those men had fought for their country, by golly, they deserved the right to vote.

History is full of irony, and here's one I feel obligated to mention: On that very Sunday morning, at dawn in New York City, as the newsboys were untying their bundles of the Sunday *Times* containing Professor Dillard's letter in preparation for delivery to their customers, on the other side of the world, in the city of Amritsar, in India, where it was at this moment half past four in the afternoon, Indian Army General Reginald Dyer ordered his soldiers to open fire on a crowd of peaceful, unarmed Indian civilians, killing hundreds and wounding thousands, including women and children.

We'll return to that story and take a deep dive into the situation in India in a few weeks. But for now, just keep that in the back of your mind as what happens next begins on the very same day. For eight hours later, back in the United States, in Jenkins County, Georgia, thousands of African Americans were converging on the grounds of the Carswell Grove Baptist Church for the church's anniversary celebration. This annual event included worship, music, and a huge picnic that was the biggest social event of the year for African Americans in that part of the state.

As the festivities were getting started, two white police officers appeared. What they were doing there is not clear, although Georgia was a dry state at the time and it seems probable they were on the lookout for illegal alcohol. They didn't find any, but they did find a pistol in a car and arrested its owner, an African-American man named Edmund Scott, for possession of an unregistered firearm. They were taking him away in handcuffs when a crowd gathered. A friend of Scott's named Joe Ruffin drew out a checkbook and offered to post the \$400 bail on the spot. The officers refused to accept a check and began to lead Scott away. Ruffin grabbed Scott and tried to pull him away from the officers. One of the officers drew his pistol and clubbed Ruffin with it. When the pistol struck, it discharged. Ruffin fell to the ground, unconscious from the blow, but most of the witnesses believed the officer had shot him dead. In the violence that followed, Scott and both of the white police officers were killed.

In the aftermath of this incident, as the news spread, mobs of white vigilantes roamed the county, hunting down those who had been involved. About four black men were killed; no one knows the exact number. The Carswell Grove Baptist Church was burned to the ground, as were two black Masonic lodges in the area.

Less than a month later, on a Saturday night in Charleston, South Carolina, a group of white US Navy sailors allegedly gave a local African-American man eight dollars to bring them some bootleg whiskey. When he never returned, the sailors went on a rampage through the town, attacking black citizens at random and destroying black-owned businesses and homes. Six

people were killed and dozens hospitalized in the worst violence Charleston had seen since the Civil War. A curfew was imposed on the naval base and sailors barred from entering Charleston on weekends.

In July, in Bisbee, Arizona, the site of the Bisbee Deportation two years earlier, episode 158, the town held a parade on Independence Day, the Fourth of July, and invited the US 10th Cavalry Regiment, stationed at nearby Fort Huachuca, to participate. I'm sure you remember the 10th Cavalry Regiment. I've mentioned this unit many times since the very beginning of the podcast. This was a unit of African-American cavalry known as "Buffalo Soldiers" that had served during the Indian Wars. John Pershing had been one of its officers—that's how he earned the nickname "Black Jack." The 10th had been at the Battle of San Juan Hill, although Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders took all the credit, episode 12. They fought against the Filipinos during the Filipino-American war, during which one of the soldiers puckishly remarked they were in the Philippines to take up the white man's burden. They had been part of Pershing's Punitive Expedition into Mexico just four years ago, where they fought in the Battle of Carrizal, episode 129, and were currently stationed at the Mexican border in Arizona to guard against any further spillover of Mexican revolutionary violence into US territory.

And they had been invited to march in the Fourth of July parade in Bisbee in 1919. All well and good; they deserved it. But in town the night before the parade, a number of soldiers from the 10th visited the red light district and got into an altercation with a Bisbee police officer. The officer said he had been harassed by the soldiers; the commander of the 10th reported later that it had been the police officer who provoked the confrontation. Gunfire broke out. White civilians took up arms and joined in, and Bisbee became a battlefield. No one was killed and order was restored, although a few people were seriously injured and dozens of the soldiers were arrested. The parade went on as scheduled the next day, with the 10th Cavalry participating, but the incident attracted national news coverage. Many of the headlines read "Negroes Cause Riot," or some variation of that.

