

“It Is My Only Protection”

Federal and State Efforts to Disarm African Americans

On July 31, 1919, Major Walter H. Loving of the army’s Military Intelligence Division (MID) went to 135th Street and Lenox Avenue in Harlem to watch people buy newspapers at the corner’s four newsstands. Washington’s riot had ended ten days earlier, while Chicago’s still raged, and Loving wanted to know how closely New Yorkers were following the events. What he saw greatly impressed him. Eager readers snapped up new editions as soon as they arrived, thousands of copies selling within ten minutes. “People, white and black, actually scramble to get these papers,” he marveled, and the “bigger and more sensational the headlines, the quicker the paper is sold.” Loving worried that New York was on the brink of its own race riot. “Never before have the Negroes of Harlem been so worked up over anything as they are at present over the recent race riot in Washington and the present one in Chicago,” he remarked ominously.¹

Loving was not exaggerating New York’s racial tensions. Late on the night of July 19, an argument between two men – one black, the other white – almost led to a riot in Harlem. According to the *New York Times*, when the white man disputed something the black man said, the latter drew a handgun and fired five shots, wounding two bystanders. By the time a police captain and fifteen officers arrived, “several thousand excited negroes” had filled 127th Street between Second and Third Avenues. When the police dispersed the crowd and began searching houses for “persons believed to have been concerned in the riot,” someone opened

¹ Loving to the MID Director, July 31, 1919, Case File 10218–345–3, RG 165, copy in box 1, reel 6, Kornweibel Papers.

fire on them.² On July 22, a black man stabbed a white man who had slapped a black woman in a subway car. That same day, a white soldier ordered a black man to give up his seat aboard an elevated train. When he refused, the soldier tried to pull him to his feet, and only the conductor's intervention prevented a fight from breaking out. Another white soldier stood outside a Harlem theater, spewing racist invective, until the police made him stop. "The least little cause is likely to start a riot," Loving warned.³

As the major recognized, "the least little" causes had roots in the now-flourishing New Negro movement. "Soap-box orators on street corners constantly remind their hearers that they went to fight for democracy abroad, and they now may be called upon to fight for that same democracy at home."⁴ The black press's exultation of the New Negro fighting for his rights, coupled with national outrage at the continuing depredations of white mobs, had encouraged forceful, swift resistance against even the slightest offenses of white supremacy. How soon, then, until the next riot, and where would it be?

This question preoccupied officers in the MID and officials in the Bureau of Investigation (BI), Department of Justice, and the Post Office. During and after the war, the MID and the BI carried out a massive program of surveillance of African Americans and suppression of black publications such as the *Messenger*, fixating on links between communists, socialists, and advocates of racial equality.⁵ The postwar cascade of racial violence convinced national security officials that a national uprising of blacks, inspired and led by socialists and communists, was now underway. Consider some of the report titles. *In re: Bolsheviki Activities, possible vio[lation] Espionage Act in propaganda among negroes. Attention Mr. Hoover in re: Negro Radical Activities. In re: William Monroe Trotter (Colored) (I.W.W. Agitator)*.⁶ The fact that relatively few

² "War Talk Starts Riot in Harlem," *New York Times*, July 20, 1919.

³ Case File 10218-345-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ For in-depth treatment of the federal government's surveillance of African Americans during the World War I era, see Kornweibel, *Seeing Red and Investigate Everything*; Ellis, *Race, War, and Surveillance*. Jeanette Keith provides additional evidence of the BI's efforts to compel black (and white) conscription and to suppress dissent in the rural South. See *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight*, 135-61. For Loving's part in the surveillance, see Johnson, "Black American Radicalism."

⁶ The report titles come, respectively, from William C. Sausele, "In re: Bolsheviki Activities, possible vio [*sic*] Espionage act in propaganda among negroes," October 18, 1919, RG 65, OGF 375,446, reel 824; Joseph Baker to Frank Burke, October 29, 1919, RG 65,

“agitators” had connections to communist and socialist organizations did not dislodge this *idée fixe*. Indeed, the absence of evidence merely convinced officials, especially the young J. Edgar Hoover – who, on August 1, 1919, was named head of the Department of Justice’s Radical Division – that they were not looking hard enough. Driven by Hoover, agents redoubled their efforts to uncover Red roots for what they dubbed “Radical Activities.”⁷

