THE OMAHA RIOT OF 1919

BY

ARTHUR V. AGE

A THESIS

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OMAHA, 1964
Thesis Approved

By

[Signature]

Major Adviser

[Signature]

Dean

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The writing of this thesis was prompted by the unique circumstances surrounding the lynching of Will Brown. The purpose of the thesis is to unravel the strange effects of this unusual lynching and riot. Because of the local and political nature of the event, such usual source materials as books and journals relating to it are practically non-existent. As a result, the main source of this thesis has been the stirring daily record provided by the newspapers of Omaha as found in the files of the Omaha Public Library. I am deeply appreciative of the aid given by its librarians. It is hoped that the account rendered here will shed light on the mystery surrounding Omaha’s venture into mob rule.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

MOB HANGS AND BURNS NEGRO WHO ASSAULTED GIRL

THRONGS AT RIOT SCENE

TROOPS GUARD MAYOR AT HOSPITAL

These were the headlines that greeted the people of Omaha on Monday, September 29, 1919. Throughout the summer Omahans had seethed over reports of rapes, assaults and attacks by Negro men upon white women. Thus, the lynching of Will Brown climaxed the growing unrest that had prevailed since July. With one tremendous outburst of violence, Omaha joined in the troubles besetting the nation in 1919.

For the United States, the year 1919 was one of both industrial and social unrest. It was a time of upheaval in the aftermath of the World War. It was a time of intense emotion; a period of industrial strife; an interval of racial antagonism and radical ferment.

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1Evening World Herald (Omaha), September 29, 1919, p. 1.
The soldier of 1918 came home to a world of change. He had fought a war to make the world safe for democracy. He returned, instead to what often seemed to be the world of the profiteer, the labor agitator, the Red, and the Negro migrant. Thus, the first industrial discord began within four days of the Armistice.  

In the months that followed the cessation of hostilities, strikes became the order of the day. The unions which had grown tremendously moved to consolidate their wartime gains. Capital, on the other hand, responded with fierce opposition. This smouldering conflict reached its peak in the fall of 1919 when three great strikes attracted the attention of the nation. These three strikes of the policemen at Boston, the steelworkers at Gary, Indiana, and the coal miners of Illinois, with their resultant violence and use of the militia, increased the ferment of the day. This constant unrest intensified the public's expectation of a general uprising of labor sponsored by the "Reds", thereby leading many states to enact laws to counter

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these radical influences.  

Accompanying this unrest and contributing to it was the presence of many hundreds of thousands of Negroes who had recently migrated to the North. This migration, which gained impetus in 1915, reached its maximum in 1917, and largely ended in 1918, involved about 500,000 Negroes. The migration, originally stimulated by Northern employers who sent labor agents to the Deep South, was furthered by letters from Negroes who had migrated. The migrants were attracted primarily by the higher wages of the North where they received $4.50 per day in contrast with $.75 to $1.00 per day in the South. Although the cost of living was higher in the North, the gain in real wages was appreciable. In addition to the Negroes' desire to escape low Southern wages, other causes of their migration were an unsatisfactory tenant and share crop system, the boll weevil, crop failures, lynchings, disenfranchisement, segregation, poor schools and ill treatment by Southern sheriffs.

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6 Link, loc. cit.


8 Ibid.

Although most of the migrants came from rural backgrounds, many succeeded in getting unskilled jobs in war-stimulated industries. As in the migration of Negroes to other Northern states, the reasons for Negro settlement in Nebraska, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, were both economic and social. The prime factor was that in Nebraska there were jobs for Negro immigrants. The railroads were pushing construction through the state in the 19th century, and their agents recruited Negro laborers in groups of hundreds to do the job. Negro immigrants found work on the construction gangs of the Union Pacific, Burlington and Midland Pacific. The Midwest Migration Company induced several hundred Negroes to enter Nebraska and attempted to settle them in a colony. This project failed, but the Negroes remained.

Many of the Negroes came into the state during labor disputes and were used as strikebreakers. They were used in this capacity by the Union Pacific Railroad in 1877, by the smelting industry in 1880, and by the packing industry in 1895. After the strikes were settled most of the men remained in the state and some

additional Negroes later came to join their relatives and friends. Since the majority of them were unlettered and unskilled, the only jobs open to them were those of waiters, porters, janitors, and similar menials. Some found jobs in the industries and packing plants, but this number was limited by the competition of other immigrant groups and the indifference of employers toward Negro labor. Yet most migrants settled in larger cities despite the hostility they sometimes encountered. Thus the bulk of Negroes settled in the cities of Omaha, Grand Island and Lincoln where they lived in relatively circumscribed residential districts.

By creating a new demand for Negro labor the First World War stimulated a strong growth of Nebraska's...
colored population. Between 1910 and 1920 the Negro population of the state rose from 7,689 to 13,242. Thus it still was only 1% of the state's total population. Of these 13,242 Negroes in the state in 1920, only 2,155 were native born. These migrants to Nebraska came from varied yet similar backgrounds. Though they were coming to fill industrial jobs, most were originally from rural areas. The states which produced the largest number of immigrants were Missouri (2006), Kansas (1,164), Texas (1163), Alabama (962), Mississippi (576), Tennessee (552), Oklahoma (548), and Kentucky (474). As a rule the Negro immigrants, whether Northern or Southern born, came to Nebraska after making one or more moves involving various periods of years. Notable exceptions, however, were the many hundreds who migrated directly to Omaha from Brewton, Alabama, during the period 1917-1920. These migrants from the Deep South brought along the nucleus of a whole community including ministers.

In that same period of 1910 to 1920 the Negro population of Omaha increased from 5,143 to 10,315, a 100.6% rise. The white population of the city also

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14 Ibid., General Report and Analytical Tables II, 637-640.

15 Nebraska's Writers' Project, op. cit., p. 5.
experienced an increase of 36,105 persons which represented a 24.9% rise over 1910. The total increase in population of 41,246 raised Omaha's total to 191,601 residents. Of this number the Negro represented 5.4% of the citizens of the state's largest city. When the Negro migrant arrived in Omaha, he moved generally into the second and third wards on the northside of the city or the seventh ward on the southside. The two northern wards accounted for 6,485 Negroes while 1,209 lived in the southern ward. In these three wards were the homes of 74% of the city's Negro population. The bulk of these Negroes lived in rented homes, and those who were purchasing houses were mainly in debt. At least 8,000 of the Negroes in Omaha were over 21 years

\[16\] U. S. Bureau of The Census, ibid., p. 47.

\[17\] In 1920 the total population of the United States was 105,710,620. Of this total, 10,463,113 or 9.9% of the population were Negroes. Omaha's Negro population was neither low nor high for a northern city when compared with Chicago's 4.1%, Cleveland's 4.3%, New York's 2.7%, Pittsburgh's 6.4%, and Philadelphia's 4%. However, it was very low when compared with the number of Negroes in the larger Southern Cities such as Houston (24.6%), Dallas (15.1%), Louisville (17.1%), Memphis (37.7), Washington, D. C. (25.1), and New Orleans (26.1%), ibid., pp. 29-49.

\[18\] Ibid., p. 609.

\[19\] Ibid., p. 1,294.
of age. Of those over ten years of age numbering 9,004, 4.5% or 408 persons were illiterate as compared to a city average of 2.5%.\textsuperscript{20} There was work, even for illiterate migrants, however. They found it in the packing houses and in domestic services. The only other significantly large block of Negro workers included the 457 serving as laborers in the building trades of the city.\textsuperscript{21} Thus, the Negro came in large numbers to live and work in a city whose past was vitally connected with the violence of the frontier and whose present was rent by social and political turmoil.

Permanent settlement of Omaha began in 1854 when the Omaha Indians ceded the present Douglas County to the United States. The completion of the Union Pacific Railroad on May 1, 1869, and the subsequent development of the meat packing industry greatly accelerated the growth of Omaha. With this growth of Omaha as a rail and meat center thousands of persons flowed in and through Omaha. To accommodate these throngs, gambling and vice flourished in the wide open town. Vice became big business in Omaha. In 1911 it was estimated that over

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 597.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., Occupations, IV, 1188-1190.
twenty-six hundred prostitutes plied their trade in the city. In that year the net earnings of twelve houses of prostitution were estimated in excess of half a million dollars.  

Omaha's modern development began in 1910. In the years 1915-1917, the city's area was increased by the annexation of South Omaha, Florence, Dundee, and Saratoga. Consequently, the census of 1920 showed 181,046 white residents of Omaha which represented a 41,246 increase over the 1910 count. Of this total white population 80.5% were native born and 19.5% were foreign born. Of the native born 47.8% had parents who were also natives and 22.9% had parents who were foreign born while 9.8% were of mixed parentage. Practically every nationality was represented with Czechoslovakia, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Italy, Denmark, Poland and Ireland providing the bulk of the foreign born. The illiteracy rate for all whites over ten years of age was 0.2% but for the foreign born it was a high of

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24 Ibid., General Report and Analytical Tables, II, 49.

25 Ibid., p. 609.
The total work force of 63,000 white males was for the most part employed in the manufacturing and mechanical industries. The largest area of employment for the foreign born was in the slaughter houses. A significant number were also employed in the domestic services. It was in these two areas of employment that the Negro made large inroads during the war—caused cessation of immigration.

After 1898, control of the boisterous city with its profitable vices was in the hands of a political group known to its foes as the "Old Gang" and headed by a political boss, Tom Dennison. It was Dennison who controlled the vast earnings of the combined liquor-prostitution and gambling interests which flourished during this time. Dennison, who had come to Omaha in 1890 with a past record of gambling successes throughout the West, became the dominant political figure in the city. His headquarters was the Budweiser Saloon on Douglas Street which became the center of activity for the "Old Gang" led by Dennison as leader of the Third Ward.

26 Ibid., p. 597.
27 Ibid., Occupations. IV, 1888-1890.
From these headquarters were dispensed the largess of the city's favors.

Serving as mayor throughout most of the reign of the "Old Gang" was James C. Dahlman who had been elected mayor of Omaha for the first time on April 20, 1906, and who won three consecutive terms thereafter. Originally from Texas, Dahlman had come to Nebraska in 1878. He had been a sheriff in Dawes County and a mayor of Chadron for two consecutive terms. Dahlman was a member of the railway commission of Nebraska from 1896-1897; was chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee for four years; on the Democratic National Committee for eight years; and was engaged in the commission business in South Omaha until his election.\(^{29}\)

Throughout his political career Dahlman styled himself a Bryan Democrat and was a close ally of the orator in his national campaigns. However in 1910, the two broke over the issue of prohibition. In the primary campaign for governor Bryan backed Governor Ashton C. Shallenberger's, an advocate of the county option plan of prohibition. Under this plan each county in Nebraska would be given the right to say whether or not liquor should be sold in that county. Dahlman

\[^{29}\text{Edward F. Morearty, } \text{Omaha Memories, } \text{(Omaha: Swartz Printing Company, 1917), pp. 105-106.}\]
was chosen as the candidate of those who argued that each municipality, not each county, should have this option.\(^{30}\) The race was close, but Dahlman won, only to lose to the Republican candidate in the general election after Bryan withheld his powerful support.\(^{31}\)

This alliance of the mayor with the pro-liquor interest was an issue in all of his campaigns. Liquor and vice as an issue stimulated various factions composed of the so-called better elements of the city to oppose Dahlman. In 1909, he defeated the candidates of the "Law and Order League". In 1912 the mayor had his own "Peoples Ticket" to counteract the opposition's "Citizen Ticket," the result being that every man on his ticket was elected.\(^{32}\)

Having served one term as a city commissioner and three terms as mayor, Dahlman was a candidate to succeed himself in April, 1915. At that primary Mayor Dahlman and his full ticket were selected. In the general election the Omaha Daily News presented a


\(^{31}\)Fred Carey, Mayor Jim (Omaha: Omaha Printing Co., 1930), pp. 119-120.

\(^{32}\)Morearty, op. cit., p. 106.
complete slate of seven to oppose the mayor. When the vote was tabulated, Mayor Dahlman and four others on his ticket were reelected. Only two of the News candidates won, one of whom was supported also by the Omaha Daily Bee and the other by the Omaha World-Herald. James C. Dahlman was again mayor of Omaha.33

But in the election of May, 1918, the seemingly perpetual mayor of Omaha, was defeated. His strength in the city had been weakened temporarily by the illness of Tom Dennison and the subsequent disagreement among the boss's lieutenants. In addition, many of the mayor's loyal supporters were away in the army. Coupled with these weaknesses was the traditional demand for reform which finally succeeded in ousting the "Old Gang".34

The newly victorious mayor, Edward P. Smith, spearheaded a ticket of disgruntled businessmen, prohibitionists, and under-paid school teachers who called their organization the "Committee of 500".35 They had as their leader Elmer Thomas, a longtime foe of liquor and vice as a member of the Anti-Saloon League and a staunch

33Ibid., p. 107.
34Leighton, op. cit., p. 209.
political enemy of Tom Dennison. Although the mayor and his committee had as their main aim the eradication of vice and liquor, they would find an even more controversial problem in the postwar crises of race relations.

During the World War relations between Negro wage earners and white employers, North and South, had improved. The South, forced to compete with the other sections for its basic labor supply, had been induced to raise wages and to give the Negro better treatment. However, at the close of hostilities, Negro soldiers who had hoped to find a new and changed attitude at home were bitterly disillusioned. There was a deliberate effort to belittle the Negroes' war record. Their limited opportunities were overlooked, and low scores on army tests were cited as proof of the Negroes' innate inferiority. Individual acts of stupidity or cowardice were interpreted as racial characteristics.

As the idealism of the war faded, it was replaced with a wave of fear amounting almost to panic concerning the return of Negro soldiers. To counteract any ideas of equality that the black soldiers might have acquired,

36 Morearty, *op. cit.* p. 66.
37 Davie, *loc. cit.*
a newly organized Ku Klux Klan began to appeal to the worst passions. On numerous occasions Negroes were chased, hunted, beaten, shot, hanged and burned. More than seventy Negroes were lynched during the first year following the war, and race riots occurred in cities both North and South. 39

The first of these riots occurred at Charleston, South Carolina, on May 10, 1919. It began with the shooting by a Negro of a sailor. In the ensuing melee two Negroes were killed and twenty were wounded while the sailors from the Naval Training Station suffered eight casualties. 40 Similarly, violence erupted at Longview, Texas, on July 11, 1919, when Negroes fired upon a group of white men. The white group was searching for a Negro school teacher accused of making derogatory remarks about a white woman. Consequently, four white men received wounds and a number of Negro homes were burned. 41 A week later riotings spread to the nation's capital where mobs composed chiefly of servicemen


pillaged the Negro section. Additional police were added and were supplemented by twelve thousand troops. The riot lasting from July 19, 1919, to July 23, 1919, resulted in three Negro and four white deaths with an additional thirty more being wounded. This was to be the prelude to the bloodiest of all the postwar riots.

The bloody and violent Chicago riot lasted from July 27, 1919, until August 4, 1919. When it was over, twenty-two Negroes and sixteen whites had been killed with an additional five hundred-thirty-seven injured. A series of events foreshadowed the riot. On April 22, a series of fights between whites and Negroes occurred on the Southside. After this near race riot, fifty policemen were posted in the district. Racial feeling had been gaining in intensity with the encroachment of the Negro into a district further southward. On the night of June 23 the brewing animosity resulted in a racial clash which left two Negroes dead. Again on July 1, racial disputes resulted in the death of one Negro and serious injuries to five whites. Then on July 27, the bloody Chicago riot was precipitated by white bathers throwing stones at a Negro boy on a raft who as a result fell from the craft and drowned. The

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Further south in Knoxville, Tennessee, a riot resulted in the death of one Negro and an officer of the National Guard. The riot began on August 30, 1919, when a group of white men raided the jail searching for a Negro accused of murdering a white woman. Angered at not finding him, the mob wrecked the jail, released the white prisoners, and then moved on to the Negro section. The National Guard was called to quell the dispute which in addition to the fatalities produced the wounding of seven whites and six Negroes.  

Although Omaha was not in the forefront of the rioting of 1919, the city had had an earlier incident of racial violence. On October 1, 1891, a convicted white murderer had been legally executed. In the jail on that same day had been a Negro prisoner named George Smith, who had been accused of assaulting a white girl. After the legal execution of the white murderer, it was erroneously reported to the citizens that the assault victim had died. In the excitement of the day a mob gathered and, after kidnapping the sheriff, broke into the Douglas County Courthouse, seized Smith and

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43 Work, op. cit., pp. 75-77.