Ten days later, on July 14, Bastille Day, the first since the Armistice, the victorious Allied armies paraded through Paris. US commander Black Jack Pershing, formerly of the 10th Cavalry, banned African-American soldiers from participating in the parade. This despite the fact that both the British and French Army contingents included black soldiers from their respective colonial territories.

You could say that white America had decidedly mixed feelings about African Americans in military service.

[music: "The United States Field Artillery"]

Robert Wilson Shufeldt was a physician, a graduate of Columbian University, which changed its name to George Washington University in 1904. He became an Army doctor and had a troubled personal life that included a scandalous divorce. In 1907, he published a book titled: *The Negro*,

A Menace to American Civilization. In it, he asserted that people of African descent had brains only three-quarters the size of a European's brain and that men of African descent had "enormously developed" penises. Those are his words, not mine. He went on to claim that people of African descent had no morals, that they lived entirely in the present without regard for consequences, and that they were driven by the basest of sensual desires. Therefore, and to put it bluntly, he concluded that any man of African ancestry was basically a rapist-in-waiting and that no white woman was safe in proximity to a black man. His solution? And I quote: "It would doubtless be a capital thing, if it could be done, to emasculate the entire negro race..."

[Sound effect: Record scratch]

Say what?

It always seems to come down to the white women, doesn't it? I have to say that paging through this book was an unsettling experience, although it did help me understand the mentality behind lynchings. Shufeldt believed that lynchings were a perfectly reasonable response to the mere accusation of a black man raping a white woman, because if you didn't resolve the matter extrajudicially, then the victim would be forced to testify to her experience in court, where she would be vulnerable to cross-examination by a lawyer representing the defendant and that was obviously unacceptable. Huh.

I feel I should apologize for subjecting you to this; it makes me uncomfortable, too. But history isn't pretty.

Imagine being a white woman in this era, living in the southern United States, which at the time was home to 80% of the African-American population. Imagine that you read a book like that, written by an M.D. and published and distributed just like any respectable book. Or, perhaps more likely, imagine that the menfolk in your life—your father, your husband, your brother—had read the book and were repeatedly warning you about African-American men, telling you how dangerous and uncontrolled they were, and cautioning you: *Don't let them take advantage of you. Don't let them touch you. Don't let them get near you. Don't talk to them or encourage them.*

Now imagine such a woman walking down a crowded street, or riding in a crowded streetcar. Suppose an African-American man bumps into her. Or brushes up against her. Or looks at her in a way that makes her feel uncomfortable. How does she react? Is she frightened? Does she cry out? Does she make a scene?

If she does, he is going to die.

There were 76 known lynchings of African Americans in the US in 1919. That was the highest number in fifteen years, and the number will never again be that high, I am happy to say. But the year 1919 saw a kind of lynching no one had ever seen before: the lynching of US Army

veterans of the Great War. Wikipedia actually has a page titled “African American Veterans Lynched after WWI” There are twelve entries on the list, which the page concedes is incomplete. But what’s striking is looking under the heading “accusations” and seeing the same stories over and over again. Not so often rape as lesser offenses like: “Insult of white woman.” “Indecent proposal to a white woman.” “Alleged assault of a white woman.” “Moved too slowly out of a white woman’s way.”

On June 27, 1919, at exactly 5:00 PM, an African-American man named John Hartfield was shot and killed just outside Ellisville, Mississippi. He had been accused of raping a white woman. The lynching had been scheduled days in advance and attracted an audience of thousands. Vendors sold US flags and souvenir postcards to the onlookers. Local newspaper headlines that morning reported matter-of-factly: “John Hartfield Will Be Lynched by Ellisville Mob at 5 O’Clock This Afternoon—3,000 Will Burn Negro—Governor Bilbo Says He Is Powerless to Prevent It.” Hartfield was bound and left hanging from a sweet gum tree that afternoon. Children climbed the tree so they could get a good view as the lynchers cut off Hartfield’s fingers while he was still alive to keep as souvenirs. They shot him punctually at five, then burned the body. A few days later, another African-American man in the next county over was lynched after he was overheard complaining about the treatment of John Hartfield.

