

SHOTGUN! PUT ON YOUR RED DRESS!

The Backstory: The Crown Heights Riots

The Hard Truth About the Crown Heights Riots

JEFFREY GOLDBERG

<https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/08/the-hard-truth-about-the-crown-heights-riots/243448/>

AUGUST 11, 2011

Ari Goldman has filed an amazing piece for The New York Jewish Week (h/t John Podhoretz) about the manner in which his former newspaper, *The New York Times*, covered the Crown Heights riots of 1991. It is astonishing, the lengths the *Times* went to prove that a riot that was antisemitic on its face wasn't, in fact, antisemitic:

My job was to file memos to the main "rewrite" reporters back in the Times office in Manhattan about what I saw and heard. We had no laptops or cellphones in those days so the other reporters and I went to payphones and dictated our memos to a waiting band of stenographers in the home office...Yet, when I picked up the paper, the article I read was not the story I had reported. I saw headlines that described the riots in terms solely of race. "Two Deaths Ignite Racial Clash in Tense Brooklyn Neighborhood," the Times headline said. And, worse, I read an opening paragraph, what journalists call a "lead," that was simply untrue:

"Hasidim and blacks clashed in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn through the day and into the night yesterday." In all my reporting during the riots I never saw -- or heard of -- any violence by Jews against blacks. But the Times was dedicated to this version of events: blacks and Jews clashing amid racial tensions. To show Jewish culpability in the riots, the paper even ran a picture -- laughable even at the time -- of a chasidic man brandishing an open umbrella before a police officer in riot gear. The caption read: "A police officer scuffling with a Hasidic man yesterday on President Street."

I was outraged but I held my tongue. I was a loyal Times employee and deferred to my editors....But then I reached my breaking point. On Aug. 21, as I stood in a group of chasidic men in front of the Lubavitch headquarters, a group of demonstrators were coming down [Eastern Parkway](#). "Heil Hitler," they chanted. "Death to the Jews." Police in riot gear stood nearby but did nothing.

Finally, Goldman informed Manhattan in very certain terms what was happening on the streets of Crown Heights:

"You don't know what's happening here!" I yelled. "I am on the streets getting attacked. Someone next to me just got hit. I am writing memos and what comes out in the paper?"

'Hasidim and blacks clashed'? That's not what is happening here. Jews are being attacked! You've got this story all wrong. All wrong."

I didn't blame the "rewrite" reporter. I blamed the editors. It was clear that they had settled on a "frame" for the story. The way they saw it, there were two narratives here: the white narrative and the black narrative. And both had equal weight.

After my outburst things got a little better. The next day's report began like this: "Black youths hurling rocks and bottles scuffled with the police in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn last night, even as Mayor David N. Dinkins tried to personally calm the racially troubled neighborhood after two nights of violence."

But the Times still had trouble changing its frame. Perhaps most troubling was an article written in the midst of the rioting under this headline: "Amid Distrust in Brooklyn: Boy and Scholar Fall Victim." The article compared the life of Gavin Cato, the 7-year-old boy killed in the car accident that spurred the riots, and the life of Yankel Rosenbaum, 29, who was stabbed to death later that night. It recycled every newspaper cliché and was an insult to the memory of both victims, but, again, it fit the frame.

"They did not know each other," the article said. "They had no reason to know... They died unaware...." In the eyes of the Times, the deaths were morally equivalent and had equal weight.

Read the whole piece.

We want to hear what you think about this article. Submit a letter to the editor or write to letters@theatlantic.com.

JEFFREY GOLDBERG *is the editor in chief of The Atlantic and a recipient of the National Magazine Award for Reporting. He is the author of Prisoners: A Story of Friendship and Terror.*