44 Dowd, loc. cit.
hanged him to a cable that supported the street car trolley lines.\textsuperscript{45} After that time, race relations in Omaha had stabilized.

However, with the influx of many thousands of Negroes during the war, the tenor of feeling took a turn for the worse. In June, 1919, a teamster strike was broken by the use of Negro strikebreakers while in the same month a strike at the stockyards failed. The Negroes who had come as strikebreakers were viewed with contempt by the displaced workers and jobless servicemen. The mayor who had not entered the labor disputes had also aroused bitterness and resentment among the workers.\textsuperscript{46} Problems of labor relations, liquor and politics would combine with the mounting racial tensions to make 1919 a terrible year for both Omaha's mayor and his Negro constituents.

\textsuperscript{45}Alfred Sorenson, \textit{The Story of Omaha From The Pioneer Days To The Present} (Omaha National Printing Company, 1923), p. 647.

\textsuperscript{46}Leighton, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 210-211.
CHAPTER II

PRELUDE TO A LYNCHING

To report and influence the events of 1919, Omaha had three daily newspapers: the World-Herald, the Daily News and the Bee. The Bee, oldest of the three with a daily circulation of sixty-three thousand, was founded in 1871 by Edward Rosewater. In 1919 the editor of this avowed Republican organ was Dr. Victor Rosewater, son of the founder. The Evening World, founded in 1885 by Gilbert M. Hitchcock, later United States senator from Nebraska, had merged with the Omaha Herald in 1889 to form the World-Herald. That simon-pure Democratic paper with a circulation of seventy thousand was edited by Harvey E. Newbranch. Larger in circulation with eighty thousand readers was the politically independent and prohibitionist Omaha Daily News, which was owned by the Scripps-McRae syndicate and edited by Joseph Polcar.¹ Each of these daily newspapers was to play an important role in the events

that led up to the riot and its aftermath.

In addition to the dailies, there were many other papers representing Omaha at this time. Typically, there were papers representing Omaha's diverse foreign backgrounds, such as: The Omaha Posten (Swedish); The Danish Pioneer; Pokrok Zapudu (Bohemian); and The Omaha Daily Tribune (German). However, the two journals which gave especially enlightening commentary on the racial events of the day were The Examiner, edited and published by Alfred Sorenson and The Monitor, the local Negro publication, edited by the Reverend John Albert Williams. The Reverend Williams, who was also the local leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, found ample employment in his dual positions since much of the local news in 1919 concerned assaults allegedly committed by Negroes.²

Throughout the year the daily press chronicled stories relating to assaults and rapes reportedly perpetrated by Negroes. It was the Bee that first began to give front page coverage to such assaults. Later the Daily News became a prolific

reporter in that area, with the World Herald almost inaudible until the eve of the lynching of Will Brown. As early as March 15, 1919, the local newspapers were heralding the increase in Negro crimes. On that date in a page one article, the Bee told of the attack upon Mrs. J. H. Glassman of 2607 Bristol Street. The newspaper mentioned that this was the fifth such incident in one month. The story related murmurings of lynching the Negro if he were apprehended.\(^3\) On the following Sunday, Chief of Detectives John Dunn announced that an arrest was imminent and that these cases resembled two others that had occurred earlier.\(^4\) On Monday, officers arrested a Negro, Henry Culpepper, on the charges. The police declared that another Negro, Homer Collins of 1503 Cummings Street in Omaha, was also involved. Yet on Tuesday, the police released the men. The Bee reported that the identification of the suspects did not agree with the complainants' descriptions. In addition, the newspaper belatedly noted that Mrs. Glassman had not been raped.\(^5\)

At a meeting of local Negro leaders, on March

\(^3\)Omaha Daily Bee. March 15, 1919, p. 1.
\(^4\)Ibid.. March 16, 1919, p. 1.
\(^5\)Ibid. March 17, 1919, p. 5.
18, 1919, Marshall Eberstein, the Chief of Police, was criticized for making remarks that could incite riots. Chief Eberstein was chided for saying that "If local Negroes don't stop the assaults and aid in the capture, riots could result as in East St. Louis. In a like vein, the Negro newspaper pointed out editorially that the Glassman case was a "frameup". It hammered at the fact that allegations were not substantiated by arrests and convictions.

Despite the Negro protests against the press' handling of the Glassman case, Omaha newspapers were soon giving similar prominence to other assaults. On April 22, 1919, the Bee reported an attack by a Negro on Mrs. Kyra Kapara of 1623 First Avenue in Council Bluffs. The Bee commented that this was the third attack in two months by Negroes on white women in Council Bluffs. On May 11 an incident of a different nature occurred. Roy Teeter, a nineteen year old white youth,

6Ibid., March 18, 1919, p. 5. Significantly, an investigating committee attributed the anti-Negro sentiment in East St. Louis to the use of Negroes as strikebreakers rather than to their responsibility for rapes. (U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Special Committee to Investigate East St. Louis Riots. 65th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1918, House Doc. 1231, pp. 1-2.

7The Monitor (Omaha), March 29, 1919, p. 2.

8Omaha Daily Bee. April 22, 1919, p. 5.
was killed in a quarrel with Albert Jackson, a young Negro. Teeter had interfered in an argument between Jackson and another Negro over an automobile accident. Witnesses reported that Teeter, who had not been involved in the accident, struck Jackson who in turn shot him. The next day a coroner's jury found that Jackson had killed Teeter. With that news an angry mob formed outside the funeral parlor where the body was being held. On Wednesday the Bee revealed that Jackson, in the opinion of Michael F. Dempsey, the former Chief of Police, was a dope fiend totally irresponsible for his actions.

The stories of rape continued into the month of May. On May 24, the Bee reported that Barbara Gerhart, age seventeen, of 2211 South Sixteenth Street in Omaha had been "attacked by a Negro and dragged into an alley". Police and residents scoured the city for her assailant.

Again on June 4, the Bee in a front page article told


10_Ibid._, May 12, 1919, p. 4.

11_Ibid._, May 14, 1919, p. 10.

12_Ibid._, May 24, 1919, p. 6. Henry Dennis, Negro, was convicted and sentenced to two to fifteen years in prison for the crime. (Ibid., June 3, 1919, p. 1).
of a rape by a Negro of twenty year old Ida Terp.\textsuperscript{13} However, on the next day the white girl was unable to identify her assailant.\textsuperscript{14} Similarly, Mrs. C. R. McConnell on June 20 could not tell whether she had been assaulted by a Negro or a Mexican.\textsuperscript{15}

Throughout the remainder of the summer months, locally as well as nationally, the Negro was news. The lynching and burning of an Elford, Missouri, Negro for assault on a white girl received front page treatment.\textsuperscript{16} Likewise, a riot at an Omaha ballpark between several hundred Negroes and whites during an interracial baseball game was equally newsworthy.\textsuperscript{17} The month of July saw a quickening of tension as reported by the newspapers. On July 5, John Hansen of 4838 Pine Street warned the police that the men of the area would organize to protect themselves against a Negro named Nelson who "hangs in the neighborhood".\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., June 4, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., June 5, 1919, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., June 20, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., June 27, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., June 30, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., July 5, 1919, p. 3.
Three days later a bigger story broke. Miss Bessie Kroupa, a nineteen year old white girl, claimed that she had been assaulted by a Negro near Tenth and B Streets. She described him as short and stout with a pock marked, mustached face. The papers reported that the physicians said her condition was serious and confirmed that she had been abused. The Bee claimed in the same article that a similar attack by a Negro had occurred the previous week.19 On the next day it headlined:

"ASSAILANT IDENTIFIED BY VICTIM"
"PARENTS OF GIRL TRY TO KILL ACCUSED MAN"

In lurid gory detail, the article told of the capture of Ira Johnson, a twenty eight year old Negro, in the Gibson railroad yards. J. E. Kroupa, father of the girl, had had to be restrained from attacking the Negro with a revolver. Kroupa's wife, the girl's mother, had lunged at the suspect with a butcher knife. Some men in the crowd had had ropes, but the police had prevented any attempt at lynching.

At a second identification in the Kroupa home the father of the victim met the police with a shotgun, but was disarmed. The girl again identified the prisoner, but Johnson maintained his innocence. In the

19 Ibid., July 8, 1919, p. 4.
same article the Bee rebuked Chief Eberstein for saying that Johnson was the wrong man. The newspaper contended that Johnson fitted the girl's description in every detail. In addition a bloody shirt was said to have been found near his bunk.  

When Johnson was brought before Judge Crawford of the county court for a preliminary hearing on July 9, the Bee reported that the police feared the possibility of violence and a lynching if he were brought from the courthouse to the police court. Johnson pleaded not guilty. Expressing obvious disagreement with Johnson's plea, the Bee said of him:

He is a man of medium size, pock marked with two teeth missing and a small moustache, all these identification marks being included in the description given by Miss Kroupa to the police. He was identified by her positively Tuesday at her home.

On July 18, 1919, Ira Johnson was brought again before Judge Crawford and arraigned on the charge of rape of Bessie Kroupa. The Bee reported that the defendant was again positively identified as the assailant. After the defense did not offer any witnesses, Johnson was bound

20 Ibid., July 9, 1919, pp. 1-2. In an editorial that day the Bee wrote "No lynching for Omaha. Let the law take its course."

21 Ibid., July 10, 1919, p. 6.
over to the district court under $5,000 bond to await further trial.\textsuperscript{22}

During the next few weeks the Bee filled its pages with narratives of riots and turmoil around the country. Each new disturbance was treated as front page news. Stories were carried concerning lynchings and riots at Longview and Gilmer, Texas, Washington, D. C. and Chicago, Illinois. The Bee disagreed with Mississippi Governor Theodore Bilbo's opinion that lynchings were the inevitable consequences of the Negro's new-found freedoms coming from the war.\textsuperscript{23} Yet the Bee's editors slanted each article on the riots to show that they were taking place to right wrongs allegedly committed by Negroes. Indicative of this tendency was the following:

\textbf{15 CASUALTIES REPORTED IN CLASHES AT CAPITAL LAST MIDNIGHT}

Onsets on colored persons in retaliation for recent attacks by Blacks on white women, troops of cavalry and 400 armed servicemen unable to avert fights.\textsuperscript{24}

At the end of July reports of local racial incidents began to heighten. On July 31, the Bee reported that a Council Bluffs woman had been

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, July 19, 1919, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}, July 13, 1919, p. 6B.

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Ibid.}, July 22, 1919, p. 1.
assaulted. This was followed by another reported rape on August 2, with the Bee pointing out that this was the second such crime in 48 hours. The Bee the next day announced the arrest of Jefferson Jones, a Negro, for assault on Mrs. Agnes Patrio and her two daughters. At his arraignment he was found to be uninvolved in the assault, but he received thirty days for vagrancy. From this time on, daily reports of attacks by Negroes built up tensions between the races. On August 6, a truck driver reported rescuing a seven year old girl from an attack by a Negro. The driver claimed to have chased the Negro across the bridge at Forty-Fifth and Dodge Street. Another Negro assailant made the first page of the Bee's August 9th edition. The reporter charged that the Negro had bound and gagged an eleven year old while he burglarized her home. On that same day two Omaha women were victims of attempted assaults by Negroes. Additionally, an altercation on the street-

25 Ibid., July 31, 1919, p. 5.
26 Ibid., August 2, 1919, p. 5.
27 Ibid., August 3, 1919, p. 3A.
28 Ibid., August 7, 1919, p. 6.
29 Ibid., August 9, 1919, p. 1.
car involving a Negro and a white man resulted in the arrest of the Negro.\textsuperscript{30}

On Sunday, August 10, Andrew Webb, a Negro, was arrested and identified as the intruder who had burglarized and bound the eleven year old girl on August 9. Webb had been wounded in the previous month by Edward Hoover, a white man, who claimed that Webb had insulted his wife.\textsuperscript{31} In the ensuing days the Bee viewed with wrath the assault of a Negro, Johnny Moore, upon four white girls aged nine to fourteen. The alleged assailant was captured in a corn field where the Bee asserted a mob had gathered, angered by the report of the attack.\textsuperscript{32} However, in court the next day Moore was sentenced to only ninety days for disorderly conduct when all of the girls failed to appear to prosecute the more serious charges.\textsuperscript{33}

These almost daily racial incidents quickened the tempo and feelings of the citizenry. A Negro janitor was arrested for terrorizing some office girls

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., August 11, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., August 12, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., August 13, 1919, p. 5.
with a revolver,\textsuperscript{34} a Negro reportedly attacked an aged woman,\textsuperscript{35} a young white woman was accosted by two Negroes in a corn field, and another chased two Negroes from her running board.\textsuperscript{36} As these reports increased, the growing number of armed citizens became an obvious fact. When the \textit{Daily News} recorded the attack on Anna Glassman, a twelve year old, by a Negro, it also told of the armed posse that was formed to ferret out the assailant.\textsuperscript{37} In nearby Florence an armed vigilance committee was formed to protect against "orchard robbers".\textsuperscript{38} With this armed activity the violence of the crimes and pursuit intensified. There Negro boys confessed to the holdup slaying of a white grocer, Nathan Shapiro.\textsuperscript{39} On that same day an armed mob nearly lynched a Negro in the railroad yards after an alleged attack.\textsuperscript{40} That feelings had reached a fever pitch was indicated by the captions

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{35}Omaha Daily News. August 16, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., August 25, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., August 17, 1919, p. 1. On September 5, John Williams, a Negro, was arrested and identified by Anna Glassman as the man who had assaulted her on August 25; in addition, two other victims identified Williams as their assailant. \textit{Ibid.}, September 5, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{38}Omaha Daily Bee. August 19, 1919, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., August 28, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., p. 4.
Emotions were rising among both Negroes and whites. Reacting to the mounting wave of hostility against Negroes, the local Negro newspaper, the Monitor, offered several explanations for the racial tension. One was the attitude of the returned servicemen who had been propagandized against the Negro by white southern military officers. Another and more compelling reason was the job competition that the Negroes presented to the whites, including both those who had remained home and those who had entered the armed forces. In June, 1919, Omaha Teamster Local 22 had issued a circular in which racial and economic tensions were intertwined. It read:

"Law abiding citizens of Omaha shall at once take steps:
To protect their wives and daughters from the horrors of East St. Louis.
To safeguard their homes, their valuables and their lives.
Do you want to suffer from an influx of Negroes and disreputables like Omaha experienced in the summer of 1917? We are reliably informed that a carload of Negroes is again being imported from East St. Louis, in order to break the strike of


42 *The Monitor* (Omaha), July 24, 1919, p. 4.
the Omaha Teamsters who are fighting for a living wage and the right to belong to a union. Prettiest Mile Revolver Club, take notice.  

Again in August the teamsters were aroused by rumors that about 500 Negroes had come into town to replace laborers in the packing houses.  

In addition to labor union propaganda, the Monitor cited the local press, in particular the Bee, as a prime factor in the rise of prejudice and tension among the races. The Daily News, which it was noted had increased its racial news, and the Bee, were chided for using glaring headlines and lurid descriptions to the minutest detail when reporting crimes by Negroes, while relegating denials and dismissals of these charges to later pages. The Negro newspaper scolded the press for failure to attribute the crimes in the southern part of the city to whites who blackened their faces. An example was shown in the case of a white youth who was arrested on the southside with just such a disguise. Additionally, the Negro editor saw the

\[ \text{\underline{Ibid.}, June 19, 1919, p. 4.} \]
\[ \text{\underline{Omaha Daily Bee}, August 13, 1919, p. 12.} \]
\[ \text{\underline{The Monitor}, July 24, 1919, p. 4.} \]
\[ \text{\underline{Ibid.}, July 10, 1919, p. 4.} \]
charges of rape as an escape for white women caught voluntarily engaging in illicit acts with Negroes. Despite the Monitor's arguments, race relations continued to falter with every new report concerning the Negro.

Suddenly, the fatal shooting of a Negro bellboy for a time caused a lessening of intensity in the reporting of assaults by Negroes. On Monday, September 10, 1919, Eugene Scott, a bellboy, was killed by members of the police department's morals squad headed by Detective Paul Sutton. Scott was shot in a raid on the Plaza Hotel as he allegedly ran with a bottle of illegal liquor. The Bee used this incident as the basis of an all out campaign against the police department with particular emphasis given to Commissioner Dean Ringer, Detective Paul Sutton and the morals squad. The Bee carried on a campaign against the morals squad's attention to liquor and vice instead of to what the editors considered the more important problem of Negro assaults. In daily editorial comments it called for changes in the policies of the department and for the

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47 Ibid., August 7, 1919, p. 4.