The federal campaign to link the Red Scare to 1919’s racial conflict is thoroughly documented.⁸ Less well known, however, is the sustained drive undertaken in 1919 to disarm African Americans because of fears that they were plotting violent uprisings. With the cooperation of state and local officials as well as white gun dealers, federal and military officials seized weapons from individual black gunowners, monitored weapons sales to blacks, and asked gun dealers not to sell weapons and ammunition to African Americans. In many cases, gun dealers needed no prompting; on their own initiative, they turned away black customers. This attempted disarming of African Americans represented a national expansion of the practice already being carried out by riot troops and police during outbreaks of antiblack collective violence: the seizure of weapons from black self-defenders, who were then often charged with carrying concealed weapons.

Given the extent of black armed resistance during 1919, it is not surprising that African Americans found ways to evade efforts to strip them of their weapons. Determined to secure all of their constitutional rights, they resisted infringement of their right to bear arms. This was no abstraction. African Americans needed these weapons to defend themselves because, for the most part, local police and federal riot troops had failed to protect them against white mobs. A cartoon published in the *Washington Bee*, a black weekly, during that city’s riot poignantly

OGF 3057, reel 304; Horace A. Lewis, “In re: William Monroe Trotter (Colored) (I.W.W. Agitator),” September 18, 1919, RG 65, OGF 49,899, reel 403.

⁷ In May 1920, the BI admitted, “to date the Department [of Justice] has not found any concerted movement on the part of the negroes to cause a general uprising throughout the country.” Instead, the primary causes of “negro difficulties” in Washington, Chicago, and elsewhere were “purely local.” Nevertheless, the BI insisted that “propaganda of a radical nature” was a secondary cause. See “Negro Agitation,” May 14, 1920, RG 65, OGF 3057, reel 304. For J. Edgar Hoover’s role in directing the BI’s search for radical sources of black activism, see Ellis, “J. Edgar Hoover.”

⁸ Kornweibel, *Seeing Red*, 19–25, 36–53, 84–99; Ellis, *Race, War, and Surveillance*, 183–227; Ellis, “J. Edgar Hoover.”

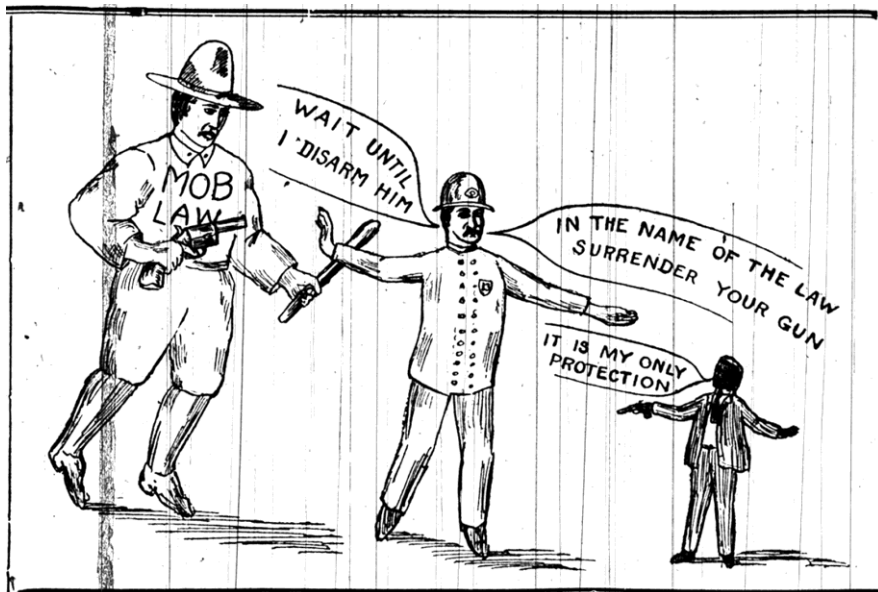


figure 7.1. Mob Law. This cartoon aptly captures the dilemma of African Americans during the year of racial violence: law enforcement officers failed to stop white mob violence, yet they demanded that blacks surrender weapons they needed to defend themselves. Source: *The Washington Bee*, August 2, 1919, p. 1. Courtesy of the Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library.

captured this dilemma (Figure 7.1). The drawing depicts a policeman standing between a hulking white man wielding a pistol and a club and a much smaller black man bearing a pistol. "Wait until I disarm him," the policeman confides to the white figure (labeled Mob Law) as he orders the black figure to surrender his weapon. "It is my only protection," the black man answers.⁹

White Fears of Black Uprisings

The telegram arrived at the MID's office in Washington on the morning of July 31. According to the commanding officer of Camp Johnston, "race riots would be on in Jacksonville, Florida" on August 1. Or so military police at the camp believed, based on statements from local blacks. The officer reported that he was "taking all possible precautions" and had

⁹ *Washington Bee*, August 2, 1919, 1.

apprised local officials.¹⁰ With Chicago still embroiled in its bloody riot, was Jacksonville next?