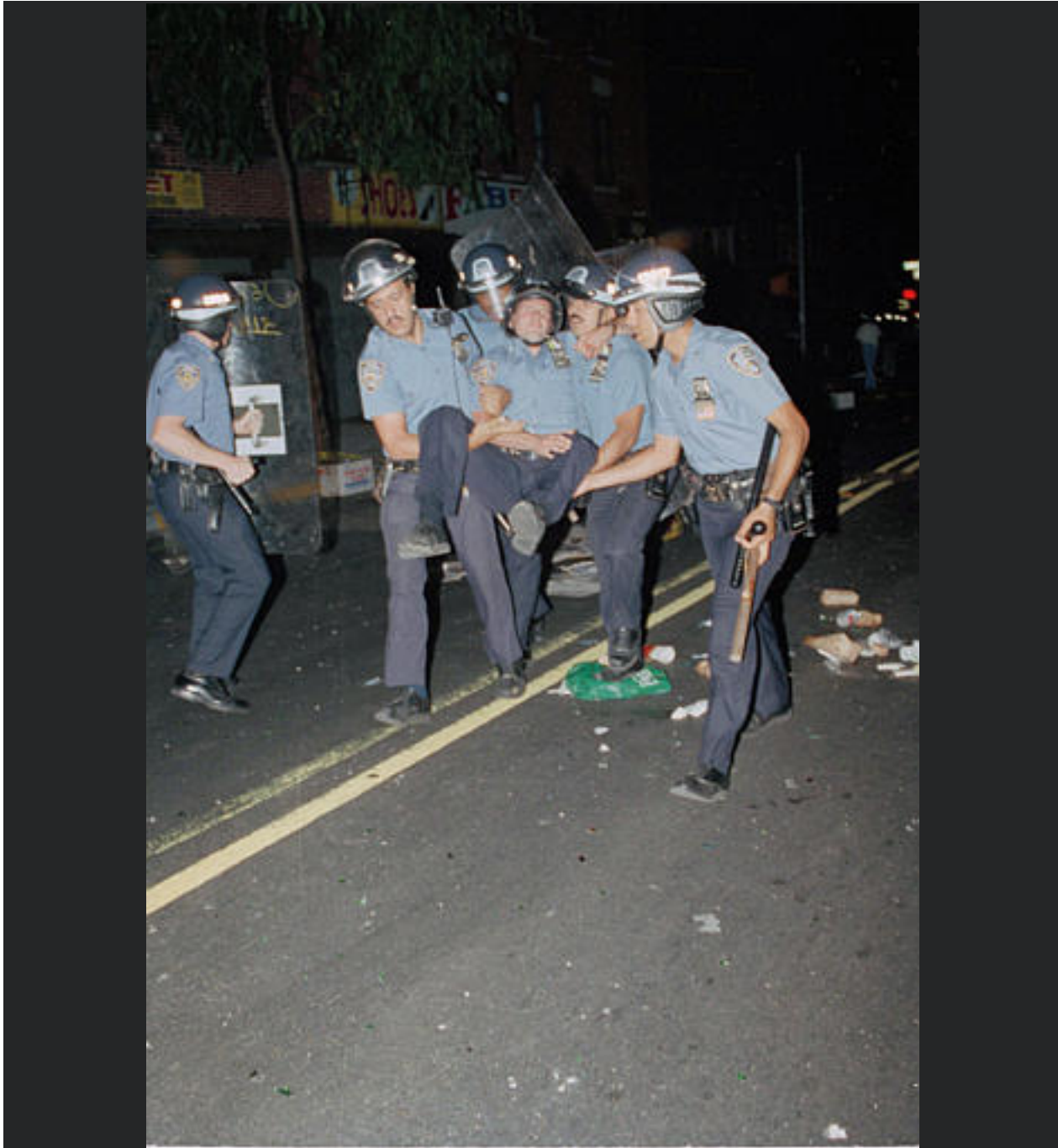




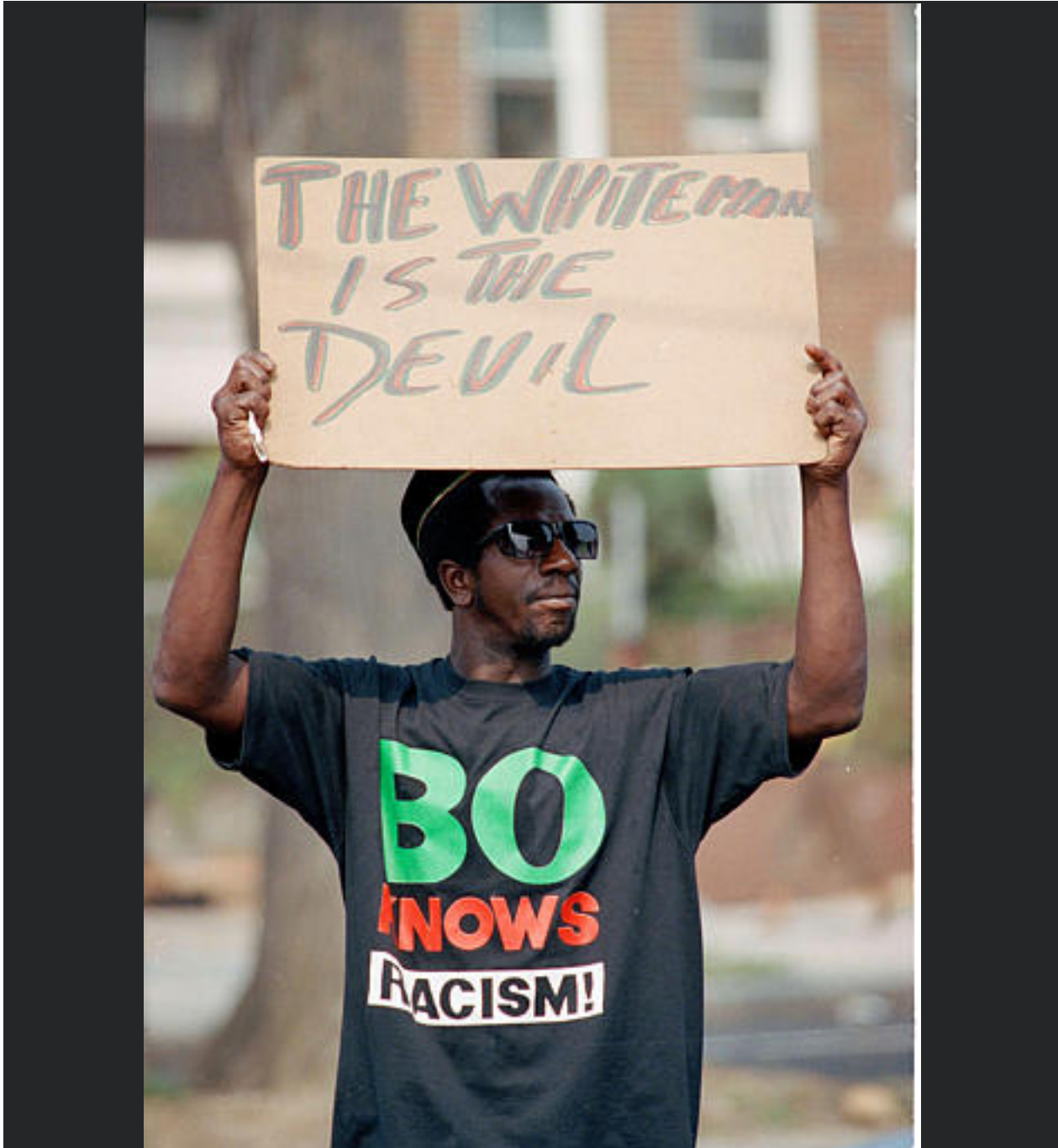




















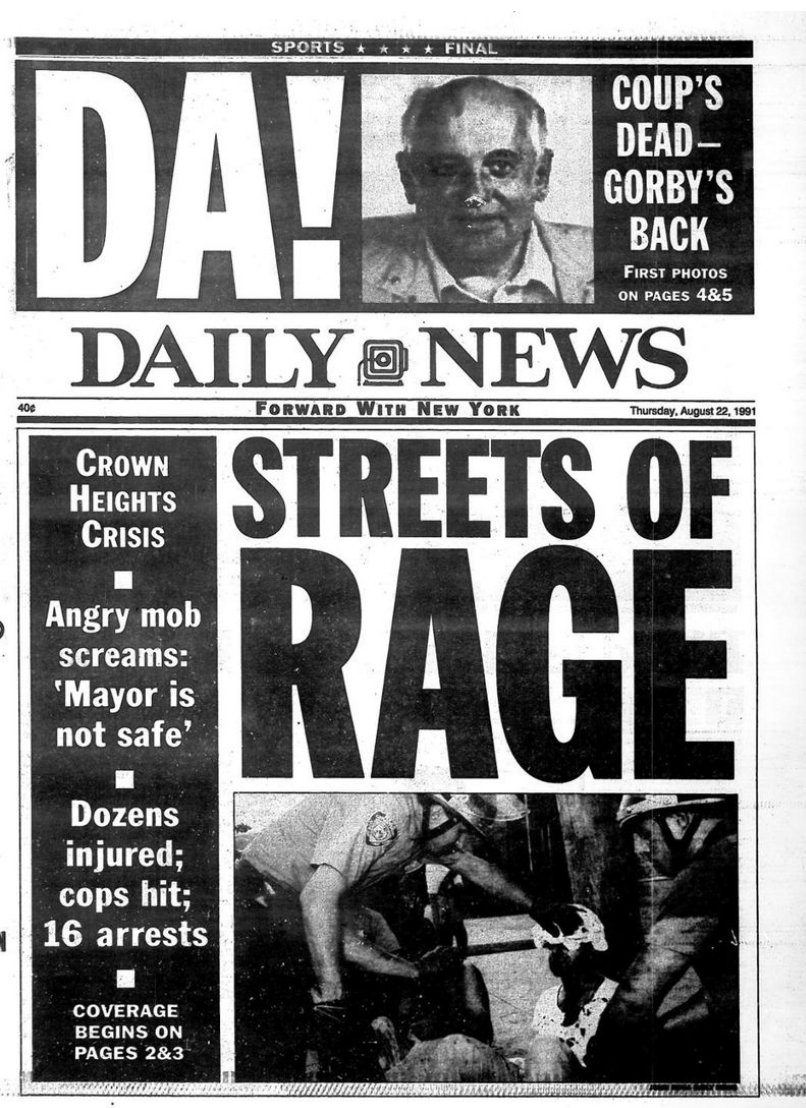
Search for: SEARCH

BLACKPAST

≡ MENU

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/crown-heights-brooklyn-new-york-riot-1991/>

CROWN HEIGHTS (BROOKLYN) NEW YORK RIOT, 1991



Crown Heights Crisis, New York Daily News, August 22, 1991

POSTED ON NOVEMBER 27, 2017 BY CONTRIBUTED BY: [MARSHALL GREENLAW](#)

On August 19, 1991, two African American cousins named Gavin and Angela Cato were playing in the streets of Brooklyn, New York. As Gavin went to adjust his bike lock, an Orthodox Jewish driver named Yosef Lifsch, who was part of a motorcade for notable Rabbi Menachen M. Schneerson, swerved onto the sidewalk. Lifsch struck the cousins, killing Gavin, and seriously injuring Angela. Although it was later debunked, rumors spread that Lifsch was drunk, and that the death was deliberate.

Within a few hours, a group of black youths stabbed a visiting Orthodox Jew from Australia named Yankel Rosenbaum. While Rosenbaum had nothing to do with the Gavin Cato death, it was seen as an apparent retaliation to it. Rosenbaum initially survived the wounds, with Mayor David Dinkins consoling him at the Kings County Hospital the next day. However, hours after the Mayor's visit Rosenbaum died from his bleeding in an undetected wound.

The background of Black-Jewish relations in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn had long preceded the riot. As a majority black neighborhood with a large Hasidic Jewish population, black residents had voiced resentment that Jews had received special protections from law enforcement due to a police redistricting decision in 1976. Many blacks were also frustrated because they believed the Jewish minority had exploited black political leadership, largely taking advantage of a lack of unity among blacks at the time.

Violence continued from August 19 (the night of the attack on Rosenbaum) until August 23. Groups of rioters destroyed numerous homes, businesses, and vehicles throughout the neighborhood. Hundreds of police officers would be called in to suppress the riot, however, many rioters and police would be injured during the ensuing violence. A few months later, a state investigation concluded that a slow response and miscalculation of the tensions by law enforcement enabled the riot.

On the third day of the riot, a group of black protesters who were part of an Al Sharpton-led march pulled away from a preplanned route. They burned an Israeli flag outside the building of a local Orthodox Jewish organization. Sharpton himself received criticism when he spoke at Gavin Cato's eulogy, referring to the Jews as "diamond merchants," and comparing the Crown Heights neighborhood to apartheid South Africa.

