



Cincinnati Riots of 1829

Cincinnati's black population grew from 700 residents in 1826 to 2258 residents in 1829. The dramatic population increase frightened Cincinnati's white citizens, and the Ohio chapter of the American Colonization Society began publishing propaganda that claimed blacks were a threat to the city. Racial tensions were so bad by 1828 that the black community began planning a mass exodus to rural Ohio where they could establish a settlement. These efforts did not come together soon enough, and on August 15, 1829 a 300-member mob attacked Cincinnati's black neighborhoods.

In 1820, approximately 433 African Americans called Cincinnati home. The city saw a steady rise in the number of black inhabitants until 1826, when the black population exploded from 700 and reached 2258 by 1829. This nine-year, 400 percent population increase frightened Cincinnati's white citizens. Middle class whites worried that the ever growing, largely uneducated, poor black population would severely change the city. Working class whites, mainly Irish immigrants, were concerned about job competition. As the city's black population increased, so too did white anxiety and fear: "the rapid increase of our black population, to nothing of slavery, is of itself a great evil...night walkers, lewd persons, and those who lounge about without any visible means of support, and especially the negro house gamblers" (reprinted in Taylor 11).

White petitioned city officials to remove black citizens, claiming that their poor living conditions were a fire hazard (Taylor 56). In 1826, several men founded the Ohio chapter of the American Colonization Society (OCS). The OCS spread propaganda that blacks were a threat to society. Their claims took hold in Cincinnati, where racial tensions had already been on the rise. Citizens petitioned government officials to enforce the 1807 Black Code that required black residents to pay a \$500 bond to serve as proof of their respectable nature (Taylor 60). On June 30, a notice went out in the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* informing all black residents that they had 30 days to pay the bond or be forced to leave the city (Taylor 63). In response to growing tension and animosity, Cincinnati's black community had already begun to plan an exodus out of the city.

In 1828, the community considered relocating to rural Ohio to create a black settlement they would call "Africana" (Taylor 60). Though these plans never came to fruition, a man named James Charles Brown led the relocation effort in the summer of 1829. In June the community chose two representatives, Israel Lewis and Thomas Crissup, to survey land in Upper Canada for a colony settlement (Taylor 61). It was while Lewis and Crissup were in Canada that the *Gazette* issued their ultimatum. Brown asked the public

for a three-month extension and issued daily updates in the Gazette about their progress and efforts from July 30 until August 10. White Cincinnatians were unsympathetic, and mobs began to attack black neighborhoods in Cincinnati's Fourth Ward (Taylor 65).

From August 15 to August 22, mobs numbering 300 people attacked black homes, businesses and buildings. The police offered black residents no protection from the mob, and the mayor refused to call for an end to the violence.

Works Cited & Further Reading

Taylor, Nikki M. *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005.



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