No. The "reports" of an uprising proved nothing more than vague rumors that some black residents planned to shoot up the town, which never happened.¹¹ In the summer of 1919, Jacksonville was just one of several cities where nervous white citizens and officials, civilian and military, reported planned uprisings by African Americans. None of the "plots" were authentic, but they unsettled whites in the affected communities and set off alarms in the Post Office, Department of Justice, BI, and MID. Not since Nat Turner's revolt, in 1831, and John Brown's raid on the Harpers Ferry arsenal, in 1859, had fears of black uprisings so transfixed and troubled white Americans.¹² "Should the negro become fairly well organized and demand social equality, there is no doubt but that serious trouble would ensue throughout the entire southern belt of the United States," a white attorney from South Carolina warned the BI on July 3, 1919.¹³ Major J. E. Cutler, a MID officer who had closely monitored the Washington and Chicago riots, believed "more bloodshed is very probable."¹⁴ In mid-August, social events organized in Philadelphia for black servicemen attracted the attention of the BI.¹⁵ In Newport News, a Labor Day speech by Matt Lewis, the black editor of the *Newport News Star*, enraged several white listeners, who claimed that Lewis said, "we colored people must hang together to protect ourselves against the whites . . . if a white man abuses you, knock him down." A local BI agent dutifully began abstracting the content of the *News Star*.¹⁶

An incipient yet warped awareness of the New Negro movement reveals itself in these fears. Anxiety over purported uprisings stemmed in part from an understanding that the riots in Washington, Chicago, and elsewhere were not aberrations. But few whites grasped that mass

¹⁰ Telegram, Merillat (Camp Johnston, Fla.) to MID, July 30, 1919, Case File 10218-354-1, RG 165, copy in box 1, reel 6, Kornweibel Papers.

¹¹ MID, Weekly Intelligence Summary for the Week Ending August 16, 1919, No. 116, in *United States Military Intelligence* vol. 9, 1561.

¹² For white paranoia about black uprisings to help Germany during World War I, see Kornweibel, *No Crystal Stair*, 4ff.

¹³ W. A. Blackwood to William J. Flynn, July 3, 1919, RG 65, OGF 3057, reel 304.

¹⁴ J. E. Cutler to Robert Moton, August 13, 1919, box 113-1, folder 12, Walter H. Loving Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center.

¹⁵ J. F. McDevitt, "Re: Colored Activities," August 14, 1919, RG 65, OGF 373,160, reel 820.

¹⁶ J. G. Shuey, "In re: Matt N. Lewis (Colored), Alleged Inflammatory Utterances," September 16, 1919, RG 65, OGF 373,701, reel 821.

resistance to antiblack collective violence linked these episodes. Instead, whites interpreted acts of resistance and rumors of uprisings as evidence that blacks themselves were responsible for the national outbreak of racial violence, and were plotting more attacks on whites.

Federal officials also grossly misunderstood the sources of black resistance: they believed a communist revolution was being mounted in the United States. Robert Bowen, a postal official, succinctly expressed this viewpoint in an essay entitled "Radicalism and Sedition Among the Negroes As Reflected in Their Publications," distributed less than three weeks before Washington's riot. He accused the *New York Age*, the *Crisis*, and especially the *Messenger* of arousing class consciousness among African Americans in order to establish communist rule. In Bowen's telling, "the negro masses may be made to assume a very dangerous power" through these publications. Bowen keenly appreciated that African Americans took their military service during the war as evidence of equality and had returned fighting for their rights: "As far back as the first movement of the American troops to France the negro publicists began to avail themselves of the argument that since the negro was fit to wear the uniform he was, therefore, fit for everything else." Although he excerpted statement after statement in which New Negro authors and publications hailed militancy in pursuit of democracy, he fixated on Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph's promotion of socialism and their support of the IWW. A simplistic and inaccurate syllogism dominated the essay: all New Negroes advocate equality; communists seek classless equality through revolution; therefore, all New Negroes are revolutionary communists.¹⁷ The New Negroes were already outnumbered and outgunned. To judge by the rumors of black uprisings that inundated Washington in July and August, and the federal response to the rumors, New Negroes were now also misunderstood, maligned, and feared.