48 Omaha Daily Bee, September 1, 1919, p. 1.
suspension of Sutton and the morals squad.\textsuperscript{49} It loudly applauded County Attorney A. V. Shotwell for charging two members of the morals squad with manslaughter in the Scott Case.\textsuperscript{50} Finally, on September 14, after a constant barrage by the \textit{Bee} and mass protests by Negroes, the squad was abolished.\textsuperscript{51}

But, despite the \textit{Bee}'s brief concern over the shooting of a Negro, tension between races continued to increase in Omaha and its vicinity. This was reflected in the deputizing of fifty ex-servicemen by the Council Bluffs police.\textsuperscript{52} Even undeputized citizens were armed, as evidenced by their frequent exchanges of gunfire with prowlers.\textsuperscript{53} Earlier in September a railroad agent at Missouri Valley shot and killed a Negro who had attacked him.\textsuperscript{54} This news excited an

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{49}Typical were such editorial blurbs as: "Well, why was Paul Sutton reappointed?" Originally, however, the \textit{Bee} had supported the reform ticket in the 1918 election and had endorsed Ringer, a former vice investigator in South Omaha, for Police commissioner. This endorsement however seemed to decline with his vigorous enforcement of prohibition. \textit{Ibid.}, September 5, 1919, p. 6.
    \item \textsuperscript{50}\textit{Ibid.}, September 6, 1919, p. 6.
    \item \textsuperscript{51}\textit{Ibid.}, September 14, 1919, p. 1. The Monitor urged protest meetings and published two scorching editorials condemning the morals squad. (The Monitor, September 4, 1919, p. 4. and September 11, 1919, p. 2.
    \item \textsuperscript{52}\textit{Omaha Daily Bee}. September 15, 1919, p. 3.
    \item \textsuperscript{53}\textit{Omaha Daily News}. September 20, 1919, p. 3.
    \item \textsuperscript{54}\textit{Ibid.}, September 17, 1919, p. 2.
\end{itemize}
already aroused Omaha. Adding flame to the fire was the news of a near-lynching at Grand Island, Nebraska. A Negro, Leo Darling, had admitted the slaying of Union Pacific conductor R. L. Massey of Omaha. Seventy-five men marched on the town hall and were joined by a thousand others who were "thirsting for blood of a Negro". Failing to find him the mob moved on to the Negro section, but no damage or fatalities occurred.55

Since June, Omaha had seethed and smouldered because of reports of rapes, assaults, prowlers, shooting, and violence, but no concrete convictions had dampened the excitement. Many whites were jobless, but they saw newly arrived Negroes working. Moreover newspapers told how these same Negroes were abusing white women and attacking white men. Every day violence seemed to be getting closer to home. Omaha was at her breaking point.

CHAPTER III

THE LYNCHING OF WILL BROWN

Violence and mob action seemed to be creeping closer to Omaha. When the news of another assault exploded fully in the press, taut emotions snapped. The alleged rape of Agnes Loebeck caused the World-Herald, previously taciturn on racial matters, to burst into print with the fiery editorial challenge: "Our women must and will be protected at all costs." The lynching of Will Brown was to follow.

What terrible shock could have stirred the World-Herald into using such emotional words? The story that so moved the newspaper had not received the headlines given to earlier incidents of less consequence. Yet the assault upon Agnes Loebeck did serve to trigger a tremendous burst of fury that had been building for months in the newspapers and among Omahans. The rape of Miss Loebeck became a deed which changed Omaha into a city briefly ruled by a mob. In its details the story was similar to others, but its effects were of a much greater importance.

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1Evening World-Herald (Omaha), September 27, 1919, p. 18.
Shortly after midnight on the night of September 25, nineteen year old Agnes Loebeck was returning from the theater to her home at 3228 South Second Avenue. Her escort, also nineteen, was Millard Hoffman of 1923 South Thirteenth Avenue. Suddenly, at the intersection of Bancroft Street and Scenic Avenue, an unidentified Negro with a revolver in his hand jumped from the bushes. He robbed Hoffman of his money, wallet, and watch and relieved the girl of some valuable rings. The assailant then dragged the Loebeck girl in to the bushes by her hair. When she attempted to escape, then he punched and knocked her to the ground. Throughout the assault, Hoffman, who was a cripple, was unable to offer any aid. After the attacker had raped the girl, he carried her back to Hoffman and ordered them to remain there ten minutes while he made his escape. After the interval had elapsed, the couple ran to the Loebeck home to notify the police.

Eight detectives and policemen under the direction of Captain Anton Varnous and Sergeant A. J. Samuelson responded with additional squads being sent

\(^2\)Ibid., September 26, 1919, p. 1.

\(^3\)Omaha Daily News, September 26, 1919, p. 1.
from the southside station. They were aided in the search by railroad detectives who volunteered their services. These were joined by a posse of railroad men and residents of the area. Most of the men were armed with shotguns and revolvers and orders that under no circumstances should they allow the Negro to escape.

The searchers, guided by a description from Miss Loebeck, were looking for a small man, possibly a hunchback. This description tallied with that of a Negro who had robbed a man three weeks in the neighborhood. Many residents of the area had already purchased weapons and had threatened to kill any Negro seen in the neighborhood. There was talk of lynching the culprit when he should be caught. These plans were soon put into action.

The Bee on September 27, headlined its story: "Girl identifies Assailant—Officers Keep Mob Off Negro."

The ensuing article told of the apprehension and arrest of Will Brown on the evening of September 26, the day after the rape. The suspect was arrested by Emergency Officer Sinclair, Special Detective Harry

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4Omaha Daily Bee, September 26, 1919, p. 1.
Lightell, and Chauffeur Heine Bosen who were investigating a call in the vicinity of Fifth and Cedar Streets. A neighbor pointed out Brown's home as one in which two suspicious looking Negroes were living with a white woman, Virginia Jones. When the officers investigated they found the forty-year old Negro packing house worker alone and armed. The frightened suspect was then taken to the Loebeck home where the victim hysterically identified him, screaming: "Take him away, the sight of him has been haunting me since he stopped me on the street and dragged me into the clump of weeds." The press reported that the Loebeck girl's escort, Millard Hoffman, had also identified Brown by saying: "There is not the least bit doubt but what he is the Negro that assaulted Agnes."7

By ten P.M. on the night of September 26, before the police could remove Brown from the Loebeck home, an angry mob gathered to lynch him. Forced by the mob to remain in the house, the officers had to go two miles to phone for reinforcements because all the lines in the

6*Omaha Daily Bee*, September 27, 1919, p. 1.
8The *Bee* estimated the mob at 250 men and women. *Omaha Daily Bee*, September 27, 1919, p. 1., while the *Omaha Daily News*, gave the number as 1500 (*Omaha Daily News*), September 27, 1919, p. 1.
area had been cut. When finally a call had gotten through, Captain Anton Varnous ordered all available men to the scene to aid the three beleagured policemen who, with Brown, had been held as virtual prisoners for over an hour. Before the carloads of additional police arrived, Brown had been seized and severely beaten by the mob.\footnote{Ibid.} When the reinforcements rescued Brown, members of the mob, who had succeeded in placing a noose around the prisoner's neck, shouted their threats of getting him yet. The battered prisoner was then whisked off to the County Jail for safekeeping. To prevent further outbreaks of violence forty-eight additional officers were kept on duty until the next morning.\footnote{Omaha Daily Bee, September 27, 1919, p. 1.}

When Will Brown was questioned concerning the assault, he maintained his innocence. The suspect contended that he had been unable to work because of rheumatism. In addition, he claimed that Agnes Loebeck had only partially identified him, and that she had said, "Yes, he was a black man alright, but I can't say whether this is the man or not."\footnote{Omaha Daily News, September 27, 1919, p. 1.} Brown also revealed that he
had been arrested the previous week in connection with an assault at Twenty-First and C Streets, but had been released. Both of Brown's contentions were disputed. Virginia Jones, the white woman with whom Brown had been living, and Harry Johnson, the other Negro who resided there, claimed that Brown had come home after them on the night of the crime. They disclosed that they had been at the theater together and had returned home before Brown had come back looking nervous and excited. Agnes Loebeck also denied that she had partially identified him, as the Negro who had been loitering in the neighborhood. Indeed, the newspapers did not paint a pleasant picture for Will Brown as County Attorney A. B. Shotwell filed criminal assault charges against him on Saturday, September 27, 1919.

By Sunday officials had taken steps to satisfy the cry against rapists and potential rapists with the wholesale arrests of forty-six vagrants, most of them Negroes, who were exiled from the city. This was done

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12 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 *Omaha Daily Bee*. September 28, 1919, p. 7D.
as it was rumored that Brown would receive a secret hearing that Monday in the courthouse, and that a mob would storm the building and lynch him. Adding substance to this fear of an impending lynching was the welter of damaging evidence being published against Brown which was helping to convict him in the public mind. Chief among the pieces of evidence was the claim that the identical clothing which Agnes Loebeck had described as being worn by her assailant had been found in Brown's room along with a double barreled rifle. In addition, Louise Loebeck had identified Brown as the man wearing a white felt hat who had been seen in the neighborhood. This same white felt hat and a revolver were purported to have been found when the suspect's room had been searched. This evoked the supposition that Brown had worn his darker hat on the night of the assault and had changed later to a lighter one. An outraged press thundered at the number of rapes and assaults committed by Negroes against white females in the past few months. Dismay at the frequency and

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18 *Omaha Daily Bee*. September 28, 1919, p. 7D.
20 Ibid.. September 27, 1919, p. 2. The News claimed that since June 7, there had been 21 attacks, with 16 of them committed by Negroes. Five of the victims were less than 18 years old with two of them under 12.
violence of assaults, and disillusionment at the efforts to correct the situation were expressed; redress was demanded.

The World-Herald doubtlessly summed up the feeling of much of the community with an editorial entitled "Protection for Womanhood" which stated:

"Attacks on Omaha women and girls have at last challenged the indignant attention of the community. The extreme limit of endurance has been reached. The apex has been passed with the criminal assault on little Agnes Loebeck Thursday night by an unidentified Negro. The crime was one of the boldest and most degraded in the annals of crime. The womanhood of Omaha is aroused. Many women feel they are not safe in their own home. They fear for the safety of their daughters if away from home after nightfall and regrettable as it is to be forced to make the admission their fears are not groundless. They are demanding better protection they have a perfect right to demand it for themselves and their daughters—protection from both white and black degenerates.

"If police protection continues unavailing Omaha stands in a fair way of still further being disgraced by mob law, violence, for the people of Omaha, or any other reputable city, will not stand to have women and girls left helpless before their assailants.

"The other day when a bank was robbed of a few thousand dollars more than a hundred men were soon on the trail of the bandits. The police and the state officials were prompt and untiring in their efforts to catch the culprits and recover the money. Is money, like bootleg whiskey, more valuable than womanhood? Omaha and surrounding country should be combed, and every avenue of possible escape watched until the assailant of little Agnes Loebeck has been caught—and then let no mistake be made when the case is called in court."
Our women must and will be protected at all costs.\textsuperscript{21}

Thus even the newspaper which had hitherto given less prominence to rape news joined the chorus calling for stern action. The readers of the Sunday newspapers, being free from work, were also free to form the mob feared by the \textit{World-Herald}'s editors and to answer terribly its cry for protection of womanhood.

As early as noon on Sunday, September 28, 1919, forty young men appeared outside the Douglas County Courthouse to seek Will Brown. Their quarry was housed on the top floor of the magnificent five story stone building located in the heart of downtown Omaha. The sturdy structure and its beautiful front lawn occupied the entire block bounded on the east and west by Seventeenth and Eighteenth Streets and on the north and south by Farnam and Harney Streets. It had been erected in 1912, taking the place of the old court house built in 1885.\textsuperscript{22} Here, Omaha would join the rest of the troubled nation of 1919 in a display of unrestrained mob violence.

At noon when the youthful demonstrators appeared,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21}Evening \textit{World-Herald}, September 27, 1919, p. 18.
\item \textsuperscript{22}Edward F. Morearty, \textit{Omaha Memories} (Omaha: Swartz Printing Company, 1917), p. 165.
\end{itemize}
only half a dozen policemen who guarded the south and east entrances to the courthouse easily held them off. These were insufficient, however, by about three o'clock when the youths at the courthouse were joined by another group of three hundred young men who had marched from Bancroft School under the leadership of Millard Hoffman. Chief of Detectives Dunn had been notified of the march and had intercepted the marchers at Thirteenth and Williams Streets. He had urged them to turn back, but this request had been met with laughter and derision. At the courthouse this group was joined by many older men mostly from the area around Bancroft School. By then the crowd numbered between five hundred and six hundred people, most of whom were armed with clubs and a variety of other weapons. To contain such a force a handful of policemen was on hand.

Thirty policemen surrounded the courthouse when the boys arrived. Sergeant P. H. Dillon, with five patrolmen was guarding the south entrance. A Negro officer, William Ransom, who was in plain clothes,
pulled his revolver and admonished the white boys. The sight of the weapon infuriated the mob, and Sergeant Dillon ordered Ransom into the building. For about an hour after its arrival at the courthouse the crowd was not unruly, and the policemen tossed verbal barbs back and forth with the youths. This led the police to believe that nothing serious would result from the gathering. Captain Henry Heitfield at the Central Police Station, located only eight blocks away at Dodge and Eleventh Streets, reported that the mob was dispersing and that the policemen at the scene had the situation under control. At 4:15 Captain Heitfield released for the night fifty officers who had been held in reserve for an emergency. They were told to be ready at home for a telephone alert if they were needed.

When the men at the station were released for the night, the mob at the scene numbered five thousand with the spectators and curiosity seekers indistinguishable from the active participants.

So large a mass was not long contained. The mob

27 Ibid., October 3, 1919, p. 1.
began to grow restless when L. J. Thomas, a mechanic for the Andrew-Murphy Auto Company, began to harangue the policemen. "If it was your mother, your sister, your wife or your daughter that was assaulted by a Negro you would be with us," he shouted. "It isn't safe to leave our wives in the house now. When a Negro does get arrested for assaulting a woman," contended Thomas, "all he gets is sixty days. Take off your badges, you cops, any other kind of job will net you more money," the agitator taunted. "Be with us. Let us get that Negro." 29

Sergeant S. L. Morris's reply that a fair trial for the Negro was needed met with resounding disapproval. A cry to rush the door was sounded and the mob pushed toward the south entrance, only to be repulsed by a dozen club wielding policemen. Thus thwarted there, the mob surged to the north entrance where it was again forced to retreat by the battling officers. 30 In the melee one officer was pushed through the door pane. 31 Another, upon brandishing his night stick was grabbed and punched

in the nose and mouth. Patrolman R. P. Samardick was seized and badly beaten by the mob and was rescued by the intervention of Patrolman H. S. Askwith who cajoled the mob into releasing the officer. These tastes of combat and violence led the mob to further attempts to gain entrance to the building.

About five o'clock the mob divided into groups with George and William Sutez, two well known amateur baseball players who lived at Wirth and Bancroft Streets, at the head of one segment. William Francis of Thirteenth and Vinton Streets, who was riding a horse and had a rope at its side, was the leader of the other group. So organized, the mob at 5:15 began a revived onslaught upon the south entrance of the building. Aided by clubs and a battering ram the mob succeeded in tearing down one of the big oak doors which led into the basement. The defenders responded with a stream of water, but the resulting retreat of the mob to Harney Street proved to be only temporary.

At this moment appeared a new target for the

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34 Omaha Daily News, September 29, 1919, p. 2.
mob's hatred, Chief of Police Marshall Eberstein. L. J. Thomas, one of the leaders of the mob, granted Chief Eberstein's request to speak to the clamoring throng. The chief besought the mob to let justice take its course and to allow Will Brown to have a fair trial. The already muttering crowd began to howl and would not permit the chief to continue speaking. They began screaming and throwing stones at Eberstein who was perched on a window sill of the building. The easy target was hit on the head and was forced to retreat into the courthouse. By this time every window on the south side of the building had been broken by the constant barrage of brickbats. Under such a steady hail the defending policemen fled to the second floor. The crowd surged in, but they met a volley of gunfire from the second floor. Two youths obtained a ladder and entered the second floor, but they were promptly arrested. A hose used from the fourth floor only dampened the crowd below which by six o'clock had swelled to six thousand.