The reference to Governor Bilbo, by the way, has nothing to do with hobbits. That’s Mississippi Governor Theodore Bilbo, a Democrat, responding to a plea from the NAACP to stop the lynching. You’ll recall I mentioned him in passing last week. Even though the time and place of the crime was well publicized in advance, Governor Bilbo insisted there was nothing he could do to prevent it. He attributed the rising violence against African Americans to “the attempt of the negro race to seek social and political equality. This desire on the part of the negro seems to have been increased since the World War by the social reception and familiarity with the negro soldier by a certain class of white women in France.”

So. Blame it on French women.

In the town of Coatesville, Pennsylvania, an African-American man had been lynched back in 1911. In July 1919, an African-American veteran was arrested in Coatesville in uniform and charged with raping a white woman. This story turns out differently. Rumors of an impending lynching stirred hundreds of African Americans to gather at the courthouse, many armed with baseball bats, demanding the man be released. He was, and the charges were dropped.

Here is something else new in 1919—African Americans fighting back.

That same month, a 28-year-old Jamaican immigrant named Claude McKay published a poem in the socialist magazine *The Liberator*. It was titled, “If We Must Die.”

[music: Bach, *Goldberg Variations*]

*If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!*

The poem was read into the Congressional Record by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, a Republican from Massachusetts.

On Friday evening, July 18, 1919, in Washington DC, a 19-year-old white woman was walking down the street when, by her account, she encountered two African-American men who tried to steal her umbrella. She called for help and the men fled the scene. One man was arrested, but the police released him the following day, citing lack of evidence to prosecute.

It turned out that the woman in question was the wife of a US Navy employee. Wild rumors flew that the incident was an attempted rape and that it was only the latest in a series of rapes of white women. By Friday evening, white uniformed military personnel were thronging the streets of America's capital, beating any African American man they could find. The violence continued through the weekend, with white mobs throwing stones, grabbing people off streetcars and sidewalks, and roaming the city in automobiles, firing at random at black pedestrians. Today, we would call these incidents "drive-by shootings." In 1919, they called these vehicles "terror cars." President Wilson, who was cruising the Potomac on his yacht *Mayflower* over that weekend, took no action and made no statement concerning the violence.

By Monday, the violence was getting worse, not better. Monday morning's *Washington Post* contained a story headlined "Mobilization for Tonight," which called on all service members stationed in or near Washington to meet on Pennsylvania Avenue that evening for what the paper called "a 'clean-up' that will cause the events of the past two evenings to pale into insignificance." Pleas from the NAACP to the Navy and the War Department to cancel leaves and bar service members from the city were rebuffed.

Monday saw a run on pistols at stores in the city. About five hundred were sold, all to white customers, since African Americans weren't allowed to shop in those stores. Even so, African Americans bought up guns second hand from pawn shops and veterans got out their Army rifles and prepared to defend themselves. That day saw the first black "terror car," if I can call it that, shooting at white people.

When Monday night came, about 400 white men answered the *Post's* call and assembled on Pennsylvania Avenue. Almost all of them were in military uniform. They pulled African Americans off of streetcars and beat them within sight of the White House. White rioters entered a restaurant, disturbing the evening meals of a room full of white diners as they searched for black waiters. "Terror cars" some operated by whites, some by blacks, fired at pedestrians across the city.

That same day, in Norfolk, Virginia, a public "welcome home" ceremony for African American soldiers returning from Europe was disrupted after a white police officer tried to arrest a black soldier.