After the riots, legal actions were taken against Lemrick Nelson Jr., a black sixteen-year old who was charged with assaulting Rosenbaum. Police had found a knife on Nelson that they had identified as the one used on Rosenbaum. However, on October 29, 1992,

Nelson was acquitted by a state court for the murder of Rosenbaum, much to the disappointment of many in the local Jewish community.

While the riots lasted only a few days, they held serious political ramifications in New York City. Mayor Dinkins, the city's first black mayor, would lose in the 1993 election to Republican Rudy Giuliani. Giuliani's campaign criticized Dinkins by asserting that he supported Black Nationalism, and had enabled an ethnic "pogrom" by allowing rioters to roam in the street. Giuliani would later become nationally known for his role as mayor during the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center terrorist attack in New York City.



NEW YORK POST

<https://nypost.com/2016/08/18/25-years-later-we-still-havent-learned-the-lessons-of-the-crown-heights-riot/>

OPINION

25 years later, we still haven't learned the lessons of the Crown Heights riot

By **Seth Lipsky**

August 18, 2016 | 8:00pm

[Enlarge Image](#)



Police walk through Crown Heights, Brooklyn, after riots broke out in August 1991.AP

“Jewish homes were being attacked, windows broken. Jewish residents were covering in the safest rooms of their homes. Sympathetic gentiles in the area were sneaking word to some of their Jewish neighbors to keep their lights turned off.

“Marauding bands of outside agitators were roaming around, blaming Jews. This was taking place not in, say, prewar Poland or the Pale of Settlement back in an even earlier time. This was taking place in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.”

That was how the Forward, which I was editing at the time, began its Page One editorial on the Crown Heights riot that erupted 25 years ago Friday. It was the first editorial to liken the violence to the pogroms from which so many Jews fled to New York.

Not that Crown Heights was anything like the scale of the attacks that took place in Eastern Europe and with government sanction. But the attacks on Jews were animated by the same anti-Semitism.

Crown Heights erupted after a driver in the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s motorcade lost control and killed a black child, Gavin Cato. For three days, historian Edward Shapiro would write, “bands of young blacks” had “roamed” the neighborhood, assaulting Jews.