On July 24, 1919, the War Department received a request from the chief of police in New Orleans: what help would he receive from troops at the Newton Jackson Barracks should race riots break out? The chief also contacted the BI. He had been told blacks "were contemplating an uprising against the whites," so he was taking "all precautions to prevent any casualties in the event the negro population became hostile." These preparations included authorization of the city's Home Guard to patrol with police, if needed. A scheduled address by Milton J. Marshall, an

¹⁷ Robert Bowen, "Radicalism and Sedition Among the Negroes As Reflected in Their Publications," July 2, 1919, RG 65, OGF 359,561, reel 793 (quotes on 1).

agent of Marcus Garvey's Black Star Line, was the cause for alarm. A poster promised Marshall would speak about blacks' wartime contributions and the need to make the United States safe for blacks. A BI agent, declaring the advertisement "inflammatory in the extreme," persuaded the mayor and police to halt the meeting and to force Marshall to leave town.¹⁸

Just days later, the MID filed a report about a secret black society called the Boule. Formed in Dahomey, West Africa, the Boule allegedly required members to swear "to die defending their brothers and to exterminate white rulers" and had helped start Washington's riot. A "printed slip which has fallen into the hands of investigators" revealed, the MID believed, a Boule plot to transport and stockpile weapons across the country: "One city at a time . . . / Send ammunition by the following way / By Parcel Post / By Express / By porters on Pullman." Light-skinned blacks, passing as whites, were supposedly buying the ammunition with the explanation that they needed it to protect themselves from blacks. The MID offered no corroborating evidence for the plot, however, or even for the Boule's existence.¹⁹

On August 6, BI chief Frank Burke summarized a pessimistic prognostication from a BI special employee named McCaleb, who lived in Texas: "It would appear that no way seems practicable to prevent [race riots], as they are apt to break out on the slightest provocation at any point in [Texas]." McCaleb had attended a meeting convened by the governor to discuss Longview's riot and the possible influence of communism, and he equated the New Negro movement with specific forms of radicalism, even if the evidence was lacking. "Nothing tangible was brought out in the conference regarding the Bolsheviki propaganda, but from the general and specific information obtained by the State authorities, it is certain that the negroes are being urged to defend their rights." According to McCaleb, whites believed that black veterans were responsible for

¹⁸ Telegram, Newton Jackson Barracks, New Orleans, to Adjutant General, July 24, 1919, box 5, folder "New Orleans, Louisiana," RG 60, Glasser File; F. O. Pendleton, "In re: alleged negro uprising in New Orleans," July 28, 1919, RG 65, OGF 369,912, reel 812 (first and second quotes); F. O. Pendleton, "In re: Milton J. Marshall (Colored) alias Black Moses: possible treason," August 1, 1919, RG 65, OGF, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans*, reel 12, frames 161-2, 164 (third quote).

¹⁹ Office of MID, New York, to Director of Military Intelligence, Case File 10218-364-2, July 1, 1919, box 9, folder "1919," RG 60, Glasser File (first quote on 4); MID, Weekly Intelligence Summary for the Week Ending September 13, 1919, No. 120, in *United States Military Intelligence* vol. 9, 1789 (second and third quotes).

raising tensions.²⁰ Another BI agent was blunter: “One of the principal elements causing concern [in Texas] is the returned negro soldier who is not readily fitting back into his prior status of pre-war times.” In other words, black veterans were insisting on their equality with whites.²¹