On Tuesday, President Wilson met with Secretary of War Newton Baker at the White House and instructed Baker to put 2,000 soldiers onto the streets of Washington. That and a rainstorm finally quelled the violence. No one knows the exact casualty figures, but it appears that dozens were killed and hundreds injured. It also appears that more whites than blacks were injured and killed, which was unusual. Wilson never did make a public statement about the violence. Some Republicans called for martial law and investigation of the rioting, but nothing came of it. Some Democrats argued that the problem was that Washington wasn't segregated, but no steps were taken in that direction either. Washington's police commissioner blamed the rioting on Bolsheviks.

By the following Sunday, July 27, the last of the soldiers were withdrawn from the now-peaceful streets of Washington, but even more ferocious violence was about to break out 600 miles away, in the city of Chicago. It was a hot summer day in Chicago that Sunday, in the days before air conditioning, and thousands of Chicagoans did what Chicagoans often did on a summer Sunday: they went to the beaches along the shore of Lake Michigan. Chicago did not have officially segregated public accommodations, but there existed an informal segregation of beaches, one for black beachgoers, the other for white.

That afternoon, a group of five teenage black boys went down to the lake. They had discovered their own private beach, a little strip of lake shore behind a brewery that lay between the segregated beaches. There they took off their clothes and went skinny dipping. By all accounts, they were not very good swimmers, but they swam and fought and splashed and frolicked in the water, as teenage boys will do. They lost track of their position. They drifted south along the lakefront, until they entered the waters adjacent to the white beach. On that beach, there had just

been an incident in which a group of African Americans had attempted to use the beach. Legally, they had the right to do so, but white men had driven them off by throwing rocks.

These five boys out on the lake had no knowledge of this other incident, until a white man on the shore began throwing rocks at them, too. The boys took it as a game. They laughed and dodged the rocks by diving underwater. But the game turned to tragedy when one of the boys, named Eugene Williams, was struck in the head by one of the rocks and disappeared into the water. The other four boys rushed back to the black beach and told a lifeguard what had happened. A mixed race group of lifeguards, police, and civilian volunteers searched the waters and recovered Eugene's body, which was brought ashore onto the white beach. There the other four boys identified the man who had been throwing rocks at them, and a black police officer attempted to arrest him, but was prevented from doing so by a white police officer named Daniel Callahan. The African Americans present grew angry; some of them went back to the black beach to call for more men to come to the scene.

Officer Callahan allowed the accused white man to leave the area, then arrested a black man on a minor charge. By 6:00 that evening, a mob of over a thousand angry African Americans began attacking police and whites on the beach. Shots were fired.

The incident led to five days of violence, worse even than what Washington had experienced. Rumors flew. In the white community, a version of the story went around with the races reversed, that is, that a white teenage boy had been killed by a black man. Most of the violence and property damage was in the African-American neighborhoods. Thirty-eight people were killed in all, and over five hundred injured. On this occasion, most of the victims were black. Stores and factories had to close. Thousands of black employees at Chicago's famous stockyards were prevented from going to work by gangs of white men blocking their way.

The police were overwhelmed and it took the mobilization of 6,000 soldiers from the Illinois National Guard to restore order. These white soldiers entered the city expecting to confront violence from black Chicagoans, and were surprised to discover it was the black Chicagoans who welcomed their arrival and they found themselves defending African-American neighborhoods against white violence. Happily, and unlike many other instances of racial violence in America, the National Guard troops were impartial and professional in their work, and the violence soon abated.

One of the problems with riots is that it is difficult to identify and arrest the perpetrators, let alone produce evidence against them. Few were prosecuted in the aftermath of the Chicago riots; most of those who were, were African American.

The Coroner's report summarized the riot this way: "Five days of terrible hate and passion let loose cost the people of Chicago 38 lives...wounded and maimed several hundred, destroyed property of untold value, filled thousands with fear, blemished the city, and left in its wake fear and apprehension for the future..."