By seven o'clock most of the policemen had withdrawn to the fourth floor of the building where Michael Clark, Sheriff of Douglas County, had summoned his deputies in the hope of preventing the capture of Will Brown. Here they would form their last line of resistance in the attempt to foil all efforts to take the intended victim from the jail on the fifth floor. Yet, by eight o'clock a new development caused a change of plans. Gasoline in large quantities was thrown into the building and set ablaze. The flames forced the crowd back and some of the defending officers had to retreat to the outside. Under the American flag taken from the nearby Y.M.C.A., the mob rushed the officers, and fifty men gained entrance. Bullets splattered everywhere, as members of the mob had armed themselves by pillaging hardware stores and pawnshops in the business district. The mob's members upon going into the courthouse shot at any officer who dared show himself and wounded seven of the police.

Meanwhile, the hoodlums, led largely by boys

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38 Omaha's Riot in Story and Picture.
40 Omaha's Riot in Story and Picture.
under twenty, ran rampant throughout the business dis-

trict. Any Negro who ventured into the area was subjected
to an instant beating. One Negro was spotted on Seventeenth
Street and was chased by several boys. He jumped on to a
moving auto, but the mob dragged him from it when two boys
prostrated themselves before the car, forcing the driver
to stop. Johnny Lee, a pugilist, tore the victim from the
mob and placed him in an automobile headed northward.41

A streetcar conductor, slammed the door shut in the faces
of another group seeking a Negro passenger and sped down
the hill at Seventeenth and Farnam Street although the
mob had pulled down his wires. At Sixteenth and Farnam
a Negro reported to have been armed with a revolver was
dragged about and kicked down the streets after he had
been disarmed.42

Similarly, a Negro hiding in a laundry at 1108
Jackson Street attracted a crowd of four to five
sand whites who shouted, "Get the nigger and string him
up." In the confusion, a police emergency car spirited
away the Negro to the Central Police Station, but Patrol-
man Heinie Bosen was shot in the wrist.43 The mob followed

the police to the station, and demanded the surrender of the Negro. Captain Heitfield allowed a committee of five to inspect the jail where they found that their quarry had been smuggled across the river to Council Bluffs, Iowa. Dissatisfied by this failure, the mob rushed back to the courthouse.

Pandemonium reigned outside that building where the crowd had increased as its deeds became more violent. Women with babies in their arms urged their husbands to join the throng. "Show them how they do it in the South," said one young woman as she kissed her husband who shook her hand and dashed into the interior. Miss Frances Hobbs, a friend of Anges Loebeck, attempted to address the mob. When she cried out, "This poor innocent girl was my chum, and I ask you," she was interrupted by wild yells and was unable to complete her speech.

By this time the courthouse building was a flaming and smoking inferno with a pitched battle being waged between the trapped officers and the mob. Casualties were inflicted on both sides with death coming to Louis Young and M. J. Hykell as they led a gang up to the fourth

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44 Ibid., September 29, 1919, p. 1.
floor of the building. Finally, the flames and smoke crowded the police off the fourth floor. At this point Mayor Edward P. Smith, Police Commissioner Dean Ringer and Police Chief Marshall Ebetstein started out of the courthouse where they had been since earlier in the day. Their reception by the wild frenzied mob was far from one of honor.

As Mayor Smith emerged from the courthouse at eleven o'clock, a shot rang out, and a man dressed in the uniform of a soldier cried out that the mayor had shot him. The mob pressed forward and one man hit the mayor on the head with a baseball bat while another slipped a noose around his neck and started to drag him away. During this encounter the mayor attempted to fight off his attackers while shouting, "If you must hang somebody, then let it be me." As the mob dragged him into Harney Street a woman tore the noose from his neck but men in the mob replaced it. Some spectators attempted to place the official in a police automobile, but he was wrenched out, and the vehicle was overturned. Once more the rope was about his neck, and he was hanged to the metal arm

47 Omaha's Riot In Story and Picture.
of a traffic light tower.49

One member of the mob delighted in striking the mayor on the head with a revolver. Others found pleasure in fiendishly pulling the mayor up and down as he hung on the traffic standard! Russell Norgard of 3719 Leavenworth Street succeeded in placing his hands between the mayor's neck and the rope and thus prevented his strangulation. With the help of another spectator he removed the mayor from his gibbet. The fury of the crowd seemed to let up as the limp body of their highest official lay before them. A girl started to cry, and she got the mob to make a path between two automobiles.50 Norgard and his unidentified assistant walked the mayor over to Sixteenth Street and placed him in a police car operated by State Agent Ben Danbaum, Detective Andy Van Deusen and Officer A. C. Anderson who rushed him to Ford Hospital.51

After the near lynching of the mayor, all attention was turned toward the main attraction of the evening, Will Brown. Earlier Sheriff Clark had decided to take the prisoners to the roof. As the cells were too hot and smoky, the female prisoners were screaming at the top

49 Omaha's Riot In the Story and Picture.
50 Omaha Daily Bee. September 17, 1919, p. 2.
of their voices to be released. Fifteen of them were set free and were passed over the heads of the rioters to safety. By wrapping themselves in blankets seven male prisoners had themselves passed out with the women.  

On the roof the remaining prisoners and Brown were caught in a cross fire from the neighboring rooftops, and three were wounded. Yells were then heard from the streets to "throw down the nigger and we will give you a ladder." Some prisoners became panic stricken and attempted to toss Brown from the roof but were restrained by the Deputies. Frustrated in that method of obtaining Brown, the mob poured more gasoline on the flames. With all efforts to run hoses blocked, there was danger that the roof of the burning courthouse would cave in. Several of the prisoners asked Brown to jump and save the rest of them. To this Brown replied in

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52 Omaha Daily Bee, September 30, 1919, p. 8.
54 Omaha Daily Bee, September 30, 1919, p. 8.
55 Ibid., September 29, 1919, p. 2. On this point there was disagreement as to who had attempted to hurl Brown off the roof. Sheriff Clark claimed it was the Negro prisoners. Ibid. The Negro prisoners contended that another Negro prisoner called "Coal Oil Johnny" had prevented two white prisoners from throwing Brown to the mob. The Monitor, October 2, 1919, p. 8.
trembling tones, "I don't know."\textsuperscript{56} The decision was not his to make.

A note wrapped around a silver dollar was dropped from the roof on the Eighteenth Street side of the courthouse by prisoner John May. It carried a plea: "There are 100 prisoners and 20 white women. Don't let us burn, you can get the Negro."\textsuperscript{57} As the flames and bullets continued to threaten the men on the roof, Brown was left along to his fate. The deputies and the prisoners headed for the third floor landing, a temporary haven from a possible flaming, bullet-ridden death. As the group left the roof, they were met by six members of the mob. Will Brown, the sacrificial victim, was bodily trust into the hands of the lynchers by his frightened fellow prisoners.\textsuperscript{58} This human gift became the price of freedom for the lawmen and their other captives.

The mob in the streets shrieked with joy as Brown was pushed up a scaling ladder outside the courthouse so that all could see. Brown was then passed on to the crowd which in its frenzy tore all the clothes from his

\textsuperscript{56}Omaha Daily Bee, September 30, 1919, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{57}\textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{58}Omaha Daily News, September 29, 1919, p. 1. Among those present at the transfer of Brown to the mob there is wide disagreement. Sheriff Clark claimed that the Negro prisoners turned him over, whereas one group
battered body. The gleeful throng then hustled its victim over to a telephone pole at Eighteenth and Harney Streets where the rioters strung him up. As Brown's nude body hung there, hundreds of shotguns and revolvers riddled the torso until the entrails were exposed. His body was then tied to a patrol wagon and dragged to Dodge and Seventeenth Streets where a flaming pyre was being prepared. The corpse was soaked with oil from a lantern used as a danger signal for street repairs and set aflame. Members of the crowd proudly posed around the blazing body for a photograph. With this done, the lynch party hauled the charred remains through the business district for several hours.

The orgy of lawlessness continued for hours after the lynching. After burning the police patrol wagon and an automobile, the mob sought diversion at the Central

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60. *Omaha's Riot in Story and Picture*. 

of Negro prisoners said it was the jailer, Sherman Clayton, who effected the exchange. *The Monitor*, October 2, 1919, p. 8. On the other hand, Charlie Digg, a Negro prisoner, said, "If they hadn't got Brown, they'd got all of us. . . . Two white prisoners delivered Brown and seemed glad of it." Lending credence to this was "Coal Oil Johnny," another Negro prisoner, who claimed that one of the white prisoners was called Joe and was a trusty with a large scar on the back of his neck. *Evening World-Herald*, October 1, 1919, p. 13.
Police Station. The object of their search was Detective Paul Sutton, deposed chief of the morals squad. They were swayed from their target by the determined officers defending the station with shotguns. On a second march on the station, the mob had a more fiendish purpose. Hundreds of members of the wild mob surrounded the building intending to burn it down. At the height of this desperate lawlessness, the besieged officers were gladdened by the arrival of soldiers of the United States Army. A night of terror had ended, but the shame had just begun.

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CHAPTER IV

THE CITY IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE RIOT

Indeed, the arrival of the United States Army saved the station and the beleaguered officers. However, it was then in the early hours of the morning of September 29, 1919. The mayor lay critically injured in a hospital, the courthouse and other property in the area were in shambles, and Will Brown was already lynched. Obviously, an earlier arrival of the troops would have spared Omaha the degrading embarrassment which it now faced.

Shortly after the mob gathered, efforts had been made to reach Governor Samuel R. McKelvie at Lincoln in order that he might appeal for federal help but he could not be found. Lieutenant Governor P. A. Burrows had informed Captain Heitfield at the Central Police Station that he could not act because the governor was inside the state.¹ On further appeals from Smith and Commissioner Ringer, the lieutenant

¹Evening World-Herald (Omaha), October 3, 1919, p. 1.
governor had requested aid from Washington. In the meantime, the Home Guard Companies of Lincoln, University Place, College View, Havelock, and Ashland had been mobilized, a volunteer force of three hundred ex-service-men of Lincoln raised, all available arms collected, and a special train was gotten ready to move these forces into Omaha. However, the special train had been cancelled, when before the arrival of any orders from Washington, the officials at Lincoln had learned that the mob had accomplished its purpose and was dispersing.

In addition to seeking aid through state intervention, city officials telephoned the Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, who directed General Leonard Wood, Commanding General of the Central Department, to take such steps as were necessary to preserve order.

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3 Nebraska Public Documents, Biennial Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Nebraska, For 1919-1920. December 31, 1920, Vol. IV, p. 16. These Home Guard Companies had been authorized in March, 1918 to take the place of National Guard units drafted into federal service. At the close of the war most of these companies disbanded, leaving the state with practically no forces to be used in case of emergency. No concentrated effort was made to reorganize the National Guard until after July, 1920. Nebraska Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration, A Military History of Nebraska (Lincoln, Nebraska: Federal Writers Project, 1939), p. 68.
Unfortunately, General Wood was on a train en route to Bismarck, North Dakota, and no one on his staff at Chicago had the necessary authority to order the troops out. Consequently, the city officials appealed directly to the commanders of the nearby military installations, Fort Crook and Fort Omaha, to send some men, but both camps responded that orders were needed from Washington. Finally Colonel Jacob Weust, Commandant at Fort Omaha, agreed to act without authority to the extent of having troops ready in the city when an order should arrive calling for action. At ten o'clock R. B. Howell, a prominent Republican and general manager of the waterworks, contacted Democratic Senator Gilbert Hitchcock in Washington. The senator held the line open for an hour until Secretary Baker was again found. In direct

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4 This delay in getting troops promptly into Omaha caused a change in United States military policy concerning civil disturbances. The National Defense Act of 1916 had drafted the National Guard into federal service, leaving the states practically stripped of armed forces. On November 20, 1917, a directive had been issued that requests for troops be referred to the Adjutant General of the Army at Washington. So the matter stood until September 29, 1919, when Secretary of War Baker sent a telegram to all department commanders ordering them hence forth to furnish troops on the requests of state authorities without consulting Washington. Edward S. Corwin, The President: Office and Powers 1787-1948 (New York: New York University Press, 1948), p. 166.
conversation with Colonel Weust the secretary ordered him to proceed with all the troops at his command.⁵

Within the hour two hundred soldiers from Fort Omaha were on duty, with two hundred more enroute from Fort Crook and four hundred others due from Des Moines. As soon as the troops appeared, the crowds dispersed. The soldiers were ordered to stand guard with fixed bayonets about the jail. These first troops to arrive frustrated without firing a shot the mob's attempt to break into the Lee-Colt-Andressen Company to take firearms and ammunition.⁶ Shortly after midnight members of the Seventeenth Balloon Company were dispatched by Colonel Weust to patrol the Negro section of North Omaha. They set up a machine gun at the south-west corner of Twenty-fourth and Lake Streets. Every pedestrian was halted and questioned before being


permitted to go to his destination. Patrols were in marching formation at the Twenty-fourth Street intersections of Parker, Burdette and Evans Streets, and at intervals were ordered to other intersections for a distance of a half mile east and west of Twenty-fourth Street. Thus military order had come to Omaha.

Within the next few days the troops in Omaha were reinforced by the arrival of men from Fort Dodge, Camp Grant and Camp Funston until the combined force had reached 70 officers and 1,222 men. On Monday, September 29, 1919, Colonel L. E. Morris, Commandant of Fort Crook, and Colonel Weust, commandant of Fort Omaha, along with a committee of city officials headed by Acting Mayor William Ure who was serving for the hospitalized Mayor Smith, issued a statement warning all Negro citizens to stay off the streets during that day and night. Additionally, all persons were ordered to turn in their firearms with a penalty of arrest being imposed upon those carrying concealed weapons. To implement these orders the military patrols were maintained, and an observation balloon was placed over the

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7Ibid., p. 4.
8Ibid., p. 1.
Negro section. When General Wood arrived the next day to take personal charge, he officially placed the city under qualified martial law. In the proclamation that General Wood issued, he assigned troops to patrol Twenty-Fourth and Lake Streets in North Omaha, and left a company to guard the courthouse and city hall. In addition, he forbade the carrying of weapons openly or concealed, as well as the assembly of any large group or mass meeting. Wood set no curfew and kept interference with local peaceful occupations at a minimum.

The general then met with Alan Tukey, the local commander of the American Legion whose 300 members had been deputized by Commissioner Dean Ringer to act as policemen at a pay rate of five dollars per day. Many of the Negro members of the Legion who had also received weapons were disarmed by the federal troops. General Wood in turn invited thirty of the Negro Legionnaires to work with the military authority in maintaining order in the Negro district. In his speech to the legion

9Ibid., September 30, 1919, p. 2.
10Ibid., p. 4.
11Evening World-Herald, September 30, 1919, p. 15.
members the General urged the men always to get their man and not to encourage violence but to remember that "There is no limit to violence in making the arrest." 13

In spite of the horror that the lynching engendered, the press still circulated extravagant reports of rapes, assaults, and machine gun battles in the wake of the rioting. The story of the rape and mutilation of Mrs. W. C. Wisner by a Negro as reported by the Bee proved to be only partly true. General Wood revealed that his investigation confirmed that she had been assaulted, but he denied that the victim had been mutilated or that she had identified a Negro as her assailant. 14 General Wood also traced the many reports of shootings and rioting accompanied by machine gun fire and found them to be false. These rumors even extended outside Omaha. A report of a race riot at Valley, Nebraska, caused Colonel Morris to prepare a special train with a machine gun detachment which he cancelled when the state agent there called back and attributed the request to his own nervousness. 15

13 Ibid., October 1, 1919, p. 1.
15 Ibid., October 2, 1919, p. 5. In Council Bluffs a detachment of Fort Dodge soldiers as well as a unit of the Iowa National Guard were on patrol in the Negro section. Omaha Daily News, September 30, 1919, p. 5.
The General also met with the City Council and called in reporters and supposedly disinterested parties acquainted with the city administration who were in any way responsible for the rioting. Significantly, General Wood especially desired to question the reporters. Throughout his short stay in Omaha, the general frequently called for a free press, but he flailed away at those segments of the press that caused unrest among the public. In a speech to the University Club on October 3, 1919, General Wood contended that, "One of the first steps toward the preservation of law and order should be the supression of a rotten press where there is one. I am strong for the freedom of the press," he claimed, "where it is honest and fearless, gives facts and not lies. Free speech, yes, but not free treason."\(^{17}\)

On October 4, 1919, in a meeting with platoon leaders of the American Legion, General Wood leveled many charges concerning the riot. The General pointed out that violence at the riot was due to an organized effort "which could be traced back to the criminal gang which ruled Omaha." He contended that his

\(^{16}\)Ibid.. October 2, 1919, p. 1.

