



1-1-2013

Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America, by Cameron McWhirter, St. Martins's 2011

John Ramsbottom
Butler University, jramshot@butler.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/las_bookreviews

Recommended Citation

Ramsbottom, John, "*Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America*, by Cameron McWhirter, St. Martins's 2011" (2013). *LAS Faculty Book Reviews*. 129.
https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/las_bookreviews/129

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in LAS Faculty Book Reviews by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

Because Ideas Matter...

The faculty and staff of Butler University's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences presents

Recommended Readings



Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America

by Cameron McWhirter, St. Martin's, 2011

Reviewed by John Ramsbottom

Who under the age of 30 can say what the title NAACP stands for? Not only is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (founded 1909) too easily overlooked today, its early history seems to coincide with a period of defeat for black Americans. The main effect of Cameron McWhirter's deeply felt narrative is to remind us that, given the entrenchment of Jim Crow in the South and pervasive discrimination in the North, the precedent set by the NAACP at the end of World War I was essential to ensuring a different outcome in the wake of World War II.

During the summer of 1919, violence on a scale not seen since the Civil War was visited on communities across the US, from Texas to Washington, D. C. Abetted by the ongoing campaign against "Red" subversives, white mobs targeted black neighborhoods; the difference now was that ordinary citizens, many of them veterans, armed themselves and fought back. Leaders of the NAACP, both white and black, tirelessly crisscrossed the country, building the total membership to nearly 100,000 while defending blacks falsely accused of "massacring whites."

Although circumstances varied, one factor was constant—the reluctance of officials, including President Wilson, to intervene. Citing the toll of lynchings and destruction over a few months, McWhirter argues convincingly and in harrowing detail that, without a national organization dedicated to denouncing racial injustice, the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s-60s could well have failed in the face of local hatreds and political indifference.

- John Ramsbottom is a Visiting Professor of Global and Historical Studies at Butler University.