Within hours, a Jewish scholar, Yankel Rosenbaum, was knifed to death by a member of a mob, some yelling, “Kill the Jew.” Shapiro would call the riot “the most serious anti-Semitic incident in American history.”

As if to underscore the point, Rosenbaum's killer, Lemrick Nelson, was acquitted of murder by a New York jury.

It would take two federal civil rights prosecutions to send him away (he eventually did 10 years on civil rights charges).

Yet even after all these years, what stands out for me is the reluctance of some of the most distinguished political and private leaders in our city to describe the riot as the anti-Semitic attack that it was.

Among them was Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League, which had hung back from defending the Orthodox Jews under attack. Foxman quickly recovered, issuing a public apology within days of the riot.

The city's government was also wanting, a 1993 report commissioned by Gov. Mario Cuomo concluded. It faulted Mayor David Dinkins and Police Commissioner Lee Brown, though it didn't support the claim that they'd intentionally shrunk from seeking to halt the violence.

The most abject default was by the New York Times, which insisted on portraying the violence as a clash between blacks and Jews. Its mendacity was finally exposed 20 years later by the paper's legman in Crown Heights, Ari Goldman.

Goldman wrote his exposé for the Jewish Week in 2011. He told of how, from the streets of Crown Heights, he'd been assigned to call in the facts of the violence — only to have them rewritten into a fantasy yarn.

A young Hasidic child covers his face as he sits on a bench with New York City police officers on Aug. 24, 1991, after more than 1,000 protesters walked through the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn.



“In all my reporting during the riots I never saw — or heard of — any violence by Jews against blacks,” Goldman wrote. “But the Times was dedicated to this version of events: blacks and Jews clashing amid racial tensions.”

He recalled how the paper ran a photo of a Hasidic man “brandishing an open umbrella before a police officer in riot gear.” The cutline under the photo read: “A police officer scuffling with a Hasidic man yesterday on President Street.”

Goldman finally reached his “breaking point” when demonstrators on Eastern Parkway started chanting “Heil Hitler” and “Death to the Jews.” He lost his cool, warning his editors over the phone, “You’ve got this story all wrong. All wrong.”

It would be folly to suggest that Crown Heights has fully healed, a fact that, as The Post marked in its editorial this week, the festival set for this weekend in Crown Heights can’t disguise. But the efforts at reconciliation are no small thing.

Liberal elites have made no such progress. They have never lifted a finger for the Orthodox Jews. The animus that erupted as “Heil Hitler” in Crown Heights has broken out on some of our city’s finest campuses, which echo with “Zionists out” and “Long live the Intifada.”

Crown Heights riot

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_Heights_riot

Crown Heights riot



Location of [Crown Heights, Brooklyn](#), in [New York City](#).

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Date | August 19–21, 1991 |
| Death(s) | 2 |
| Injuries | 152 police officers 38 civilians |
| Arrested | 129 |

The **Crown Heights riot** was a [race riot](#) that took place from August 19 to 21, 1991, in the [Crown Heights](#) section of [Brooklyn, New York City](#). Black residents turned against [Orthodox Jewish Chabad](#) residents, resulting in a deterioration of already tense racial relations in the densely populated community. The riots began on August 19, 1991, after two children of [Guyanese](#) immigrants were accidentally struck by one of the cars in the motorcade of [Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson](#), the leader of [Chabad](#), a Jewish religious movement. One child died and the second was severely injured.

In the wake of the fatal accident, some black youths attacked several Jews on the street, seriously injuring several and fatally injuring an Orthodox Jewish student from Australia. Two weeks after the riot, a non-Jewish man was killed by a group of black men; some believed that the victim had been mistaken for a Jew. The riots were a major issue in the [1993 mayoral race](#), contributing to the defeat of Mayor [David Dinkins](#), an African American. He was blamed for an ineffective police response.

Ultimately, black and Jewish leaders developed an outreach program between their communities to help calm and possibly improve racial relations in Crown Heights over the next decade.^[1]



Car crash

At approximately 8:20 pm on Monday, August 19, 1991, Yosef Lifsh, 22, was driving a [station wagon](#) with three passengers west on President Street, part of the three-car motorcade of [Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson](#), leader of the [Chabad Lubavitch Hasidic](#) movement.^{[2][3]} The procession was led by an unmarked [police car](#) with two officers, with its rooftop light flashing.^[4]

The police car and Schneerson's automobile crossed [Utica Avenue](#) on a green light and proceeded along President Street at a normal speed, but Lifsh's vehicle had fallen behind. Not wishing to lose sight of Schneerson's car, Lifsh's vehicle either crossed Utica Avenue on a yellow light or ran a red light. There was no indication of the exact

speed of Lifsh's vehicle.^{[3][5]} Lifsh's vehicle struck a car being driven on Utica Avenue, veered onto the sidewalk, knocked a 600-pound (275 kg) stone building pillar down and pinned two children against an iron grate covering the window of a first-floor apartment in a four-story brick building (40.66717°N 73.93166°W). Seven-year-old Gavin Cato, the son of Guyanese immigrants, who was working on his bicycle chain while on the sidewalk near his apartment on President Street, died instantly. His seven-year-old cousin Angela Cato, who was playing nearby, survived but was severely injured.^{[6][7]}

Lifsh believed he had the right of way to proceed through the intersection because of the police escort.^[4] Lifsh said he deliberately steered his car away from adults on the sidewalk, toward the wall, a distance of about 25 yards (23 m), in order to stop the car. Lifsh later said that the car did not come to a full stop when it hit the building, but slid to the left along the wall and hit the children.