\(^{17}\)Ibid.. October 3, 1919, p. 1.
investigation had shown that alcohol mixed with ginger was freely distributed, and that a regular taxi service was maintained to bring men to the scene. He concluded that "with the exception of a few men and one newspaper, you have a good city." In subsequent speeches in Omaha and around the country General Wood also attributed the riot to the general unrest prevalent in the country because of the activities of the Industrial Workers of the World.

Before leaving the city on October 5, 1919, the General left a sealed letter with the commission recommending a revamping of the police department and the appointment of an inspector, preferably a war veteran. He urged that the police department be reorganized and equipped with standard arms and emergency equipment. Wood also called for an increase in the number of patrolmen. This was necessary as the entire force

18 Ibid., October 5, 1919, p. 1.
19 General Wood was a hopeful for the Republican nomination for President in 1920 and was making political speeches throughout the country with the IWW as his major theme. In Nebraska General Wood won the Republican primary for president, but in the convention at Chicago, on June 8, 1920, Warren G. Harding received the nomination. Addison E. Sheldon, Nebraska, The Land And The People (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), p. 970.
consisted of but 202 persons including stenographers, telephone operators, chauffeurs, and all officers and detectives. Of this number less than 100 were patrolmen assigned to beats. Since the patrolmen worked eight hour shifts, the number of patrolmen walking beats at any one time was thirty. The number was so inadequate that no attempt was made to patrol many of the outlying districts.\footnote{Ibid., \textit{October 1, 1919, p. 1.}} This was indeed meager protection for a city of 190,000 people. Yet, with the soldiers still present, Omaha was a city of law and order.

In the aftermath of the riot Omaha found itself indulging in self pity and recriminations. Everyone was assessing reasons and causes for the lynching and the wanton destruction that was a part of it. The majority of probers and soul searchers pointed accusingly toward the police force. In the editorials of the following days, each daily newspaper set the tone it was to follow in the ensuing months of investigation, trials, and shame. The \textit{Bee} on the day following the riot led off its editorial page with the sarcastic remark, "Now for a week of Carnival fun." This remark referred to the annual festival of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben whose fun making parade and ball, the height of Omaha's social season,
were cancelled because of the tense situation in this city. In the Bee's principal editorial of the same day, entitled "Put The House In Order," the editor determinedly castigated the efforts of the police department in the rioting, and chided the courts for their alleged failure to punish arrested assaulters. In essence the editorial was an avowed condemnation of the police with little concern expressed for the riot or the destruction. However, the editors found space elsewhere on the editorial pages to bemoan the destruction of the courthouse and other vandalism, with hitting barbs at the reform group that was in office.

While the Bee vented its editorial spleen on the police, the World-Herald flowed with words of denunciation and scorn of the riot, the rioters, and their deeds. In a Pulitzer Prize winning editorial, the newspaper analyzed the causes of the riot. It traced these causes to the inefficiency of the city administration, the police force in particular, and called for firmer policies in dealing with criminals. This could be

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22 Omaha Daily Bee, September 30, 1919, p. 8.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 5.
achieved by a strengthening of the department under a new leadership. Omahans, both Negro and White, in the main, were featured as law abiding citizens with certain duties in society incumbent upon both races. Thus the editorial expressed regret for those whose normally strong moral fiber was weakened so that they either joined or encouraged the mob. The editors forthrightly called for a strong prosecution and conviction of the mob, including those who so unwittingly lent a hand. The *World-Herald* was saddened by the image that Omaha had briefly displayed to the world, but it felt secure that Omaha had recuperative powers to regain the reverence for law it once had. This plea for the correction of the faults that had preceded the riot, together with punishment for the offenders and a hope for a brighter future for Omaha, became the road that the newspaper trod in the months of wrangling, recrimination and trials that followed in the wake of the lynching of Will Brown.25

The *Omaha Daily News* published an editorial "The Lynching" which viewed the mob's activities as one of vengeance. Seemingly, it saw much of these activities as necessary. This and other articles by the News

seemed to vindicate the mob while moralizing about the property damage. Much of the News reporting in the following months tended to soothe the sting of the brief slip into anarchy.26

Omaha's Negro weekly, The Monitor, in a stinging editorial indictment entitled "Omaha In Shame" placed the blame for the riot directly upon the prejudicial and sensational reporting of the Bee and the Daily News. The Negro editor found that the lynching and mob violence was traceable to the fanning of race prejudice by the glaring and detailed reporting of alleged assaults by Negroes upon white women. Among the other causes of the riot the Negro weekly noted were the persistent ridiculing and criticism of the police administration which though sometimes deserved, too often stemmed from purely politic purposes. The Monitor also saw an anarchistic element at work and, "the hidden, but not wholly concealed hand, of those who would go to any extreme to place themselves in power." These reasons for the riot caused the newspaper to call the night one of shame and infamy and to cry out that the city punish those guilty for the crimes, as only thus could the city atone and vindicate her

honor. The Negro newspaper praised the policy of the World-Herald and reprinted that paper's prizewinning editorial in its entirety. The Monitor urged that justice be done and called for a harmonious relationship between the races.

Clergymen united in their vigorous denunciation of the mob and of its destruction. Some saw the cause as the irreligion and unchristian training of the youth of the day. However, many attributed the riot to the sensational reporting of the newspapers, with the Bee being singled out. The Reverend Charles E. Cobbey, pastor of the First Christian Church, placed the blame directly at the feet of the Bee. However, it was the sermon by the Reverend Titus Lowe of the First Methodist Episcopal Church which evoked the editorial ire of the Bee in an ensuing verbal battle. The Reverend Mr. Lowe charged that the riot could be traced in a large measure to exaggerated reports of crime and to attacks upon the city made by a local newspaper. In his view nothing could condone the lynching, malicious destruction of property, and shameful attack on the mayor which he believed was the result of calculated efforts on the part of the politicians who belonged to "the old gang" and who were opposed to the

27 The Monitor (Omaha), October 2, 1919, p. 4.
28 Ibid., October 9, 1919, p.4.
present city administration.  

The Bee replied with a fiery editorial entitled "A Degenerate Pulpit." Its writer charged that Lowe, "preaching in a church edifice which money of the editor of the Bee helped to build"... had adjured his congregation "with a tirade of falsehoods to a creed of hate," and had urged it to stop reading the Bee because it had fearlessly performed its duty to expose the inefficiency of our helpless police department. "The spirit of lawlessness that from the pulpit proclaims a boycott," the editorial charged, "is in essence the same as the spirit of lawlessness that breaks into shops, burns courthouses and lynches Negroes." He sneered, "What a pity that a pulpit graced by Newman, Mcquoid, Crane, Loveland, should fall so Lowe."  

Following the ministers' frequent charges that the Bee had made malicious statements concerning the city administration, the Ministerial Union of Omaha adopted a resolution condemning the newspaper.  

In self defense the Bee replied that the ministers' charges should apply to the other newspapers which were equally as guilty. The Bee charged the Ministerial Union with

29Ibid., October 6, 1919, p. 9.  
30Omaha Daily Bee. October 8, 1919, p. 6.  
31Ibid., October 21, 1919, p. 1.
being in league with the profiteers, the labor crushers, and the rent gougers with whom the clergymen divided the contribution boxes.  

More diverse and vociferous than the opinions of the newspapers were those expressed by the citizens of Omaha concerning the riot. Residents wrote letters to their editors which ran the gamut from shamed condemnation of the riot to bellicose praise of the rioters. First, there were the few who publicly condemned the riot and the rioters. This brave minority was "outraged" and disgraced by the action. Others were shocked by the apathy of Omahans who could condone the crime. Others could sense the guilt that showed on the faces of those who had participated. Yet, the call for punishment and conviction of the lynchers was largely unheard.

The second group of letter writers either

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32 Ibid., October 22, 1919, p. 6.
33 Omaha Daily News, October 8, 1919, p. 6.
34 Ibid., October 19, 1919, p. 6.
35 Evening World-Herald, October 4, 1919, p. 10.
37 T. H. Tibbles in a letter to the "Public Pulse" did see the riot as treason and the rioters as traitors. Evening World-Herald, October 2, 1919, p. 10.
praised the rioters or sought reasons to mitigate the gravity of the deed. Among those who condoned, the rioters, the reasoning followed the line that the men were protecting the women of Omaha from black degenerates in the face of a breakdown of law enforcement. Sometimes the whole Police Department was charged with inefficiency or with complete disregard for evidence where Negro assaulter were concerned. Most often, however, the Chief of Police, Marshall Eberstein, or Commissioner Dean Ringer were cited as the culprits.

38 *Omaha Daily News*. October 6, 1919, p. 6. Mrs. H. L. Cooke expressed it this way, "For the love of Pete, let's forget about the riot. The brute is dead." *Ibid.* October 13, 1919, p. 6. "Another Mother" did not believe that anything should be done to the mob. *Ibid.*, October 19, 1919, p. 8, while W. G. Morse believed that Brown had been made an example, *ibid.*, October 15, 1919, p. 6. "Stranger" believed that Negroes should not have been allowed to come to Omaha, *ibid.*, October 9, 1919, p. 6, while "A Reader" agreed that the many crimes of the degenerate Negro were a just cause for the lynching, *ibid.*, October 16, 1919, p. 10.


40 *Omaha Daily Bee*. October 1, 1919, p. 4.

41 "Citizens" attacked Eberstein's doubts about the guilt of Brown and other accused assaulter, *ibid*.

42 "An Observing Citizen" combined all the criticisms of the Commissioner when he charged that "all unprejudiced citizens think that Mr. Ringer showed a woeful lack of nerve and good judgment when those qualities were the most needed." *Ibid.*, October 27, 1919, p. 6.
Numerous writers also found fault with a court system that failed to punish alleged assaulters once they were arrested. Others sought different causes for the riots such as those who saw an anarchist conspiracy. Few saw the newspapers as the cause of the riot. One who did, however, was the Negro attorney, H. L. Pinkett, who accused the press of disregarding the merits of Negroes and branding them as a race of rapists. If Omaha's conscience was pricked by the riot, it was little expressed by the writers whose stream of letters appeared in print. Indeed, those who felt sorrow and guilt were

\[43\] P. M. Wickstrum found the courts slack (Evening World-Herald, October 1, 1919, p. 12). and John Davidson saw an imbalance of the penalties for serious crimes (ibid., October 13, 1919, p. 10), while J. H. Dundes (Omaha Daily Bee, October 11, 1919, p. 12) and V. T. Yoes (ibid., December 8, 1919, p. 1) saw a partial enforcement of the law.

\[44\] Omaha Daily News, October 20, 1919, p. 6. I. H. Linden saw the need for more Americanism to counteract the bolshevism that had arisen in Omaha, Evening World-Herald, October 6, 1919, p. 8.

\[45\] Omaha Daily News, October 1, 1919, p. 4. Others who found fault with the press were W. M. Ward (Evening World-Herald, November 6, 1919, p. 12) and A. B. Marshall (ibid., October 3, 1919, p. 20).
a small minority.\textsuperscript{46}

Special interest groups within the population also offered varying explanations for the riot. One Omaha labor organ representing the printers union saw the cause as being the failure of the police to protect the citizens, coupled with light sentences for Negroes as political favors. It praised Mayor Smith's courage but inferred that he should not have held out for "the worthless beast accused of one of the most outrageous crimes for which he paid the price."\textsuperscript{47} Similarly, the Omaha Central Labor Union attributed the disturbances to the importation of degenerate Negroes from the South by business interests of the city.\textsuperscript{48} Conversely, the Chamber of Commerce blamed the riot upon a lack of vigorous action by the police force.\textsuperscript{49} John N. Tanner,

\textsuperscript{46} Agnes Loebeck, Brown's alleged victim, was described as extremely nervous after having cried all night on the evening of the lynching. Her mother said that, "The pity of it all is that so many brave men had to suffer all that for one Negro." (ibid., p. 10). Similarly, Mrs. Mary Dressen, the grandmother of the fatally wounded Louis Young, sixteen, said she was proud of him as he had died a glorious death, fighting and avenging wrong." (ibid., September 30, 1919, p. 1.)

\textsuperscript{47} Western Laborer (Omaha), October 4, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{48} Omaha Daily News, October 3, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., October 1, 1919, p. 4.
editor of a small but pointed and witty South Omaha paper, moralized that lynching was wrong under any condition, even when rapes were involved, as the crime generated more harm than it rectified.\textsuperscript{50} This view was not shared by the editorial pages of a local "society" paper which defended the action of the mob.\textsuperscript{51}

In defense of the courts, County Attorney A. B. Shotwell declared that the groundless stories concerning the leniency of the courts and of court officials were responsible for the riot. He attributed the rise in crime in Omaha to an influx of Negroes from Chicago during the summer. However, he cited numerous cases where false stories were circulated that Negroes had been arrested for assaults and released or given light sentences. Attorney Shotwell called for a complete report of the cases and a cessation of that type of propaganda which incited riots.\textsuperscript{52}

There were others who also looked toward the newspapers as fomenting the riot. Governor Samuel

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{The Nebraska Democrat} (Omaha), October 4, 1919, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{51}\textit{Omaha Excelsior}, October 4, 1919, p. 3. However, in the following edition (ibid., October 11, 1919, p. 4.) the owners of the strictly society paper retracted the editorial and returned to more social news.

\textsuperscript{52}\textit{Evening World-Herald}, October 1, 1919, p. 1.
R. McKelvie came into Omaha on the day after the riot and issued statements deploring the lynching and the assault upon the mayor. He chided the newspapers for their constant criticism of the local officials which only helped to build up a disrespect for the law enforcement agencies. His remarks were met with mixed comments by the three dailies. The News in its editorial, "Abuse of The Police", agreed with the governor and lashed out at the World-Herald and the Bee for misrepresenting and vilifying the police department. It admitted many of the imperfections of the force but asserted that support was needed to correct these faults.

Neither the World-Herald nor the Bee specifically mentioned the governor's criticism of the press, but, instead, they in turn blasted the state's chief executive. The World-Herald ripped into the governor's views and mockingly paraphrased his statements on the responsibility for the riot. While the governor had wondered why no precautions had been taken to safeguard against the lynching, the editors concluded that the governor as chief law enforcement officer of the state

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54 Ibid., October 2, 1919, p. 6.
had been as remiss as the local officials. Similarly, The Bee in reporting the governor's statements concerning the riot heavily capitalized the words, "Scores City Administration." In its editorial, "Not in Good Grace," the newspaper scolded the governor for his lack of foresight in providing for the emergency and for invoking immunity from criticism for the police department. Yet, paradoxically, immunity of any kind was not an attribute of that department.

Governor McKelvie, himself, on October 5, 1919, demanded the immediate reorganization of the police department and the ouster of Chief Eberstein. Following the governor's advice, Acting Mayor Ure discussed the matter with the Commissioner, but Commissioner Ringer, under whose department the chief worked, refused to state his opinion on the ouster movement. Commissioner Zimman, however, wanted to compel the ouster of both

55 *Evening World-Herald*. October 1, 1919, p. 12.
56 *Omaha Daily Bee*. October 1, 1919, p. 3.
59 The commission council was composed at this time of four Republicans, William Ure, Harry Zimman, Thomas Falconer, and Edward Towl. Dan Butler, the only holdover from the old regime and Mayor Ed. P. Smith were Democrats. *Examiner* (Omaha), June 8, 1918, p. 3.
Eberstein and Ringer. This idea was not accepted, but Street Commissioner Dan Butler requested that Eberstein be given a hearing before the commission. This did not reach a vote, however, as the commissioners failed to comment upon it. Chief Eberstein, nevertheless, had very much to say. He began by denying all the charges of inefficiency leveled against him by the governor, and especially that he had full charge at the courthouse during the riot. The chief contended that he worked with Sheriff Clark throughout the night. At about 9:30 P.M. or 10:00 P.M. on that fateful night, according the Chief, his proposal to take Will Brown out of the building by the Eighteenth Street side was dismissed by Mayor Smith, Commissioner Ringer and Sheriff Clark as being too risky. Another phase of the plan which called for having a fast car speed off with the Negro and then allowing a committee of rioters to inspect the building was turned down by the sheriff who thought the presence of the other Negro prisoners would still encourage the mob. In speaking of the fire department's role the

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60 In a poll of the commission council taken earlier on the dismissal of both Eberstein and Ringer these were the comments: Zimman: fight to the end to oust Ringer; Ure: undecided; Falconer: opposed to Ringer's oust, undecided on Eberstein; Butler: undecided on Ringer, in favor of removing Eberstein; Smith: not contacted but a supporter of Ringer. (Omaha Daily News, October 3, 1910, p. 10).
chief revealed that he had appealed to Commissioner Zimman to call out the entire force but that he had been refused. The chief also complained that he had been the only public official to make a direct appeal to the crowd. The policeman concluded by refusing to resign his job and reiterated that if Dean Ringer and Governor McKelvie wanted his office they would have to kick him out.