Rumors from Texas continued to preoccupy federal intelligence officials. In Waco, word spread that black residents were signing a declaration that the Great War had made equals of blacks and whites. BI agent R. W. Tinsley went straight to an “absolutely reliable” source: Mrs. Sarah Morris, a black janitor in Waco’s federal building. She assured Tinsley that the rumor was unfounded. As a precaution, Tinsley consulted with the city’s postmaster, who began monitoring the mail of a local black pharmacist, Dr. J. W. Fridia. Like Longview’s S. L. Jones, Fridia was the local sales agent for the *Defender*, which, in Tinsley’s view, “contained some rather radical articles.” Also like Jones, Fridia was harassed by white men who demanded that he stop selling the paper. The pharmacist immediately asked for police protection. Rather than question the men who had menaced Fridia, the chief of police “warned him in no uncertain terms that if there was any trouble with the negroes that the agitators would be summarily dealt with.” Fridia got the message; he promised to stop selling the *Defender*.²²

By late August 1919, the BI was chasing the foggiest of rumors, yet the fact that no “uprisings” occurred did not abate its concern and that of other national security agencies.²³ The MID, in its last weekly intelligence digest for August, declared that although there had been no outbreaks of racial violence, the national atmosphere was like that of “an armed truce” and that agitators continued to stir black resentment by talking and writing about racial injustices.²⁴

²⁰ “Special news of the day in brief,” August 6, 1919, RG 65, OGF 129,548, reel 518.

²¹ Gus T. Jones, “In re Negro Organizations Suspected of Radical or I.W.W. Tendencies,” September 16, 1919, RG 65, OGF 371,751, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans*, reel 12, frame 445 (emphasis in original). For more on white fears of a black uprising in Texas, see Reich, “Soldiers of Democracy,” 1498–1500.

²² R. W. Tinsley, “In re: Negro Activities, Waco, Texas; Alleged Agitation for Racial Equality,” August 26 (first quote), August 29, September 3, September 8 (second and third quotes), September 27, 1919, RG 65, OGF 379,422, reel 831.

²³ See, for example, the report “In re: Atlantic City, N.J., alleged prospective negro uprising,” August 27, 1919, RG 65, OGF 374,236, reel 822. In this case, a BI agent asked a Richmond, Virginia, woman if she had heard a rumor about a black uprising while on vacation in Atlantic City.

²⁴ MID, Weekly Intelligence Summary for the Week Ending August 30, 1919, No. 118, in *United States Military Intelligence* vol. 9, 1664–5.

"Armed truce" was an apt phrase. The belief that African Americans were stockpiling arms and ammunition was a major source for white fears of black uprisings. The belief originated in the military. In April 1919, Colonel John Dunn, citing unnamed but supposedly reliable sources, warned MID director Marlborough Churchill that almost every serviceman in the colored labor battalions returning from France has "secreted somewhere about their person or in their baggage, an army revolver obtained before they left the other side." Dunn urged Churchill to launch an immediate investigation:

The importance of this matter can hardly be over-estimated, since it is a well known fact that there is a great deal of social and labor unrest among the Negro population of the United States, who are demanding social equality as well as other changes from their pre-war status. Negro publications now openly advocate race war and violence, and if there be any truth in this report about the revolvers, this would seem to indicate one of the sources from which they are obtaining, or could obtain, fire arms for illegal purposes.²⁵

Churchill agreed, but he ordered that servicemen of both races be searched upon disembarkation.²⁶ The results proved Dunn's "sources" to be far less than reliable. During May, 9,000 men arriving at Newport News were searched – just thirty-one pistols were discovered.²⁷

Having failed to find guns, the MID looked for communist propaganda aboard the troop transports. One after another, investigating officers reported no evidence of radical literature or proselytizing. Instead, they observed black soldiers discussing the need to fight for equality.²⁸ An officer aboard the USS *Orizaba* reported hearing two black soldiers agreeing that "the negro would have to stand for his rights as a citizen or be deprived of them." The officer remarked sourly, "this seems to throw some light as to what we may expect of the Negro in the near future."²⁹ Another officer overheard a black enlisted man say, "things

²⁵ John M. Dunn to Director of Military Intelligence, April 25, 1919, Case File 10218–329–1, RG 165, copy in box 1, reel 5, Kornweibel Papers.

²⁶ Churchill to Military Attaché, American Embassy, Paris, April 26, 1919, Case File 10218–329–2 (see also files 10218–329–3 and 10218–329–4), RG 165, copies in box 1, reel 5, Kornweibel Papers.

²⁷ John D. Austin to Commanding General, Port of Embarkation, Newport News, Va., June 10, 1919, Case File 10218–329–9, RG 165, copy in box 1, reel 5, Kornweibel Papers. See also Ellis, *Race, War, and Surveillance*, 211–12.