The violence of the Red Summer, occurring as it did in parallel the Red Scare, was attributed by many white people to Bolshevik agitation. *The Wall Street Journal* summarized this view succinctly when it wrote, “Race riots seem to have for their genesis a Bolshevik, a Negro, and a gun.”

The *Journal* probably got this idea from J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Justice Department’s Bureau of Investigation. Hoover had promoted this idea to the press and hinted at secret government investigations that proved it. But though there were secret investigations, no such proof emerged. When Hoover had taken over the Bureau of Investigation, he fired all the women agents, because he didn’t believe it was appropriate work for women, but he did hire African-American agents to infiltrate organizations like the NAACP in search of Bolshevik influence. They didn’t find any.

There was a kernel of truth in these accusations. Socialists were always conspicuous in promoting the view that all races should be treated equally. The Wobblies, already famous for their radical views and alleged ties to Bolshevism, were distributing a pamphlet titled: “Justice for the Negro: How He Can Get It.” Spoiler alert: he can get it by joining the Wobblies, that’s what the pamphlet said.

This, in a nutshell, was the problem European-style socialism struggled with when it tried to take root in the United States. While it stood forthright in favor of racial equality, the socialist analysis typically dismissed racism as an artificial obstacle imposed by the capitalists to divide the proletariat. Socialism’s prescription for racism is therefore to ignore it, and focus instead on the class struggle. You shouldn’t be surprised to learn that this message didn’t exactly resonate in the African-American community. I’d go so far as to suggest that socialism’s failure to come up with a more compelling response to racism is an important reason why it never was as successful in the US as it was in Europe.

This is not to say that issues of race and class never intersect. In 1919, the place where the Red Scare intersected most clearly with the Red Summer was in Elaine, Arkansas at the end of September of that year.

Many African Americans in the South at this time, millions of them, were sharecroppers. Sharecroppers were typically heavily in debt. They lived and worked on someone else’s land and had few legal rights. It was a life hardly better than the slavery of old. As you well know, the Great War caused the prices of food and other agricultural products to soar. This included the South’s signature crop, cotton. This also brought about a labor shortage, as African Americans migrated to the factories of the north, or served in the military, or took some of the new civilian jobs the war was creating, such as construction work at military bases.

All these factors increased the demand for farm labor. White landowners in the South and their political allies in the state capitals did their level best to keep the high prices cotton was fetching in the pockets of the landowners and away from the sharecroppers, but even so, there was some

trickle-down, and sharecroppers were finding they had a little money in their pockets for the first time since...ever, really.

People who are destitute are usually too busy keeping body and soul together to agitate for change. It's when their lot improves a little bit that they begin to ask, "Why not more?" Such was the case with factory workers in the North; such was the case with sharecroppers in the South.

This brings us to Phillips County, Arkansas, which lies on the Mississippi River. In 1919, it had a population of about 40,000, over 30,000 of whom were African American. On the evening of September 30, about a hundred African-American sharecroppers met in a church just outside the village of Elaine to organize a new chapter of the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America. That was a fancy name for a small group founded earlier that year and limited to just a handful of chapters in Arkansas. Among its founders was an African-American war veteran, recently returned from France, and it was meant to be a sort of co-op and self-help organization for sharecroppers. One of their goals was to organize cotton farmers against cotton buyers who would only offer a black farmer a fraction of what they were willing to pay a white farmer for cotton. There was a white attorney in Little Rock who had taken up the cause of the rights of sharecroppers and was willing to help out.

Many of the farmers present had already been threatened by their white neighbors, warned against attending this meeting. So they came armed and nervous, and guards were posted in front of the church. That night, as the meeting proceeded inside the building, two white men, a county deputy and a railroad detective, pulled off the road near the church and opened fire on the building. Windows shattered. Tables of literature were overturned as the people inside sought protection. And they returned fire, killing one of the two white men and wounding the other. No one inside the church was seriously hurt, and they fled the scene.