On the next day both the ailing mayor and the police commissioner issued strong statements supporting Chief Eberstein and disclaiming any part in an ouster movement. Some, however, viewed this as an attempt to hush up the chief whom it was suspected had something incriminating to say. Consequently, when Commissioner Butler introduced another resolution calling for a hearing on Chief Eberstein "before his resignation is called for," the proposal was referred to a committee of the

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61 Commissioner Zimman when contacted said that he had asked the fire chief for support but was told that the water hoses would only infuriate the mob. (ibid., October 8, 1919, p. 1.) Fire Chief Charles A. Salter called for an investigation into the conduct of four firemen who had refused to lend assistance in aiding the trapped policemen in the courthouse. (Omaha Daily Bee, October 14, 1919, p. 1).


63 Omaha Daily Bee, October 8, 1919, p. 10.
whole where it would come up for later discussion. The commissioners all agreed that, indeed, further discussion was necessary.

Perhaps, the most discussed man in Omaha was Dean Ringer, the Commissioner of Police. The names "Ringer" and "Police" were so interwined that when one was spoken of the other was mentioned also. Opponents of the city administration sought Ringer's ouster much more vigorously than they did that of Eberstein. Before the riot there had been constant criticism of the police department and of the commissioner in particular. But, whereas, all the papers had scolded the police previously, it was the Bee which in countless editorials had blasted the administration and the commissioner personally. The World-Herald was a little more subtle in its approach but was still opposed to Ringer and his administration. However, it did call for a temporary cessation of hostility to allow the commissioner a chance to reorganize his department. The staunchest supporter, however, of the department and of its commissioner was the Daily News which constantly reminded

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64 Omaha Daily News. October 9, 1919, p. 1.

readers that Ringer had inherited the remnants of the old political machine still inherent in the police department. 66

The Commissioner took much the same line in blasting the Bee. In a long list of charges he pointed out that the Bee had printed articles that undermined the confidence of the public in the police department and that the paper was the direct cause of the riot. He linked those who would destroy the police force with those who would profit most, namely, the bootleggers, prostitutes, thieves, and vice dealers. The commissioner charged that the organized efforts to discredit his administration were part of the "gang method." He concluded by charging that Tom Dennison was seeking to make one of his close friends the chief of police. 67

Thus, the police department remained the vital concern of the city of Omaha.

This concern for the reorganization of the police department had been expressed in the recommendations of General Wood to the Commission Council. In the line with the general's suggestions for reorganization,

67 Ibid. October 8, 1919, p. 10.
the Chamber of Commerce recommended a merit system for
the police with a change in the civil service re­
quirements, the use of standardized side arms, and the
construction of a new jail. To facilitate the
reorganization of the force and to restore the court­
house, Governor McKelvie issued a call for a special
session of the legislature to convene on October 13,
1919. The designated purposes were to enact legis­
lation desired by the Douglas County and Omaha City
Commissioners to raise money to repair the courthouse,
to allow the city to borrow, or otherwise raise money
to pay for an increase in police, and to pay for the
special session. As could be expected the special
session turned into a political battleground.

Two bills affecting Omaha and Douglas County
were passed. The bond bill provided that the co.
commissioners could issue bonds for repairing the

68 Ibid., pp. 1-2.

69 Ibid., October 12, 1919, p. 1.

70 It cost the taxpayers $1,376,250 to repair
the courthouse and restore records. This included a
bond issue of $750,000 and $628,250 in interest. (Sun­
day World-Herald, October 2, 1915, p. 10B). A group,
the Citizens and Taxpayers League, fought the bond
issue. (Omaha Daily News, November 17, 1919, p. 6).
Douglas County courthouse and replacing furniture and records destroyed in the rioting. The bill applied only to Douglas County and provided that the Commissioners would seek estimates first and then issue bonds not in excess of the estimate.\textsuperscript{71} The Omaha police bill gave the city the right to employ its chief, inspector, and police patrolmen whether they were legal residents of the city or not. Patrolmen's salaries were increased so that the range was $125 to $150 per month. However, also by this bill, the police force was removed from civil service as the commission council was given the right to discharge policemen.\textsuperscript{72} This provision stirred up controversy both inside and outside the legislature. All the dailies opposed the repeal. The Bee called it an attempt to build up a machine.\textsuperscript{73} Similarly, the World-Herald viewed it as a boomerang which would remove the evil of the present force while running the risk of incurring another.\textsuperscript{74} This view was shared by the News, which saw the growth of a spoils system in the

\textsuperscript{72}\textit{Omaha Daily Bee}. October 18, 1919, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{73}\textit{Evening World-Herald}. October 18, 1919, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{74}\textit{Omaha Daily News}. October 20, 1919, p. 6.
future. In the city council the opinion was equally divided. Commissioners Ure, Ringer and Towl endorsed the plan while Falconer, Zimman and Butler opposed.

In the legislature the police bill with the civil service amendment provided stirring debate. Significantly, the Bee and The World-Herald both reported sections of the debate, but not in its entirety. The most interesting and heated debate was over the amendment presented by Republican Representative John Jenison of Clay County on October 15, 1919, which authorized the chief of police to discharge any subordinate without a hearing and required an affirmative vote of five commissioners before reinstatement. In support of his amendment the lawmaker charged that the defeated political machine in Omaha had built a campaign of disrespect for the law and police officers which had made the riot possible. He charged further that those same forces had not mentioned the incompetence of Sheriff Clark in quelling the riot. While this attack on the "old gang" was not reported by The Bee, that newspaper reported in more fiery tones than those repeated by the World-Herald a debate between Jenison

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76 Ibid., October 16, 1919, p. 1.
and Representative Bob Drusedow of Douglas County.

"You put that amendment in for a grandstand play," Druesedow told Jenison. "You are sore at Governor McKelvie because he passed you up when he organized his public welfare bureau under the code bill," he continued, "and you are willing now to put the governor in the hole although you used to be his right hand man."

"Dirty linen," shouted another member.

"Yes, there is a lot of it drying in the state house grounds now," Druesedow retorted.

Jenison said he would not take the time to reply to Druesedow, but asked permission to introduce a telegram from Police Commissioner Ringer in which Ringer said he had asked the governor to introduce the matter in his call and had been disappointed because it had not appeared.

"You are acting as a cat's paw for this man Ringer," shouted Representative Harry Foster of Douglas County. "It is Ringer's scheme to knock out the civil service regulations so he can build a political machine in the police department. He couldn't get anyone here to father his scheme so he got you."

Speaker Dalbey finally terminated the debate
and restored good feelings. Despite all the wrangling and name calling, the police bill on October 16 passed the House on an 83-0 vote. The bond bill passed with less dispute.

A resolution by Representative Victor Reynolds of Douglas County asking Governor McKelvie to reconvene the legislature and call another session for the purpose of increasing the penalty for rape by violence was defeated by a vote of 34 to 49 with every member of the Omaha delegation supporting the resolution. During the debate on Representative Reynold's proposal on October 17, 1919, Representative William Grozier of Douglas County contributed the most radical speech of the session, which was a foreboding of the sentiments that trial judges could expect when the rioters would come to trial. He declaimed:

The official records shows that 26 cases of rape have occurred in Omaha during the past four months, and the unofficial reports show 54 of them. If necessary I'll get the physicians certificates to show this. Womanhood has not been protected and therefore the people of Omaha resorted to mob violence. Today a girl in Omaha is lying in a hospital with her breast cut off by a Negro brute, and is dying of cancer.

77 Omaha Daily Bee. October 18, 1919, p. 1.
A ten year old girl was terribly maimed as a result of a Negro's attack. A woman who became a victim of an assailant in her own home while her husband was away is now a raving maniac.

We are going to do everything in our power to protect womanhood in Nebraska. If these young boys at Omaha are not sentenced to the penitentary we'll tear the rest of the courthouse down.

Despite the oratory those who voted against the bill claimed, that they did so in order not to go over the head of the governor who had not specified the rape issue in his call for the session. This business completed, the legislature adjourned on October 18, 1919. The governor also attempted executive action concerning the Omaha police department. On October 16, 1919, the chief executive announced that he was sending his special agent, Ralph Wilson, to Omaha to conduct a probe into the riot. In conducting the probe the governor sought the aid of the Commission Council. He envisioned

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79 Omaha Daily Bee. October 18, 1919, p. 2.
81 Nebraska, State and House Journals of the Legislature, 39th Session (Special), p. 1.
82 Omaha Daily Bee. October 16, 1919, p. 1. This was reported under such captions as "Blame To Be Placed Officially," and "Particularly With Reference To Conduct of Police Officials."
an open public investigation of the police force by the Council with his representative being able to sit in and question witnesses. When this issue was presented to the Council on October 21, 1919, by Commissioner Butler, it failed by a 5-1 vote with only Butler voting for his own measure. In the debate over the matter Commissioner Zimman charged Commissioner Ringer with incompetence and demanded that the Police Commissioner be transferred to another department and that the Chief of Police be fired. This precipitated a three way harangue between Zimman and Ringer with Butler in the middle. To cut off debate and end the constant bickering, Commissioner Zimman proposed that, since the grand jury was meeting, the commission council table all debate concerning the riot until the next year's city elections. This novel solution did not prove long lasting. In the October 30, 1919, council meeting, insinuations of cowardice were hurled back and forth between Commissioners Butler and Ringer. The rift stemmed from Butler's charges that many officers had handed over their weapons to the

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Ringer retorted that Butler should be more specific in his charges and make known the names of those whom he could identify. Finally, the Police Commissioner wanted to know where Butler had been on the night of the riot. In answer to the query Commissioner Butler claimed that he was outside the courthouse and in more danger than Ringer. Thus, the bickering continued in the council.

When the mayor, who had been recuperating at Excelsior Springs, Missouri, since October 10, 1919, returned to the city on November 16, 1919, he reiterated his earlier support of Commissioner Ringer. However, the mayor sought confidential reports from every officer.

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84. This same charge had been made by the News which reported that on the night of the riot every officer around the courthouse, with the exception of those on the upper floors, was without a pistol after 8 o'clock (Omaha Daily News, September 29, 1919, p. 11). Another editor charged that one officer mailed his gun to himself while another furnished mob leaders with a diagram of a back stairway through which the mob finally captured Brown (The Monitor, October 9, 1919, p. 3).


86. Evening World-Herald. November 17, 1919, p. 1. The mayor, however, tossed some verbal blows at Sheriff Clark whom he charged with neglect on the night of the riot. The mayor charged that Clark could have deputized anyone in the county to aid him and taken the fight to the outside of the courthouse. To these charges of neglect of duty the sheriff retorted that he had been with the mayor all that night and he had not suggested it. In addition, the sheriff pointed out that the prisoner involved was a city prisoner and consequently the mayor's responsibility.
on the force to ascertain his degree of effectiveness on the night of the riot. Consequently, when Governor McKelvie a week later again sought an open probe of the police department through the Commission Council, the mayor expressed the unexpected view of favoring a reorganization of the police department. The mayor based his changed views on his study of the confidential reports in which he found that many officers had not done their full duty. Though opposing the governor's proposal for an open probe, Mayor Smith and Commissioners Ure and Zimman agreed that an investigation should be held.87

On October 28, 1919 Commissioner Ringer had successfully introduced a plan raising patrolmen's salaries and providing for the appointment of a police inspector. He also proposed an unsuccessful resolution which would have given the chief of police the authority to demote or reclassify at any time any officer on the force.88 However, the appointment of Captain Andrew Pattullo, a native of Omaha, as inspector of police aroused a bitter controversy. In the conflict over the appointee it was decided he would be in charge of uniformed


police, leaving Chief of Detectives John Dunn in charge of the detectives. In practice Patullo would be subordinate to Eberstein. The wrangling over the new inspector's position in the hierarchy of the department became so bitter and personal that the World-Herald published an editorial "Not A Saloon Brawl" in which it chastized the commissioners for their poor conduct and lack of the decorum befitting public officials. This outburst terminated the quarrel over the official responsibility for the failure to prevent the lynching. Neither city nor state authorities had made or would make any thorough investigation. Instead, they chose to leave all further actions to the courts.

CHAPTER V

THE TRIALS

Immediately following the rioting, soldiers and police officers were rounding up those who were known to have participated. On September 30, 1919, two days after the lynch mob had been dispersed, the Governor announced it had the names of alleged ring leaders together with possible accomplices and proof of their part in the riot. By October 1, 1919, over one hundred persons had been arrested, and others were being sought. Chief among those still at large was William Francis, eighteen years old, who allegedly rode a horse at the head of the mob. Millard Hoffman, the companion of Agnes Loebeck when she was raped, was sought but was never indicted. While the sheriff and county attorney quarreled over the responsibility for the failure to find Hoffman, neither succeeded in doing so.


2Ibid., October 1, 1919, p. 1. Francis was finally arrested on October 4, 1919. (Ibid., October 4, 1919, p. 1).
locating him.\(^3\)

On October 8, 1919, at 11 A.M., Judge William A. Redick called to order a special session of the grand jury. When the judge viewed the assembled panel of jurors, he found that only nineteen of the twenty-three men summoned had reported. Of those reporting, three were excused because of physical defects and another because he had not been a resident of the county long enough. Since sixteen persons were necessary to compose a jury, Sheriff T. Dunn ordered to summon an additional citizen. Proceeding into a hallway the sheriff turned to John W. Towle of the police department who was selected as the sixteenth juror. John W. Towle of 102 Pacific Street, the president of the Structural Steel Works, was elected to serve as foreman of the grand jury. The other members of the jury presented a cross section of Douglas County with a variety of interests and occupations being represented. Among those from the lower economic levels there was a printer, a mechanic, a clerk, a city foreman, a gardener, a carpenter, and a few farmers. Management was represented by an auto broker, a real estate broker, a company manager, and a company president. At least

\(^3\)Evening World-Herald, (Omaha), October 4, 1919, p. 1.
two worked for the Union Pacific Railroad, and two others were city employees.  

In his charge to the body, Judge Redick directed the men to investigate the acts of various persons who would be brought to their attention. He charged them to display a strong determination to perform their duties and not be influenced by passion, public clamor, fear, favor or prejudice. The court laid special stress on warning the jury against any attempt by outside influences to control it. Judge Redick called the jurors' attention to certain elements which tried to take the law into their own hands, and he declared that true bills should be returned against every person against whom sufficient evidence should be presented. With those goals in mind the jury set out to fulfill its task.

4In addition to Dunn and Towle these were the members of the jury: Clarence J. Anderson, 2907 Bristol Street, Adolph Benson, 2578 Pratt Street, Harry Davis, 3203 Potter Street, William F. Gray, 3820 North Eighteenth Street, Charles E. Hall, 3319 Harney Street, William Hock, 4506 Ames Avenue, Olaf Johnson, 132 North Thirty Seventh Street, William C. Hughes, 4016 Grand Avenue, Robert Lackey, 4211 Crown Point Avenue, David L. Morgan, 3309 Sherman Avenue, Claire R. Nelson, 415 North Thirteenth Street, Hilard B. Noyes, 2021 Wirt Street, J. J. Smith, R.F.D. South Florence, and Jake Williams, 5805 Erskine Street. (Omaha Daily News, October 4, 1919, p. 1.).

5Ibid.
As the grand jury sat, conferred, and questioned witnesses, daily reports were issued of indictments. Attorney Abel V. Shotwell, representing the county, had announced earlier that no prosecutions or charges of murder, arson, assault with intent of doing bodily harm, or other charges growing out of the riot, would be considered until after the return of the special grand jury. However, persons arrested in connection with the riot could enter pleas of guilty in police court or district court and receive immediate sentencing. The first person to avail himself of this procedure was Lester Price, a Negro, who received thirty days in jail for carrying a concealed weapon.