Death of Gavin Cato

Accounts differ as to the next sequence of events. After the collision, Lifsh said that the first thing he did was to try to lift the car in order to free the two children beneath it.^[8] Members of the [EMS](#) unit, who arrived on the scene about three minutes after the accident, said that Lifsh was being beaten and pulled out of the station wagon by three or four men.^{[4][9]} A volunteer ambulance from the [Hatzolah](#) ambulance corps arrived on the scene at about 8:23 pm, followed by police and a City ambulance. The latter took Gavin Cato to [Kings County Hospital](#), arriving at 8:32 pm; Cato was pronounced dead shortly thereafter.^[4] Volunteers from a second Hatzolah ambulance helped Angela Cato, until a second City ambulance arrived and took her to the same hospital.^{[3][4]}

Two attending police officers, as well as a technician from the City ambulance, directed the Hatzolah driver to remove Lifsh from the scene for his safety, while Gavin Cato was being removed from beneath the station wagon.^[10] According to *The New York Times*, more than 250 neighborhood residents, mostly black teenagers, many of whom were shouting "Jews! Jews! Jews!", jeered the driver of the car and turned their anger on the police.^[11]

Some members of the community were outraged because Lifsh was taken from the scene by a private ambulance service while city emergency workers were still trying to free the children who were pinned under the car. Some believed that Gavin Cato died because the Hatzolah ambulance crew was unwilling to help non-Jews. There was a rumor at the time that Lifsh was intoxicated. A breath alcohol test administered by police within 70 minutes of the accident indicated this was not the case. Other rumors circulating shortly after the accident included: Lifsh was on a cell phone, Lifsh did not have a valid driver's license, and that police prevented people, including Gavin Cato's father, from assisting in the rescue of the children.^{[4][12][13]}

Later that evening, as the crowds and rumors grew, people threw bottles and rocks. Someone reportedly shouted, "Let's go to Kingston Avenue and get a Jew!"^{[14][15][16][17]} A number of black youths set off westward toward Kingston Avenue (0.7 miles (1.1 km) away from Utica Avenue), a street of predominantly Jewish residents several blocks away, vandalizing cars, and throwing rocks and bottles as they went.^[18]

Viewpoints

After the death of Gavin Cato, members of the black community believed that the decision to remove Lifsh from the scene first was racially motivated. They also said that this was one example of a perceived system of preferential treatment afforded to Jews in Crown Heights.^[7] The preferential treatment was reported to include biased actions by law enforcement and uneven allocations of government resources, amongst others. Many members of the black community were concerned that the number of Jews in the community had increased and that they were buying all of the property in the crowded area.^[19]

A number of studies[[] focused on the allegation that law enforcement habitually favored Jews over African Americans. *City Journal* refuted the allegation.^[6] An interview with [Rabbi Shmuel Butman](#), published in 1991, mentions a police directive to Hatzolah to transport Lifsh, along with Jews already injured by rioters, without transporting either of the Cato children. "We did exactly what the police officers wisely advised us."^[20]

Based on protesters' statements and actions during the rioting, Butman said, "We were always hoping that after World War II no Jew would ever be killed just for being Jewish, but this is what happened in the city of New York."^[20] In his eulogy at the funeral, the [Rev. Al Sharpton](#) referred to "diamond dealers" (a Jewish business) and said, "It's an accident to allow an [apartheid](#) ambulance service in the middle of Crown Heights."^[21] A banner was displayed at the funeral that said, "Hitler did not do the job."^[6]

[Edward S. Shapiro](#), a historian at [Brandeis University](#), later described the riot as "the most serious [anti-Semitic](#) incident in [American history](#)" and published a book about it in 2006.^[4] He notes that there are many interpretations of what happened:

Almost immediately after the riot a host of differing interpretations emerged regarding its nature and origins. This effort at explanation ... reflected the diverse political, religious, and social circumstances, the differing ideological assumptions, and the divergent understandings of the past by the journalists, sociologists, political activists, and historians who wrote about the riot.

— *Edward S. Shapiro, American Jewish History, 2002*^[22]



Riots and murders

Yankel Rosenbaum killing

About three hours after the riots began, early on the morning of August 20, a group of approximately 20 young black men surrounded Yankel Rosenbaum, a 29-year-old Jewish [University of Melbourne](#) student in the United States conducting research for his doctorate. They stabbed him several times in the back and beat him severely, fracturing his skull. Before being taken to the hospital, Rosenbaum identified 16-year-old [Lemrick Nelson Jr.](#) as his assailant in a line-up shown to him by the police.^[3] Rosenbaum died later that night because the doctor didn't notice a stab wound in his chest. Nelson was charged with murder as an adult;^[23] he was acquitted at trial. Later he was convicted in federal court of violating Rosenbaum's civil rights and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Nelson eventually admitted that he had stabbed Rosenbaum.^{[24][25]}

Rioting

For three days following the accident, numerous African Americans and Caribbean Americans of the neighborhood, joined by growing numbers of non-residents, rioted in Crown Heights. In the rioting of the ensuing three days, according to Edward Shapiro, many of the rioters "did not even live in Crown Heights."^[4]

During the riots, Jews were injured, stores were [looted](#), and cars and homes were damaged. The rioters identified Jewish homes by the [mezuzot](#) affixed to the front doors.^[13]

An additional 350 police officers were added to the regular duty roster on August 20 and were assigned to Crown Heights in an attempt to quell the rioting. After episodes of rock- and bottle-throwing involving hundreds of blacks and Jews,^[26] and after groups of blacks marched through Crown Heights chanting "[No Justice, No Peace!](#)", "Death to the Jews!", and "Whose streets? Our streets!", an additional 1,200 police officers were sent to confront rioters in Crown Heights.^[4]

On the third day of the disturbances, [Al Sharpton](#) and [Sonny Carson](#) led a march.^[27] The marchers proceeded through Crown Heights carrying antisemitic signs and burning an Israeli flag.^{[27][28]} Rioters threw bricks and bottles at police; shots were fired at police and police cars were pelted and overturned, including the Police Commissioner's car.^{[4][13]}

Riots escalated to the extent that a detachment of 200 police officers was overwhelmed and had to retreat for their safety. On August 22, over 1,800 police officers, including mounted and motorcycle units, had been dispatched to stop the attacks on people and property.^[4]

By the time the three days of rioting ended, 152 police officers and 38 civilians were injured, 27 vehicles were destroyed, seven stores were looted or burned,^[29] and 225 cases of robbery and burglary were committed.^[4] At least 129 arrests were made during the riots,^[29] including 122 blacks and seven whites.^{[30][31]} Property damage was estimated at one million dollars.^[4]



Related shooting murder

On September 5, two weeks after the riot had been controlled, Anthony Graziosi, an Italian sales representative with a white beard dressed in dark business attire, was driving in the neighborhood. As he stopped at a traffic light at 11 pm, six blocks away from where Yankel Rosenbaum had been murdered, a group of four black men surrounded his car and one of them shot and killed him. It was alleged by Graziosi's family and their attorney, as well as Senator [Al D'Amato](#), Senator [Daniel Patrick](#)