²⁸ J. E. Cutler to the Chief, Morale Branch, June 18, 1919, Case File 80–163–88, RG 165, box 132.

²⁹ Transport Personnel Adjutant, USS *Orizaba* to Intelligence Officer, Port of Embarkation, Newport News, July 3, 1919, Case File 80–163–117, RG 165, box 132.

would be different in the States now.”³⁰ The personnel adjutant of one transport reported that black soldiers from the South were receiving letters from their families warning them not to wear their uniforms when they returned home because of attacks on black veterans.³¹ Concern over the assertiveness of black soldiers reached the highest levels; in mid-July, Secretary of War Newton Baker ordered that the “mixing of white and colored troops” on transports should be avoided as much as possible.³²

The fact that so many black veterans used legally purchased arms for self-defense during the Washington and Chicago riots stoked the smoldering fears of uprisings. A report forwarded to the BI in late August claimed that the troubles in those cities augured uprisings against whites in other cities. According to the unnamed author, who cited a so-called reliable source, African Americans were using express rail, parcel post, and even coffins to ship arms and ammunition. Blacks who could pass as whites were purchasing the weapons to avoid attracting attention. Quoting a secretive message allegedly circulating in New York, the author surmised that Philadelphia and Cleveland were the next targets. The twenty-six page report was strident, alarmist, and lacked corroboration; but it was also typical of the intelligence received by the BI and MID that summer.³³ BI agent William Sausele, who investigated a prediction that blacks would ambush whites during a St. Louis parade, determined that “most of these rumors, when traced, ended in some such blind alley, as ‘heard it on a street car’ . . . or ‘talking to two men in a saloon,’ etc.”³⁴

Yet BI agents and MID officers dutifully passed on the received information to their superiors, who did the same; copies swiftly arrived at the offices of other government intelligence offices. The chain of command thus became de facto verification of the reports’ content. Consider the following cover letter, signed by MID director Marlborough Churchill and addressed to BI chief Frank Burke: “Enclosed herewith for your information find copy of 3rd Endorsement, dated St. Louis, Mo., August 4, 1919,

³⁰ Personnel Adjutant USS *Amphion* to Port Intelligence Officer, July 25, 1919, Case File 80-163-148, RG 165, box 132.

³¹ J. E. Cutler to Chief, Morale Branch, July 17, 1919, Case File 80-164, RG 165, box 132; Churchill to the Army Chief of Staff, July 16, 1919, Case File 80-163, RG 165, box 132.

³² Memorandum for the Adjutant General of the Army, n.d., Case File 80-163, RG 165, box 132.

³³ Joseph Baker to Frank Burke, August 21, 1919, RG 65, OGF 3057, reel 304.

³⁴ William C. Sausele, “In re: Bolsheviki activities, general investigations,” October 14, 1919, RG 65, OGF 105,390, reel 484; Sausele, “In re: Bolsheviki Activities,” October 18, 1919, RG 65, OGF 375,446, reel 824 (quote).

and addressed to Headquarters, Central Department, Chicago, Ill., and signed 'T. S. Maffitt, Captain, U.S.A., Intelligence Officer,' same being a report of an investigation made by the Intelligence Officer, St. Louis, of certain rumors that negroes were purchasing fire arms in St. Louis and East St. Louis, Mo."³⁵ Churchill offered not a word about the rumors' veracity (note the noncommittal phrase "for your information"), but the lengthy provenance of what was, essentially, a report about rumors suggested the information was of the utmost significance.

Like the rumors about racial uprisings, stories of rampant arms purchases and stockpiling proved exaggerated, inaccurate, or uncorroborated. For his report, Captain Maffitt had interviewed St. Louis's chief of police and chief of detectives. Both men stated that "their reports show that a large number of high-powered rifles and pistols and a large amount of ammunition have been purchased" by blacks in St. Louis and East St. Louis. When asked, however, neither man could estimate that "large number."³⁶ Concern that black employees were stealing gun parts to assemble weapons led the Remington Arms Company of Connecticut to place watchers on the factory floor.³⁷ In Denver, an intrepid BI agent, hearing rumors of increased arms sales, visited pawn brokers and gun shops in October. One pawn shop had sold a single handgun to an African American during the previous six weeks. Another broker had sold twenty-five pistols to blacks in July and eleven in August. The reason for the modest increase in sales was no mystery to the agent: "the Chicago trouble."³⁸ In Newport News, fears of a black uprising led the city council to require permits from a city official to purchase firearms, and the police prohibited the sale of weapons to African Americans. But there was an uptick in arms sales – to whites.³⁹

Newport News was not the only community that restricted or prohibited arms purchases by African Americans. City authorities and local gun shops stopped weapons sales to blacks in Washington and Chicago during those cities' riots. Throughout Texas, gun dealers worked with

³⁵ Churchill to Burke, August 14, 1919, RG 65, OGF 375,446, reel 824.