Two other men who pleaded guilty to unlawful assembly and rioting became key figures in a conflict between the Bee and the grand jury. The men, Harold Thorpe and Ernest Morris, identified John Harry Moore, a reporter for the Bee, as having also been a rioter. On November 6, 1919, the grand jury indicted Moore on a charge of conspiracy to commit arson. Upon his

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6Ibid., October 28, 1919, p. 1. Usually the pleas of guilty were to charges of unlawful assembly and rioting which provided a sentence of ninety days and a fine not to exceed $100.

7Evening World- Herald (Omaha), November 6, 1919, p. 1.
release on bond posted by the Bee, the reporter and his employer took up the cry that the charges were a "frame-up". The Bee dismissed the testimony of the two convicts as favor seeking. They were pictured as bootleggers and all around criminals who had gotten light sentences in return for helping Captain Henry P. Haze, superintendent of the city workhouse. The newspaper followed these charges by a sensational expose with accompanying affidavits signed by Thorpe and Morris. The Bee headlines screamed:

Boys disclose the Frame-Up
Promised Freedom by Police
Captain Haze offered Liberty to prisoners for false Testimony
Before Grand Jury They Declare in Affidavits
Rotten Police Methods Laid Bare by Youths
Admit they Never Saw Bee man they testified Against Until After Case Had Been Framed By Detectives.

In a few days the Bee enlarged the dispute by claiming in an editorial that Moore was the victim of a frame-up performed by the grand jury using perjured evidence manufactured at City Hall. With such

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8Omaha Daily Bee, November 7, 1919, p. 9.
9Ibid., November 9, 1919, p. 1.
10Ibid., November 10, 1919, p. 9.
daily diatribes against the grand jury it seemed inevitable that the organ would be cited for contempt.\textsuperscript{11} Indeed, it was quick in coming as the \textit{Bee} on the 11th of November Headlined:

"\textit{Bee} and Editor Cited For Contempt For Publishing Story of Police Frameup"

In the story of the citation the newspaper charged the \textit{World-Herald} and the \textit{Daily News} with not publishing the frame-up story although both papers had representatives present.\textsuperscript{12} As a direct result of the charges of collusion between police and prisoner, Sheriff Clark issued instructions to his deputies to refuse Captain Haze and other members of the police department the privilege of interviewing prisoners in the county jail unless the sheriff or a deputy were present.\textsuperscript{13}

A final, more sensational blast against the grand jury exploded in the \textit{Bee}. The newspaper in a front page banner story charged that John Towle, foreman of the grand jury, had gone to the home of Harold Thorpe.

\textsuperscript{11}In addition to its troubles with the grand jury, the \textit{Bee} was being boycotted by the Negroes of the city. William Ransom, a Negro policeman, filed suit on October 17, 1919 against the \textit{Bee} for $25,000 because a story published on October 7 charged him with beating two persons for reading the \textit{BEE}. (\textit{Omaha Daily News}, October 17, 1919, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Omaha Daily Bee}, November 11, 1919, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Tbid.}, p. 2.
and had given his mother $80. This money was given, the story related, in addition to a promise by the juror to obtain a pardon for the boy from the governor. In return for this largess the boy was to return to his original story of an identification of Moore. In his denial of the charge the foreman admitted that he had not only helped this family but that he also had secured aid for others who were in jail during this time.14

When the contempt case was called into court on November 17, 1919, both the reporter, Moore, and Victor Rosewater, editor of the Bee, pleaded not guilty. In the ensuing trial, pros and cons were fought out both in the courtroom and in the newspapers. The other two dailies followed the course of the trial diligently with the World-Herald mockingly reporting the evasive testimony of Rosewater and his managing editor, Taylor Kennerly, neither of whom knew or would admit to the authorship of the contemptuous articles.15 Finally, on November 20, 1919, Victor Rosewater, editor of the Omaha Bee, and the Bee Publishing Company of which

14Ibid., November 16, 1919, p. 1. In this respect County Attorney Shotwell had doubted the wisdom of imposing fines on these boys as he knew many of the youths had others depending upon them. (Omaha Daily News, October 28, 1919, p.1).

he was president, were each fined $1,000 and cost of court charges by Judge William A. Redick. The charges against the reporter, John H. Moore, were dismissed for insufficient evidence. The Bee proclaimed its innocence and appealed the case to the State Supreme Court which ultimately affirmed the judgment against the publishing company.

In the midst of the Bee's contempt trial, the grand jury returned a report of its findings. The report as issued on November 19, 1919, showed that 195 cases had been examined, and that 120 indictments had been returned. The witnesses examined included the mayor and the commissioners together with the police chief and every policeman who was on duty at the courthouse. Though some private citizens were called, the jurors expressed sadness at the lack of willing testimony of eye witnesses who were supposedly on the side of law and order, but who had remained silent and not volunteered to appear before the grand jury. Except for the police and other city

16 Omaha Daily News, November 20, 1919, p. 1. The arson charge against Moore was dismissed on February 4, 1920 (Omaha Daily Bee, February 5, 1920, p. 2.).


officials, few persons had volunteered testimony that would enable the investigators to establish the probable guilt of participants in the riots. A sense of frustration pervaded the entire report.

A measure of blame was placed upon the police department for the riot. The grand jury showed that if there had been proper coordination of the efforts of superior officers between 3:30 P.M. and 6 P.M. when the mob was forming, the subsequent activities of the mob might have been averted. No officer above the rank of sergeant was in charge about the courthouse until 6:30 P.M. when Chief Eberstein arrived. However, causes for the riot were placed in other areas also. The general public itself was chided for its apathy and general disrespect for and non-support of the police department. The grand jury urged stronger backing of that department. In addition, it recommended a heavier penalty for rape; praised Mayor Smith for his conduct during the rioting; exonerated Police Captain Heitfield; asserted that the *Omaha Bee* misrepresented the facts in articles concerning Foreman Towle of the grand jury; asked that standard firearms be furnished police to prevent future outbreaks; and recommended that policemen be given legal support when they were sued for damages in
connection with the performance of their duty. In a final analysis of its report, the grand jury reduced the causes of the riot to three basic conclusions. First, the absence of riot guns and interchangeable weapons and ammunitions made the policemen ineffective at the scene of the riot. The jurors placed responsibility for this upon the city commissioners. Second, the police were not trained in company drill or mass formation so as to make use of riot control procedures. The jurors in speaking of controlling the mob praised the Mayor for his forthright stand in the face of a near lynching. Third, the grand jury found the immediate and fundamental causes of the riot, "to be the raping of white women by Negroes, also undue prominence given to crime and undue criticism given to courts, police and public officials by the press of the city."20

In addition to the report of the grand jury, John Towle, the foreman of the jury, issued a letter of transmittal expressing his personal views. Foreman Towle in his letter branded the grand jury report as a compromise and composite of facts. He charged that it was common

knowledge that at least one party had gone to the various pool halls in the south part of the city, and had announced that a crowd would gather at Bancroft School and from there would march to the courthouse for the purpose of lynching the colored man. These reports were current about the city and were known in certain official circles. He wondered also why the prisoner had not been moved to the state penitentiary or why Mayor Smith, Commissioner Ringer or Chief Eberstein were not warned of the impending crisis. Another mystery was probed by Towle when he publicly questioned the sheriff about the whereabouts of Millard Hoffman - who seemed to have disappeared. 21 Indeed, in the aftermath of the report others would also express dissatisfaction.

Indignation at the report came from every source. Mayor Smith defended his actions on the night of the riot, claiming his prime concern was for the innocent people present. 22 Commissioner Eberstein claimed that the report erred in its findings that no superior

21Ibid., pp. 288-289.
officer above sergeant was at the scene of the riot between 3:30 P.M. and 6:00 P.M. The sheriff's office was incensed by the letter of transmittal of Foreman Towle which emphasized the activities of the sheriff during the riot. However, the most interesting comments were furnished by the news media. The Bee gave full coverage to the report and found in it a vindication of that newspaper's charge that the police were inefficient and corrupt. The Bee, consequently, claimed that it should be declared innocent of contempt. Conspicuously absent in all of the Bee reports was any mention of the grand jury's censure of the role of the newspapers. Conversely, the World-Herald agreed in substance with the report but emphasized the findings of Foreman Towle. It expressed concern at the statement of the jury blaming all the newspapers and wished that the jurors had been specific as to what newspapers were being scolded. The Omaha Daily News editorially accepted the report as one that would meet with the

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23 Ibid., November 19, 1919, p. 1.
approval of all law-abiding citizens. 27 But what was the attitude of those citizens toward the grand jury's indictment?

Perhaps the pulse of the citizenry had been felt before the grand jury had reported. On November 5, 1919, before Judge Redick in District Court, attorneys had encountered difficulties in obtaining a jury to try Ira Johnson, the Negro accused of assaulting Bessie Kroupa on the night of July 7, 1919. This dilemma of finding uncommitted jurors was a foreboding of similar troubles to be experienced by judges in the riots cases. In the Johnson trial, Frank Howell, law partner of Mayor Smith, had represented the defendant. The Bee had taken delight in referring to this partnership. 28 The hostile editors had justified the frequent violent outbursts by the girl's mother as necessary indignation against "the attorney whose merciless questions were fairly crushing the little girl on the witness stand." 29 Conversely, little mention had been given to defense testimony. On November 8, 1919, after three ballots

28Omaha Daily Bee, November 9, 1919, p. 6a.
for conviction of 10-2; 11-1; and 12-0; the jurors found the defendant guilty.\textsuperscript{30} On November 13, 1919, Johnson was denied a new trial and was sentenced to 20 years at hard labor in the state penitentiary.\textsuperscript{31}

When Louis Weaver, the first of the rioters, came to trial on December 1, 1919, the newspapers were filled with apprehension and expectancy. Weaver was charged with arson and with having been the man responsible for pouring gasoline into the courthouse and setting the blaze. He was positively identified by policemen at the scene as having caused the fire. Weaver in his own testimony admitted the charges, but he claimed that he had done so only when ordered by a man who pointed a gun at him.\textsuperscript{32} When all the evidence had been heard, the jury found the defendant guilty.\textsuperscript{33} On December 13, 1919, Weaver was sentenced by District Judge Redick to one to twenty years in the penitentiary.\textsuperscript{34} After this major conviction later defendants received

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., November 9, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{31}Evening World-Herald, November 13, 1919, p. 1. However, another Negro, Ralph Underwood, was acquitted by a jury on December 19, 1919, of criminally assaulting Mrs. Hanna Pillard on October 28. This trial also produced fireworks as Mrs. Pillard threw a cuspidor at the defense attorney during questioning. (Omaha Daily News, December 20, 1919, p. 1).
\textsuperscript{32}Omaha Daily Bee, December 2, 1919, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., December 4, 1919, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., December 13, 1919, p. 1.
lighter sentences or none at all as jurors were reluctant to bring in guilty verdicts.  

In the trial of Ralph Snyder which began on December 8, 1919, the jury brought in a verdict of not guilty. This defendant, charged with conspiracy to commit murder, was identified in court by numerous witnesses including Chief of Detectives John Dunn who testified that Snyder was at the scene and incited rioters by making inflammatory speeches. In his own defense Snyder admitted making speeches but alleged that instead of inciting rioters, he was urging them to disperse. In the same trial the attorney for Snyder charged that the police force was incapable of protecting a fly, and that it was time for the people to take the law into their own hands. Thus, in most of the major trials the results were seen in acquittal or in

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35 One notable exception was the conviction on January 15, 1920, of Sam Novak, 17, of conspiracy to commit murder. He was sentenced to the reformatory until he became 21 years old. (Ibid., January 16, 1920, p. 1).


37 Ibid., December 11, 1919, p. 2.
the failure of the jury to agree.\textsuperscript{38}

One of the more sensational trials, that of George Davis, specifically centered around the assault of Mayor Smith. Davis, a peddler, was charged with assault to murder and assault to do great bodily harm. The mayor charged that it was Davis who had struck him upon the head with a revolver on the night of the riot. This identification was verified by Russel Norgard, the man who rescued the mayor, and by John Overbay, a special police officer.\textsuperscript{39}

This identification of Davis by Overbay was challenged by the defense attorneys, Eugene O'Sullivan and James Jamieson. A violent personal altercation erupted between the witness and attorney O'Sullivan over whether Overbay had visited the home of Mrs. Campbell, a sister of the defendant, in order to have her change attorneys. To this charge Overbay replied in the following heated exchange:

\textsuperscript{38} In the trial of Perry Jenkins accused of conspiracy to commit murder the jury deliberated fifteen minutes and found him not guilty. (Omaha Daily Bee, January 3, 1920, p. 2.) James Blankenship tried on the same charge was set free when the jury remained deadlocked 8 for conviction and 4 for acquittal. \textit{ibid}., December 19, 1919, p. 9.

"I never did," said Overbay. "You're a professional bondsman, aren't you?"
"No, I'm not. I only went on one bond in a case of yours and you double crossed me then." 40

The mayor was not spared this type of bitterness. In their cross-examination of him, the attorneys for the defense sought to shake his dramatic testimony of the near hanging and harassment by the mob. O'Sullivan, inquiring as to the mayor's mental condition, recalled an operation which the mayor had had performed on his skull in years past. In addition, he revealed that the mayor had once fallen unconscious in court during a trial. O'Sullivan dwelled on these conditions as a cause of the mayor's being mistaken in his identification of Davis. 41 In a subsequent cross-examination by the other defense attorney, Jamieson, Judge Redick had to restrain the lawyer from charging that Mayor Smith had incited the mob by making remarks against its members and denying its leaders access to the jail. 42

In defense of Davis, three persons testified that on the night of the rioting he was at home after the

40 *Omaha Daily Bee*, December 17, 1919, p. 1.
hour of 8:30 p.m. until the following morning. In his own behalf Davis denied that he had been downtown after 8 o'clock on that fatal Sunday. He admitted that on the night in question he had bought two pints of bootleg but claimed that he had called a taxi about 8 o'clock and had returned to his sister's home, thus verifying the story of his other witnesses. On cross-examination the defendant's criminal background was brought to light. He admitted to serving a twenty-three month sentence in Walla Walla, Washington for grand larceny. In addition, he had served a sentence in Omaha after being charged as a vagrant.43

After four days of prosecution and defense testimony the case was given to the jury. Thirty-six hours of deliberation could not produce an agreement on a verdict. The jurors remained nine for conviction and three for acquittal. Davis was released on $14,000 bond and a second trial was set for December 29, 1919.44

However, the second trial did not really begin until January 13, 1920. Eight days were spent in examining prospective jurors, most of whom were

disqualified by the judge. Man after man was excused because of expressed prejudice or an already formed opinion about Davis' guilt or innocence. One prospective juror declared that the possibility of imposing a penalty of two to fifteen years on Davis, if he were found guilty, would prevent him from finding the defendant guilty, even if he were proved so. Another said that sympathy for Davis would cause him not to return a guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. 45

When finally the Davis jury was obtained, it was greeted with new testimony damaging to the defendant. The records of a taxicab company were produced to show that Davis had been taken to his home at 10:30 p.m. on the Sunday of the rioting rather than at eight o'clock as he had contended. 46 Then, too, additional witnesses were called to identify Davis as being at the courthouse. 47 The mayor and the other witnesses retold their stories while Davis reiterated his denial of all charges against him. 48 On January 19, 1920, after forty-seven

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45 The same reluctance of prospective jurors to convict alleged rioters was shown in Judge Sear's court when a jury was impaneled to try seventeen year old Sam Novak on the charge of conspiracy to murder Will Brown. Omaha Daily Bee, January 13, 1920, p. 3.

46 Ibid., January 16, 1920, p. 12.


hours of deliberation the jury was discharged after failing to reach a verdict. The jury had taken eleven ballots and not a single vote had changed. The vote began at eight to four for conviction and stood at eight to four when the jury was dismissed. County Attorney Shotwell planned for a third trial, but it never materialized, and all charges were dropped on September 7, 1921.

