

New york age and brooklyn eagle coverage of harlem riots 1935 research paper exam...

[Politics](#), [Communism](#)



In the following essay, I would like to compare the coverage of Harlem race riot of March 1935 presented by two newspapers - New York Age -one of the most influential African-American newspapers published from 1887 to 1955 and Brooklyn Eagle, a daily newspaper published from 1841 to 1955.

At the time of the riots, there were a lot of speculations about the exact circumstances which incited the riot. The whole incident started off with the ungrounded rumor that the 16 year old Black, Puerto Rican boy had been beaten to death due to his alleged attempt to steal candy from a local shop. New York Age reported that the people who gathered in groups in front of the shop were angered by the event and started to throw rocks at the police officers who arrived at the scene of the incident. New York Age also reported on the increasing activity of Communist leaders gathering in front of the store, addressing the angry crowd in order to induce a bigger commotion and tumult. Despite the fact that some of the leaders were shortly apprehended by the police officers, the Communists succeeded in their attempt to stir up feeling of indignation among the crowds which led to a violent march resulting in a major property damage.

Unlike New York Age, Brooklyn Eagle did not report on the initial stage of the riot and the abovementioned circumstances of the incident. On March 20th Brooklyn Eagle posted the article about the latest developments of the incident, particularly reporting about armed clashes between rioters and police. It was also reported that " Negro snipers on the roof tried to pick off patrolmen". The article included a chain of subsequent events of the disturbances, particularly stressing on the apprehension of rioters, successes of the police in quelling of the disturbances as well as on the accounts of

injured and dead. As a result of clashes, around 100 persons were injured, and among seven shot one died. Seven policemen sustained severe injuries resulting from throwing of stones and rocks by the mob. It was also emphasized that the riot had been initially sparked off by the spreading of an unconfirmed reports stating that a Black child was beaten to death by the storeowner or even police officer. Brooklyn Eagle described the participants of the riot as bands of Black men and women joined by whites who marched down the streets of Harlem, occasionally assaulting white people, smashing windows and looting nearby stores. In this regard, Brooklyn Eagle has provided its readers with more objective and comprehensive account of the circumstances of the riot than New York Age, which coverage mostly focused on the brief description of the inciting incident, as well as on the opinions of the Harlem community clergy as to the possible causes and consequences of the disturbances. Brooklyn Eagle dedicated a few articles to the prosecutorial actions including the indictment of the most violent offenders. Those indictments incriminated anarchy offenses including incitement to riots, looting, assault and robbery. The District Attorney and Police Commissioner expressed a joint position that the main responsibility for the riots lies on the Communist agitators, a movement called Young Liberators. The District Attorney was quoted as saying: " These Reds have been interfering with our institutions long enough. When they incite to riot, it`s time to stop them". He also noted that the laws must be stricter in regard to those who, by abusing the Constitutional right for free speech, incite people to participate in massive riots. Commissioner added that at the beginning of the disturbance when the crowd gathered in front of the store, these

agitators immediately began to spread untruthful and deceptive information, as well as inflammatory literature inciting to riot. White participants of the initial protests in front of the store were charged with a number of crimes. These men are said to have climbed the platform in front of the store and inflamed the crowd by stating that the boy had been killed. They are also known to have distributed leaflets to Blacks calling attention to racial discrimination and inciting to riot. It seems that the main idea behind the Brooklyn Eagle coverage of the incident is to demonstrate that the primary cause of the riot was connected with the activities of Communist groups. At the same time, as part of Harlem riots coverage, Brooklyn Eagle published an article by George Wibecan, an active social worker and the member of Harlem community. The article intends to take a closer look at the possible causes of Harlem riots. The author argues that the riot was sparked by poor living conditions and social inequality of Black population of Harlem rather than by the desire of vengeance against the white population. The author also concludes that the majority of unemployed Blacks who are willing to work in local stores feel resentment when they see that the majority of proprietors employ only whites, while most of the customers in these shops are colored population. Considering these circumstances, many of the organizations and individuals made a public appeal to the business owners urging them to give more employment opportunities to Blacks, mainly due to their purchasing power. While some of the proprietors accepted this request, most of the business owners refused to consider the urge which led to the massive boycotting of the stores, including the stores on 125th street where the riots began. The author also notes that Black population should avoid the

Communism as its ideology runs contrary to the inherently American values and philosophy.

As to the question of causes of riots, New York Age focused mainly on the opinions of Harlem clergy. The whole coverage of the riots itself rarely mentions the role of Communist leaders in the Harlem outbreak. Reverend John H. Johnson argues that Reds or Communists were just “ foam on the top of the boiling water”. The riot was not racial but economic and social; it was a revolt against exploitation and unfair employment practices. The reverend notes that the outbreak was, in fact, the act of revolt of suppressed people against the business interests of the community. Reverend William P. Hayes pointed at the endless patience and self-restraint of the Black population of Harlem, who had to endure an enormous burden of poverty and unemployment. Thus, New York Age defines that the main reason of riots lies in the poor economic and social conditions of the majority of Black population in Harlem, and in these circumstances Communists played the role of the “ foam on top of the boiling water”.

Conclusion

As we can see, the coverage of Brooklyn Eagle and New York Age of 1935 Harlem riots for the most part expresses similar views as to the general sequence of events, main incidents and implications of the riot. At the same time, Brooklyn Eagle stressed on the predominantly violent character of the riots, with numerous reports of vandalism, looting, robbery and assaults against the white population while New York Age chose either to omit or to mention briefly about those facts. Apart from this, Brooklyn Eagle paid particular attention to the activity of Communist groups during the race riot,

emphasizing their particular role in the incitement of the crowd to riots and revolt. Essentially, the position of Brooklyn Eagle in regard to the riots fully conforms with the interests of the official government, especially in the context of the increasing influence of communism and its potential threat to the American model of capitalism. This position is supported by the fact that even the article of George Wibecan, which at first sight seems to point at the economic and social reasons of the riot, concludes with the unambiguous Bible-style statement: "The Negro should avoid Communism, as he would poison, for to embrace that un-American philosophy would be to turn his back to all that true Americans regard as holy". New York Age, however, holds much more reasonable view on the causes of the riots, pointing at the fact that the roots of the conflict lie in the worsening social and economic conditions of inequality that Black population had to endure.

Bibliography

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