



Extension - Excerpt from *America On Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s*

From America On Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s by Elizabeth Hinton (W.W. Norton & Company, 2021).

The 1960s produced an image of “riots” as fundamentally Black. Yet historically, most instances of mass criminality have been perpetrated by white vigilantes hostile to integration and who joined together in roving mobs taking “justice” into their own hands, often with the support of local police. The Jim Crow era was defined by riots. In August 1908, a lynch mob as large as five thousand people, many of them from out of town, descended on the Black community of Springfield, Illinois, wantonly destroying Black businesses, driving Black families from their homes, and executing two Black men. Mobs in St. Louis, in 1917, forced Black wartime factory workers and their families to choose between being burned alive or shot to death in one of the bloodiest riots of the twentieth century. White supremacist mass violence only escalated as Black migrants fled the terror of the segregationist south in greater numbers during and after the First World War, searching for better opportunities and safety from the white mob—only to meet it again in the North, Midwest, and West. White vigilante violence was a means to police the activities of Black people and to limit their access to jobs, leisure, the franchise, and to the political sphere.

[. . .]

It was only when white people no longer appeared to be the driving force behind rioting in the nation’s cities, and when Black collective violence against exploitative and repressive institutions surfaced, that “riots” came to be seen a purely criminal, and completely senseless, acts. “Law and order” became the main response from the white establishment. As local police began to assume many of the previous functions of the white mob, the terms of urban violence were set.