³⁶ T. S. Maffitt, August 4, 1919, RG 65, OGF 375,446, reel 824.

³⁷ William P. Hazen, "Re: Larceny of Guns and Gun Parts from the Remington Arms Company," October 1, 1919, RG 65, OGF 901, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans*, reel 8, frame 90.

³⁸ Charles H. Heighton, "In re: sale of guns and ammunition," October 9, 1919, RG 65, OGF 375,462, reel 824.

³⁹ J. G. Shuey, "In re: Alleged preparation for uprising by negroes at Newport News, Virginia," August 11, 1919, RG 65, OGF 374,223 and 374,237, reel 822.

local, state, and federal officials to prohibit gun sales to blacks after those riots as well. On August 5, a Beaumont hardware store manager reported to the BI that five black men had tried to purchase rifles that day, but he had refused them. The manager was not alone. All of the hardware stores in Port Arthur and two other large hardware stores in Beaumont had agreed not to sell rifles to blacks, an embargo that continued until at least October. Indeed, all dealers “in the larger cities have been instructed by the Sheriff’s Department not to sell any more ammunition or fire arms to the negroes,” reported a special agent with the U.S. Railroad Administration.⁴⁰ An El Paso, Texas, gun dealer informed the MID that Pullman porters were trying to buy weapons and ammunition – he feared the porters were smuggling the guns to Chicago.⁴¹ The sheriff of Harrison County, Texas, recorded all shipments of weapons and ammunition to black residents; he also stopped blacks from selling the *Defender*.⁴²

African Americans who sent or sought weapons through the mail also risked the intervention of federal authorities. C. K. Jackson, a hotel porter in Washington, D.C., asked his brother to send him a revolver and cartridges from Scranton, Pennsylvania, during the capital’s riot. After a postal inspector intercepted the package, the BI sent an agent to interview C. K. Jackson and his employer. The agent decided the “subject” was “a quiet, good man, very peaceful” and would not “use the revolver even if he had one.” The BI closed the investigation without further action.⁴³ Also in Washington, a prominent black physician, fearing that more antiblack collective violence might break out, asked an attorney in New York to mail him six revolvers and ammunition. The request came to the attention of Major Loving, who implored the lawyer not to send the weapons.⁴⁴ Loving’s request, as well as the BI agent’s belief that it was his duty to assess C. K. Jackson’s right to own a firearm,

⁴⁰ V. I. Snyder, “In re: Negro Race Riots,” August 8, 1919, RG 65, OGF 369,955, reel 812; Fuller Williamson to R. S. Mitchell, August 23, 1919, RG 65, OGF 17,011, reel 347 (quote); H. W. Perkins, “In re: Purchase of Arms by Negroes,” October 18, 1919, RG 65, OGF 287,223, reel 704.

⁴¹ District Intelligence Officer to Department Intelligence Officer, August 30, 1919, Case File 10218–366–1, RG 165, copy in box 1, reel 6, Kornweibel Papers.

⁴² C. L. Breniman, “In re: Negro race riot propaganda in Texas,” August 28, 1919, RG 65, OGF 105,390, reel 484; Perkins, “In re: Purchase of Arms”; Snyder, “In re: Negro Race Riots.”

⁴³ Roy McHenry to Frank Burke, August 9, 1919; George L. Wallace, “In re: C. K. Jackson, negro, New Cochran Hotel, Washington, D.C.,” August 13, 1919, RG 65, OGF 372,680, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans*, reel 12, frames 540–2.

⁴⁴ W. H. Loving to M. Churchill, August 10, 1919, Case File 10218–350–7, RG 165, copy in box 1, reel 6, Kornweibel Papers.

illustrate the extent of the government's campaign to impede black gun ownership.