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THE MAINSTREAM AND THE ALTERNATIVE:
UNDERSTANDING HOW THE
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH AND THE
ST. LOUIS ARGUS CHARACTERIZED THE
1917 EAST ST. LOUIS RACE RIOTS

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This thesis focuses on differential media reporting of the 1917 East St. Louis Race Riots. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *St. Louis Argus* were two relevant newspapers at the time of the riots with very different readerships and missions. The *Post-Dispatch* aimed to serve its predominantly white readership as a liberal crusader for justice, while the *Argus* acted as a voice for empowering African-Americans in the region. As such, the *Post-Dispatch* can be seen as a mainstream newspaper supporting majority viewpoints, leaving a void for the pro-black *Argus* to fill as an alternative news source. The main purpose of this project then becomes to investigate the significance of each paper's distinct narrative construction of the Race Riots, as well as understand how an alternative news source developed in opposition to the mainstream. Specifically, what was similar and different in each paper's respective characterization of the riots, and how did it align with their overall mission? By discerning which events and details were highlighted, we can gain a deeper understanding as to each paper's true goals and functions in society, and further speculate the impacts reporting had on both readerships. To tackle these ideas, this project begins with a historical analysis of the riots, focusing on the racial, economic, and political dynamics in East St. Louis that allowed for an eruption of racist violence to occur. Using archival materials, a history of the *Post-Dispatch* and *Argus* is then followed to provide context for reporting on the 1917 Riots and to uncover the relationship between the two papers, with specific attention paid to each paper's depiction of African-Americans. Finally, this project continues using archival materials to dive into the papers' reporting over a three-month period that encapsulated the riots. Overall, there is substantial literature that discusses the 1917 East St. Louis Race Riots as a historical event, as well as literature that dictates histories of the *Post-Dispatch* and the *Argus*. However, there are no scholarly pieces that comparatively analyze these paper's depictions of the riots, which is where this project aims to situate itself.