[Moynihan](#), State Attorney General [Robert Abrams](#), former Mayor [Ed Koch](#), and a number of advocacy organizations, that Graziosi's resemblance to a Hasidic Jew precipitated his murder. The New York Police Department, [Mayor Dinkins](#), newspaper columnist [Mike McAlary](#), and the [U.S. Justice Department](#) did not agree. The murder was not treated as a [hate crime](#).^[32]

Court case

A [grand jury](#) composed of 10 black, 8 white, and 5 Hispanic jurors found no cause to indict Lifsh. Brooklyn District Attorney [Charles J. Hynes](#) explained that under New York law, the single act of "losing control of a car" is not criminal negligence, even if death or injury resulted. Lifsh waived immunity and testified before the grand jury.^[5] About an hour after hearing Lifsh's testimony, the grand jury voted not to indict him.^[33] Subsequently, Lifsh moved to [Israel](#), where his family lives, because he claimed his life was threatened. In Israel, Lifsh settled in the Lubavitch village of [Kfar Chabad](#).^[34]

Afterwards, Hynes fought unsuccessfully for the public release of the testimony that the grand jury had heard. His lawsuit was dismissed, and the judge noted that more than three-quarters of the witnesses who had been contacted refused to waive their right to privacy. The judge also expressed concern for the witnesses' safety.^{[5][34][35]}



Aftermath

Impact on the 1993 mayoral race

The Crown Heights riot contributed to the defeat of [David Dinkins](#) in his second mayoral bid.^[36] He was attacked by many political adversaries in his reelection bid, including

vocal proponents of "black nationalism, back-to-Africa, economic radicalism, and racial exclusiveness."^[4]

Girgenti Report

On November 17, 1992, New York Governor [Mario Cuomo](#) gave the Director of Criminal Justice Services, Richard H. Girgenti, the authority to investigate the rioting and the Nelson trial. The *Girgenti Report* was compiled by over 40 lawyers and investigators. The 656-page document, dated July 1993, is available through a website of the Washington, DC-based Police Foundation, which prefaces the report with a disclaimer that the "review does not seek to put blame on any entity for what happened..."^[37]

The report was extremely critical of Police Commissioner [Lee Brown](#). The report also criticized Mayor Dinkins for poor handling of the riots. However, the report found no evidence to support the most severe charge against Dinkins and Brown: that they had purposely delayed the police response in order to allow rioters to "vent" their rage.^[38]

The first night of the riot, Dinkins, along with Police Commissioner Brown, both African Americans, went to Crown Heights to talk to the community to dispel the rumors about the circumstances surrounding the accident. They had no appreciable influence on the rioters, most of whom were young black men.^[13]

In a 16-minute speech on the Thanksgiving holiday following the riot, Dinkins rebutted allegations that he had prevented police from protecting citizens in Crown Heights.^[4] The Jewish community believed Dinkins failed to contain the riot and failed to exercise his responsibility, to their detriment.^[39]

Use of the term "pogrom"

The Crown Heights riot was an important issue that was raised repeatedly on the campaign trail in the 1993 mayoral election.^[40] According to Edward S. Shapiro, politicians opposed to Mayor Dinkins used the word "[pogrom](#)" to characterize the riot in order to discredit the mayor's response to the riot, writing "the controversy over how to define the Crown Heights riot was not merely an issue of semantics."^[40]

[Rudy Giuliani](#), who would be elected as the next mayor of New York, referred to the Crown Heights riot as a "pogrom" on July 1, 1993, in a speech at [Bay Ridge, Brooklyn](#): "You can use whatever word you want, but in fact for three days people were beaten up, people were sent to the hospital because they were Jewish. There's no question that not enough was done about it by the city of New York. One definition of pogrom is violence where the state doesn't do enough to prevent it."^[41] Other political opponents to Dinkins used the term, including [Ed Koch](#), who had been defeated by Dinkins in the 1989 Democratic mayoralty primary, and [Andrew Stein](#), a candidate in the 1993 Democratic mayoral primary.^[40] The term had been used previously in 1991 by journalists such as [A. M. Rosenthal](#) in [The New York Times](#) and [Eric Breindel](#) in the [New York Post](#), and politicians such as New York City Councilman [Noach Dear](#) and later by Judah Gribetz, president of the [JCRC](#) of New York.^[40] By September 1991, it had become routine within Jewish circles to describe the riot as a pogrom. Some Jews continued to use this term for the riot a decade later,^[40] as shown by articles in publications such as [Jewish Week](#), [Jerusalem Post](#), [The Forward](#) and [The Jewish Press](#); others went further and called it "America's [Kristallnacht](#)".^[40]

Use of the word was rejected by Dinkins and his supporters, primarily on the basis that a pogrom by definition is state-sponsored.^[40] Dinkins said "To suggest that this is [a pogrom] is not to contribute to the resolution of the problem but to exacerbate tensions and problems that are there." Dinkins was personally offended by the use of "pogrom" since it insinuated that the riot was state-sanctioned and that he personally was an antisemite.^[40] "I am incensed by it... [it is] patently untrue and unfair."

[Michael Stanislawski](#), Professor of Jewish History at Columbia University, wrote in 1992 that it was "historically inaccurate" to couple "pogrom" with Crown Heights, because the word denoted organized violence against Jews "having some sort of governmental involvement."^[40] Journalists also disagreed with the use of the term, including Joyce Purnick in *The New York Times*, [Earl Caldwell](#) in the *New York Daily News*, and an article in *The City Sun*. Rev. [Al Sharpton](#) said that Giuliani was engaged in "race-baiting" by using the word "pogrom."^[40] [Henry Siegman](#) and Marc D. Stern of the [American Jewish Congress](#) also publicly rejected use of the term to refer to the riot.^[40]

In 2011, shortly before the twentieth anniversary of the riots, an editorial in *The Jewish Week* wrote: "A divisive debate over the meaning of pogrom, lasting for more than two years, could have easily been ended if the mayor simply said to the victims of Crown Heights, yes, I understand why you experienced it as a pogrom."^[42]