The news that white men had been shot by African Americans terrified the white minority in Phillips County. Rumors quickly flew that the two white lawmen had accidentally stumbled upon a secret meeting of African-American insurrectionists who were plotting a campaign to slaughter all the white people in the region. Local newspapers reported this as fact, under headlines that said things like "Negroes Plan to Kill All Whites" and "Vicious Blacks Were Planning Great Uprising." They also reported that the Farmers and Household Union was a front group organized by socialist agitators attempting to trigger a race war.

Over the next four days, hundreds of armed white men poured into Phillips County from across Arkansas and from Mississippi and Tennessee. They roamed through the county, randomly killing African Americans. The state governor called in about 500 US Army soldiers to help restore order. By all accounts, they joined in the killing.

When the violence ended, at least a hundred African Americans were dead. The number may be as high as three hundred. Four white men were also killed. Hundreds were arrested, all African American. There are reports many were interrogated under torture, and dozens were prosecuted.

No white person was charged with a crime. Twelve African-American defendants were sentenced to death, but legal intervention from the NAACP would result in their convictions being overturned four years later.

The violence in Phillips County during the first four days of October 1919 may have been the bloodiest outbreak of racial violence in US history to date. It's been called the Elaine Race Riot, although in recent years, historians have shifted to the more accurate term, the Elaine Massacre. Reportedly, race relations in Phillips County have been uneasy ever since and remain so even in our time.

The only good news I have for you is that the Elaine Massacre was the last outbreak—well, the last major outbreak—of racial violence in this unhappy year of 1919. It must have been a disturbing and unsettling time to live through. We like to think that our own times are uniquely confusing and unsettled, even traumatic, but history doesn't support that claim. Hard times are nothing new. The people who lived in 1919 went through their own traumatic experiences, war, pandemic, political and social unrest and more. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that in the case of the United States, people went a little crazy over Bolshevism, or that the politics of the time shifted sharply, or that the next Presidential election would be won by the candidate who promised a return to normalcy.

Still, I'd like to think that in the long run, the more hopeful things I mentioned at the beginning of the episode will prove more significant: the new pride felt by African-American veterans, their families and their communities, and even among their white fellow citizens. The new prominence of African Americans in the arts. The rise of jazz. But in the short run, the bitterness of 1919 is going to stick in the memory.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Clinton for making a donation, and thank you to Tim for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Clinton and Tim help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so thank you all for that. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*; we'll remain in the United States and turn to Woodrow Wilson, as he returns from Paris, bringing along the Treaty of Versailles. We'll see what kind of reception it receives in the Senate, and examine the President's deteriorating health. That's in two weeks' time, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. In the midst of the Red Summer, in June 1919, the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, held its annual convention in Cleveland. This would be a pivotal moment for the organization. Although the leadership of the NAACP was still mostly white, the organization had been sending speakers across the country to raise issues of racial justice and recruit new members. The Cleveland convention was organized and run by African Americans and the attendees were mostly African American, including a number of delegates from the South, something new for the organization.

Delegates from different parts of the country shared their experiences. The convention passed resolutions calling for voting rights, equal justice, the right of African Americans to sit on juries, equal access to railroads and public schools, and laws against lynching. Most pointedly, in view of the ongoing Red Scare, the convention passed a resolution that declared, “We warn the American people that the patience of even colored people can find its limit; that with poor schools, Jim Crow methods of travel; little or no justice in court or in things economic staring him in the face, while the colored man is called on to bear his part of the burden in taxation, in government loans, in civic affairs, and in fighting the common foes of our government, we are inviting him to grasp the hands which the Bolsheviks, the IWW, and other kindred organizations held out to him.”

Most significant of all, perhaps, was the rapid growth in membership. At the beginning of 1918, the NAACP had about 9,000 members. By the end of 1919, it had more than 90,000. And it was during this surge in membership that the organization became majority African American. As a sign of its new power and self-confidence, the 1919 convention voted to hold its 1920 convention in Atlanta, Georgia, its first meeting in the South.

[music: Closing Theme]