As sensational as the Davis trials was the case against Claude Nethaway. Nethaway, an avowed hater of Negroes, was arrested on the day following the lynching. Years earlier his wife had been found dead in the railroad cut near Florence, Nebraska. For this murder, a Negro had been convicted and sentenced to the state penitentiary. Later Nethaway had run for sheriff on a platform declaring that he would remove certain Negroes from the sheriff's office. Thus, when Nethaway came up for trial on January 5, 1920, on charges of conspiracy to commit murder, excitement was expected. An entire day was needed to select a jury. In addition, Nethaway requested that Judge Redick not hear the case as the defendant had opposed his reelection. Instead, Judge

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50 *Nebraska, Douglas County, District Court, "Criminal Appearance Docket,"* Vol. 21, p. 213.
Sears, who had presided over the trial of the murderer of Nethaway's wife, was chosen to preside.\textsuperscript{51}

Once these matters were settled, the state presented numerous witnesses who testified that Nethaway was at the scene of the riot. They reported that the defendant had harangued the crowd and had reviled the sheriff and police. All those who were preventing the rioting had been branded as "nigger lovers" while Nethaway had urged the mob on by telling of his murdered wife and urging them "to get the nigger."\textsuperscript{52} In his own defense Nethaway admitted being in the mob but not as an active participant. He claimed his reason for being there was to find his second wife who had gotten lost in the crowd. Nethaway denied urging the mob to kill the victim. In his admission of speaking to the mob, he did say that he "would like to put some holes in that nigger's hide" referring to his wife's murderer. He further explained that his grudge against Sheriff Clark stemmed from the latter's testifying to the innocence of the Negro accused of murdering Nethaway's wife.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51}Evening World-Herald, January 6, 1920, p. 1. \\
\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., January 7, 1920, pp. 1-2. \\
\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., January 8, 1920, pp. 1-2.
After 27 hours of deliberation, the judge dismissed the jury on January 9, 1920, with no verdict being reached. The vote, whether for conviction or acquittal, had stood at seven to five. County Attorney Shotwell planned for a second trial. However, the wheels of justice moved so slowly that the possibility of a new trial for Nethaway and, in a larger sense, the aftermath of the riot was ended when in May, 1921, a new regime headed by the perpetual mayor, James Dahlman, swept into office. On September 7, 1921, the county dismissed the charges still pending against George Davis and Claude Nethaway. The books were now closed.

Omaha had performed the proper legal rituals. It had formed a grand jury, produced indictments, and had held trials. However, the grand jury failed to lay the main blame for the riot on the mob and exonerated all public officials. Indeed, it found the fundamental causes to be degenerate Negroes and an unduly critical press. A man had been lynched; a mayor had been briefly hanged. One-hundred-twenty indictments accused the participants in such deeds. However, jurics were hard to


find, and it was even harder to convict anyone. The more serious the charge, the more likely an acquittal. There were eleven cases in which persons were charged with conspiracy to commit murder or of lynching Will Brown. All of the eleven pleaded not guilty to the charges. Four of those indicted never were tried while two others were found not guilty when they were first brought to trial. In three cases the jurors could not agree so second trials dates were set. However, two of these trials were not held and the other defendant was acquitted in his second trial. Thus, of the eleven charged with conspiracy to murder, only two received punitive judgment. Sam Novak, a minor, was committed to the state reformatory until he reached the age of twenty-one. James Shields, on the other hand, changed his plea to guilty and was fined $200 and cost of court.56

In the two cases of those charged with assault with intent to murder, both defendants pleaded not guilty. One was never tried, and the other, George Davis faced two juries which could not agree on their judgment. Similarly, in six cases of assault three of the accused pleaded not guilty and had the charges

56 Similarly, the two cases of first degree murder involving James Shields and Harry Jenkins both ended with dismissal of the charges. ibid., pp. 74-253.
dismissed while the others pleaded guilty with two paying a total of $150 in fines and the other serving thirty days in jail. Of the thirty-two who were charged with unlawful assembly and rioting, twelve others pleaded not guilty with one being acquitted while the other received a three months jail sentence. A large group of eighteen pleaded guilty to the charge with eleven being fined varying amounts from $25 to $200 while the others seven received jail sentences ranging from fifty days to ninety days.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 64-246.}

There were five cases involving concealed weapons. Two were dropped, one defendant served thirty days, and the others were fined $50 and $100, respectively. In the three arson cases growing out of the riot, two of the men had the charges against them dropped. However, the third, Louis Weaver, received the longest sentence of all the rioters, one to twenty years in the penitentiary. Significantly, this case involved a crime against property as did twenty-seven breaking and entering cases, eleven were dismissed while seven
defendants pleaded not guilty. Four of the latter were acquitted and the other three received fines of $200 each. The remaining nine pleaded guilty with three being assessed fines from $180 to $600 and the others receiving sentences of sixty days to three months. One of the nine, however, did a one to ten year sentence. In the seven larceny cases three were dismissed; three of those accused pleaded guilty and received light sentences of ten to thirty days, one defendant paid a $50 fine. Thus many Omahans were punished for rioting and destroying private and public property, but none was found guilty of a murderous lynching or of the humiliation of his city's highest officer.

58Ibid., pp. 84-242.
Omaha, as it entered the roaring twenties, could try to forget the year 1919. This year had been one of social, industrial, and racial strife both for Omaha and the nation. Beginning in the heat of July an enlarging series of violent and sordid assault and rape stories appearing in the Bee had caused an entire city to reach a fever pitch and finally go beserk. The lynching of Will Brown was not a single isolated murder in a sea of hatred and confusion. It was the inevitable climax of a campaign of bigoted racial and political animosity.

As in any city's tangled jungle of politics, those politicians out of office in Omaha were constantly seeking means to return to power. The Omaha "Old Gang" was burdened with the additional anguish of having been displaced by a reform group after two decades of continuous control. A further aggravation of feeling stemmed from the fact that the new administration was both anti-liquor and anti-vice in a traditionally wet and open town. The old members of the police force who had tolerated such conditions were confronted with a morals
squad which ferreted out vice and booze.

The Bee, an ally of the ousted faction, began a campaign against the inefficiency of the police department and its liquor-smashing morals squad while publishing in great detail the growing number of atrocities perpetrated by Negroes upon white women. The obvious inference was always that the police and, in particular, the morals squad were more concerned with petty and pleasurable crimes than with the defense of white womanhood. As the summer waned but the alleged assaults multiplied, The Omaha Daily News added its voice to the outcry against the Negro rapers but tempered any rank criticism of the police whose anti-vice program it had endorsed. The staid World-Herald withheld comment on the mushrooming assaults until, finally, with the alleged attack by Will Brown on Agnes Loebeck it, too, demanded protection for womanhood. At last the pent up rage against the Negro raper, strikebreaker, and job holder burst out in its fullest fury. When it was spent, Will Brown was dead, and the mayor lay critically injured in a hospital.

Was Omaha shocked, ashamed, or saddened? Some indeed, like the editors of the World-Herald, were concerned about the depths into which Omaha had sunk, but the many more felt satisfied that a white girl's honor
had been avenged. This was the opinion that the citizens poured into their newspapers which in turn often seemed to agree. Many writers expressed regret at the amount of property damaged, but few suffered remorse at Brown's death. Of course, all tried to find reasons why such an event could occur.

Every segment of Omaha's population cited explanations for the riot and attempted to assess blame, but, here again, there was not mention that the lynching was murder. Finally, a grand jury did reach that conclusion. That body brought forth over one hundred indictments, but it took pains to exonerate all public officials while blaming the riot upon the tremendous amount of assaults by Negroes upon white women, with the newspapers as co-defenders for publishing reports of them. On the one hand, the jurors agreed with the press while with the other they slapped the journalists. Indeed, both the press and the grand jury found the Negro a convenient scapegoat. Yet, perhaps, as the foreman of the grand jury charged, the actions of the political group out of power were the real causes of the riot.

Considering the enormous number of indictments stemming from the riot, the natural conclusion might be that a large group was jailed. This was not the case. The public sentiment of the average Omahan seemed to be that no one should be convicted of murdering Will Brown
or doing harm to the mayor. As a consequence, when only reluctant jurors could be found, acquittals and hung juries became the order of the day. Only where crimes against property were concerned were any fines or sentences assessed, and these were light. Only one person received a stiff sentence and that was for the terrible crime of burning a public edifice. Evidently, many civic minded Omahans condoned the death of Will Brown but were appalled at such wanton disrespect for property.

The political ramifications of the lynching were in the traditions of political wrangling. The loud hue and cry for a reorganization of the police department ended in a sham. The appointment of the long anticipated powerful inspector of police resulted in the triumphant return to office in the next election of the old regime led by James Dahlman, the perpetual mayor of Omaha.¹

In the aftermath of the lynching the pattern of segregation and white supremacy in Omaha was encouraged and strengthened. While no serious racial incidents occurred, basic problems continued to exist. In the industrial and economic life of Omaha, the Negro was faced with a number of complications including dis-

criminations, open and tacit, low wages, long hours and irregular employment. The conditions resulted in low standards of living, lowered vitality, behavior problems, juvenile delinquency, and other difficulties. In an effort to develop a plan for improving this situation, men of both races met in an interracial conference at Omaha, on October 20, 1933, and studied "The Economic Life of Negroes." The conference found that Negro job opportunities in Omaha were limited to low paying jobs in which the colored citizens were denied union membership and were in danger of being replaced by white workers. As possible remedies the conference suggested the promotion of friendly interracial attitudes, citizenship training, interracial forums, appeals to employers to hire Negroes, and vocational training for Negroes.²

Through a slow gradual process, the economic level of the Negro in Omaha was raised. Increasingly more jobs became available to him. By 1960 Omaha had reached a total population of 301,598 with 25,220 of this total being Negro.³ In a total work force of


114,343 persons,\(^4\) 5,427 Negro males\(^5\) and 3,364 Negro females\(^6\) were employed. Although the Negro was found in nearly all of the occupations, the largest single area of employment was in the service category.\(^7\) Indeed this accounted for the difference in the median salary of the white and Negro worker of Omaha. The median salary of the white male was $5,027 and his Negro counterpart only $3,668. Similarly, median earning of the white female was $2,336, whereas the Negro female received $1,415.\(^8\)

In spite of the increase of job opportunities in Omaha, two areas continued to blot interracial relations. These were housing and education. Because Negroes lived in circumscribed district, the elementary schools were de facto segregated. These schools had segregated faculties as no Negroes were employed to teach in schools in predominantly white neighborhoods.\(^9\) These conditions had existed before and since the lynching of Will Brown. The raging hatred and fear which had caused a riot still had echoes in the living patterns of a semi-

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 378.  
\(^5\)Ibid., p. 363.  
\(^6\)Ibid., p. 365.  
\(^7\)Ibid., pp. 364-365.  
\(^8\)Ibid., pp. 378-381.
segregated northern city. Over four decades after Brown's death, there was still a quiet, stand-offish and segregated pattern among the people. Although Omaha had progressed tremendously since the dreadful night of September 28, 1919, and though many of both races had forgotten Will Brown himself, they had not yet forgotten the heritage of his lynching.
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Public Documents

This official state report showed the activities of Home Guard units during the rioting and the attempt to get troops into Omaha. In essence the report was a plea for the reestablishment of National Guard Units.

Nebraska. Senate and House Journal. 39th Session (Special), October 14, 1919, to October 18, 1919.
This journal serves only as an official record of the special session concerning the riot. It contains a description of the bills enacted and the voting on the issues, but it does not contain a record of the stirring debates that these issues provoked.

The census of 1960 with its almost complete analytical insight into the population was a valuable guide to modern conditions in Omaha.

While all of these volumes helped to give a picture of Omaha and its Negroes, Vol. II was the most useful. It analyzed all segments of the population as to origin and could be used to show the areas in which different groups lived.

This official governmental report was significant for its presentation of the facts concerning this riot and for its attempt to assess blame. Unfortunately, no committee met concerning the Omaha riot.

This short report gave a military description of the number and use of troops in Omaha. However, it shed no light on the causes of the riot or conditions in its aftermath.

Books


A very useful book on the history of the Negro, especially on the migration and the feelings engendered North and South by the impact of World War I.


This is the usual biography in praise of a hero. It was useful in giving the outline of the politician's career, but it had little value as a source of true political information.


This book had very useful notes on effects that riots, in particular the Omaha riot, have had upon the use of militia in peacetime in suppressing disturbances.


Although this work has little concerning the Nebraska situation, it does present a clear picture of the migration of the Negro and the effects that it had nationwide.


As a source book on migration and race relations both before and after World War I, this work proved very helpful in the contrasts it presented to all the Negro oriented works as to causes of the exodus from the South.


Primarily, this biography is a defense of Leonard Wood as both a general and politician. It was of little use concerning the general's Omaha activities.

Undoubtedly, this is the most interesting and useful history of Omaha. The author presented a strong case against business and political corruption and collusion. However, no proof is cited, as no footnotes are used to bolster the story.


This work contained valuable and useful material concerning the aftermath of World War I. It was very informative and helpful in detailing the problems presented by the Red Scare, labor unrest, and race relations which were discussed together.


As an eyewitness account of Omaha events this work is unsurpassed. It was very useful on all background information necessary in studying the history of Omaha. Disappointingly, the work only covered the period up to 1917.


A very good history of the military in Nebraska. In dealing with use of troops during the riot it pointed out the necessity for a National Guard Contingency.

*The Negroes of Nebraska.* Lincoln: Woodruff Printing Co., 1940.

An excellent source for background material on the Negro in Omaha. It proved most useful in pointing out the sites of settlement and activities of the Negroes. It was weakest, however, in treating of race relations, especially, the riot, which it dismissed with one paragraph.

Omaha's Riot In Story and Picture. Omaha: Educational Publishing Company, no date.

Evidently, this account was written by an eyewitness. This was most useful and enlightening concerning the activities of the riot itself. Although the authorship is anonymous, the company that printed the work had one of its employees on the grand jury.

As a source for a study of the strikes of 1919 this work was useful. However, it presented no material on the Negro and the social unrest engendered by the migrations and the World War.


This scholarly work on the migration of the Negro delved into every phase of the movement and, in that respect, was most helpful in obtaining an overview. However, it was published before the effects of these migrations could be studied.


This is the best available source upon the political situation and atmosphere in Nebraska. Unfortunately, this is a picture of the state as a whole and was not helpful in developing Omaha's politics.


A fine history by a man who lived and experienced the story he tells. This work was most useful in unravelling the political history of the time and the politics of the newspapers.


A good history of the Negro and labor from slavery to 1931. A very helpful book in developing the feelings of communities in the face of immigration and labor disputes involving Negroes.


This short work by an Omaha sociologist in collaboration with one of his students made good use of the 1920 census and seems to have been the basis for the WPA book on the Omaha Negro. Like that work, it does not delve deeply into the race problem.

This was the most useful work on the various lynchings and riots of the period. The articles are well documented and interestingly presented.

Newspapers

**Evening World-Herald** (Omaha). 1918-1920.

Of the three daily newspapers it was the least sensational. As a reporter of the events of the day, it was more factual and less descriptive than the others. However, in keeping with newspapers of the day, it was an obviously political organ.

**Examiner** (Omaha). 1918-1920.

This periodical was most useful in developing the political background of the period as the editor was an active participant in the history of the city.


A useful newspaper which was very helpful in obtaining a true picture of the events of the time especially, the threefold problem of race, labor, and the reds.

**Omaha Daily Bee.** 1918-1920.

Without the Bee, perhaps Omaha would have been a drab town. With its staunch views on everything, its sensational reporting, and involvement in politics, the newspaper was the most prolific source of material for this paper.

**Omaha Daily News.** 1918-1920.

This newspaper, although not as voluminous as the Bee, provided a contrast between that paper and the World-Herald.

**Omaha Excelsior.** 1918-1920.

This was strictly a society paper which entered public affairs only to have its fingers burned.

This edition of the World-Herald commemorated the events of 1919 and presented the views of survivors. It was especially useful in pointing out the costs of the riot and opinion on the subject many years later.

The Monitor (Omaha). 1918-1920.

As a purely minority group newspaper, this Negro weekly presented priceless information concerning Negro views in the period. When presenting opinion, the newspaper was at its best. However, many of its news stories seemed to be direct copies from the World-Herald.

The Nebraska Democrat (Omaha). 1918-1920.

This periodical was not very useful on the strikes or riots. It was helpful, however, in giving background material into the feelings of the time.

Western Laborer (Omaha). 1918-1920.

This was an interesting but not very useful periodical. It was of little help concerning the Negro although it did give general labor news.

Unpublished Material


This public record contained all of the information concerning the various indictments, trials, and final decisions stemming from the riot.


A useful public document which gave valuable information as the work of the grand jury and its final report.