Ethnic relations

Prior to the riots, [Eastern Parkway](#) divided the black community in northern Crown Heights and the Jewish community in southern Crown Heights.^[43] Efforts aimed at the improvement of the relations between blacks and Jews in Crown Heights began almost immediately following the rioting. Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden summoned the leaders of each of the ethnic communities to Borough Hall within days after the riots ended, creating what became known as the Crown Heights Coalition. The Coalition, led by [Edison O. Jackson](#), then President of [Medgar Evers College](#), and Rabbi [Shea Hecht](#), Chairman of the Board of the National Committee for Furtherance of Jewish Education (NCFJE), operated for ten years as an inter-group forum in which to air neighborhood concerns and work out issues. Golden used the Coalition to initiate interracial projects designed to promote dialogue.^[1] One project involved sending a Jewish leader and a Black leader together in a pair to public intermediate and high schools in the area to answer questions from the children about each other's cultures.^[44]

A week after the riots, Hatzolah helped repair an ambulance of a black-owned volunteer service. The following year, the [Brooklyn Children's Museum](#) held an exhibit on the contributions made by blacks and Jews in New York. In 1993, the Rev. [Jesse Jackson](#) was active in promoting improved black-Jewish relations.^[45] In 1993, a series of neighborhood basketball games were scheduled between the two groups, including a scrimmage held as part of the halftime entertainment of a [New York Knicks](#) vs. [Philadelphia 76ers](#) professional basketball game. Also that year, rabbi Israel Shemtov, whose anti-crime patrol had long been perceived by many black residents as biased against them, rushed to the aid of a black woman who had been shot on the street in Crown Heights, putting her in his car and taking her to the hospital.^[46] The

Crown Heights Mediation Center was established in 1998 to help resolve local differences, also a direct outcome of the Coalition.^[47]

Anniversary commemorations

On August 19, 2001, a street fair was held in memory of Cato and Rosenbaum, and their relatives met and exchanged mementos of hopes of healing in Crown Heights. Again in 2016, family members Carmel Cato and Norman Rosenbaum planned to meet together to commemorate their loss.^[48]

Twenty years after the riot, a [Manhattan](#) synagogue invited Sharpton to participate in a [panel discussion](#) marking the anniversary. Norman Rosenbaum, brother of the murdered Yankel Rosenbaum, was outraged, saying inviting Sharpton to speak was "an absolute disgrace" and that his "vile rhetoric incited the rioting." He added that Sharpton "did absolutely nothing then to improve black-Jewish relations — and nothing since."^[49] Sharpton expressed regret for some aspects of his involvement. He insisted that his marches were peaceful, although his language and tone "sometimes exacerbated tensions."^{[50][51]}

In a 2019 speech to a [Reform Jewish](#) gathering, Sharpton said that he could have "done more to heal rather than harm". He recalled receiving a call from [Coretta Scott King](#) at the time, during which she told him "sometimes you are tempted to speak to the applause of the crowd rather than the heights of the cause, and you will say cheap things to get cheap applause rather than do high things to raise the nation higher".^{[52][53]}

Demographics

To this day, the demographic trends of Crown Heights remain largely the same as in 1991. Jews did not flee from Crown Heights, and the [Lubavitch](#) population of Crown Heights increased after the riot, leading to an expansion of the area in which they reside.^[54]

In popular culture

- On the sketch comedy show [In Living Color](#), the 1991 season 3 premiere episode did a sketch parodying [West Side Story](#) called *Crown Heights Story*. The skit was cut from the DVD.^[55]
- [Anna Deavere Smith](#) interviewed more than 100 people directly and indirectly associated with the riot, and created her play [Fires in the Mirror](#) (1992), which premiered the following year in New York. The one-woman show featured Smith playing the roles of numerous public and private figures, having drawn quotes from the transcripts of her interviews.
- A 2004 television movie, *Crown Heights*, was made about the aftermath of the riot, starring [Howie Mandel](#).^[56]
- A fictionalized version of the riots appeared in [Law & Order](#).^[57]
- [Brooklyn Babylon](#), a feature film starring Tariq "[Black Thought](#)" Trotter and [The Roots](#), presents a fictionalized version of Crown Heights neighborhood unrest in the 1990s.^[58]

References [\[edit\]](#)

- [^] ^{Jump up to:}^a ^b "Beep Honor Peace Coalition: Crown Heights leaders reflect on 10-year milestone"^{[[permanent dead link](#)]}, *New York Daily News*, August 23, 2001.
- [^] Goldman, Ari L. (June 13, 1994). "[Rabbi Schneerson Led A Small Hasidic Sect To World Prominence](#)". *The New York Times*. Retrieved April 30, 2010.
- [^] ^{Jump up to:}^a ^b ^c ^d Wilson, Judy (2006). "[Crown Heights riot – fact, fiction, and plenty of blame](#)". *New Jersey Jewish News*. Archived from [the original](#) on December 8, 2007. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
- [^] ^{Jump up to:}^a ^b ^c ^d ^e ^f ^g ^h ⁱ ^j ^k ^l ^m ⁿ ^o Shapiro, Edward S. (2006). [Crown heights: Blacks, Jews, and the 1991 Brooklyn riot](#). Waltham, Massachusetts: [Brandeis University Press](#), [University Press of New England](#). ISBN 1-58465-561-5. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
- [^] ^{Jump up to:}^a ^b ^c Kifner, John (September 6, 1991). "[Grand Jury Doesn't Indict Driver In Death of Boy in Crown Heights](#)". *The New York Times*. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
- [^] ^{Jump up to:}^a ^b ^c McGowan, William (Summer 1993). "[Race and Reporting](#)". *The Manhattan Institute*. Archived from [the original](#) on December 8, 2007. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
- [^] ^{Jump up to:}^a ^b Kamber, Michael (January 16–22, 2002). "[Faded Rage](#)". *The Village Voice*. Retrieved December 4, 2016.
- [^] Myers, Steven Lee (September 7, 1991). "[Judge Won't Open Records Of Crown Heights Inquiry](#)". *The New York Times*. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
- [^] Girgenti Report, 1:79–81.
- [^] "[j. – 5 years later, Crown Heights blacks, Jews coexist warily](#)". *Jewishsf.com*. Retrieved May 13, 2010.
- [^] McQuiston, John T. (August 20, 1991). "[Fatal Crash Starts Melee With Police In Brooklyn](#)". *The New York Times*. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
- [^] Allis, Sam (September 9, 1991). "[Racial Unrest: An Eye for an Eye](#)". *Time*. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
- [^] ^{Jump up to:}^a ^b ^c ^d Mintz, Jerome R. (1992). *Hasidic People: A Place in the New World*. [Harvard University Press](#). pp. 334–335. ISBN 0-674-38115-7. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
- [^] Teller, Hanoch. "[The Bitter Truth About the Crown Heights Pogrom](#)", *Hamodia*, August 20, 2014. Accessed December 27, 2016. "An NBC film crew that was in Crown Heights to cover the concert captured the jeering, explosion of glass bottles, and rioting. The agitation and crowds increased all evening until someone reportedly shouted, 'Let's go to Kingston Avenue and get a Jew!'"
- [^] Staff. "[The Crown Heights Riot](#)", *New York Daily News*. Accessed December 27, 2016. "By the time night fell in Crown Heights, rioters could be heard screaming 'Let's go to Kingston Avenue and get a Jew!'"
- [^] Marcus, Kenneth L. *Jewish Identity and Civil Rights in America*, p. 101. [Cambridge University Press](#), 2010. ISBN 9781139491198. Accessed December 27, 2016. "Shouting 'Let's go to Kingston Avenue and get a Jew,' 10 to 15 young black men walked a few blocks away to that predominantly Jewish area, throwing rocks at homes and vandalizing automobiles along the way."
- [^] Kelly, Ray. *Vigilance: My Life Serving America and Protecting Its Empire City*, p. 68. [Hachette Books](#), 2015. ISBN 9780316383790. Accessed December 27, 2016. "Around 11:00 p.m., someone reportedly shouted, 'Let's go to Kingston Avenue and get a Jew!'"
- [^] "[Law Library – American Law and Legal Information](#)". *Law.jrank.org*. Retrieved May 13, 2010.
- [^] Dasun Allah (January 15, 2002). "[> news > Dasun Allah dissects the Crown Heights silence](#)". *Village Voice*. Retrieved May 13, 2010.
- [^] ^{Jump up to:}^a ^b "[Crown Heights Riots – 25 Years Later: A Look Back at Jewish Press Coverage](#)". *The Jewish Press*. August 24, 2016. p. 12. Retrieved August 30, 2016.
- [^] Saletan, William; Zenilman, Avi (October 7, 2003). "[The Gaffes of Al Sharpton](#)". *Slate*. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
- [^] Shapiro, Edward S. (2002). "Interpretations of the Crown Heights Riot". *American Jewish History*. **90** (2): 97–122, here: p. 98.
- [^] Under New York State law, 16-year-olds can be charged as adults for homicide.
- [^] Gourevitch, Philip (January 1993). "[The Crown Heights Riot & Its Aftermath](#)". *The Jewish Forward*. Archived from [the original](#) on December 5, 2013.
- [^] Newman, Andy (August 21, 2003). "[Penalty in Crown Hts. Case Means a Little More Jail Time](#)". *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 3, 2009.
- [^] "[Riots erupt in Crown Heights in 1991](#)". *New York Daily News*. August 18, 2015 [Originally published on August 21, 1991]. Retrieved December 17, 2015. By 6 p.m. yesterday, rival mobs of black and Hasidic protesters – perhaps 250 – had gathered outside the Empire Blvd. stationhouse, hurling rocks, bottles and insults at each other and police.
- [^] ^{Jump up to:}^a ^b Berger, Paul. "[In Crown Heights, Residents Still Cling to Their Grievances](#)". *The Jewish Daily Forward*. forward.com. August 19, 2011.

28. [^] Shapiro, Edward S. *Crown Heights: Blacks, Jews, and the 1991 Brooklyn Riot*. UPNE, 2006): 38-40.
29. [^] [Jump up to:](#)^a ^b Shapiro, Edward S. (June 2002). "*Interpretations of the Crown Heights Riot*". *American Jewish History*. **90** (2): 97–122. doi:10.1353/ajh.2003.0035.
30. [^] Kifner, John (August 24, 1991). "*Police Brace For Protest In Brooklyn*". *The New York Times*. p. 27.
31. [^] "*TENSION IN BROOKLYN: Official Tallies of Arrests Differ*". *The New York Times*. August 25, 1991. p. 36. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
32. [^] *Crown Heights: Blacks, Jews, and the 1991 Brooklyn riot*, Edward S. Shapiro, [University Press of New England](#), 2006, p. 57.
33. [^] Specter, Michael (September 6, 1991). "*N.Y. Jury Doesn't Indict Hasidic Driver: Boy's Death in Auto Wreck Set Off 4-Day Race Riot in Brooklyn*". *The Washington Post*. Archived from *the original* (fee required) on May 16, 2011. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
34. [^] [Jump up to:](#)^a ^b Haberman, Clyde (September 18, 1991). "*Sharpton Tries to Serve Summons In Israel but Doesn't Find His Man*". *The New York Times*. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
35. [^] Yarrow, Andrew L. (September 17, 1991). "*Bid to Unseal Crown Heights Testimony Founders*". *The New York Times*. Retrieved October 20, 2007.
36. [^] Spencer, B. (2000). *The Death of American Antisemitism*, p. 52 ISBN 0-275-96508-2
37. [^] Girgenti, Richard. "*A Report to the Governor on the Disturbances in Crown Heights*". *Police Foundation*. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/192737414/Girgenti-A-Report-to-the-Governor-on-the-Disturbances-in-Crown-Heights-An-Assessment>: Police Foundation. Archived from the original on August 21, 2018. Retrieved August 21, 2018.
38. [^] Martin Gottlieb "*The Crown Heights Report: The Overview*", *The New York Times*, July 21, 1993.
39. [^] Cohen, D. N. "Crown Heights Jews feel vindicated by report". *Jewish Tribune* (Rockland County, NY), July 23–29, 1993.)
40. [^] [Jump up to:](#)^a ^b ^c ^d ^e ^f ^g ^h ⁱ ^k Interpretations of the Crown Heights Riot, Edward S. Shapiro, *American Jewish History*, Volume 90, Number 2, June 2002, pp. 97–122.
41. [^] *Daily News*, July 1, 1993.
42. [^] Mark, Jonathan (August 9, 2011). "*What The 'Pogrom' Wrought*". *The Jewish Week*.
43. [^] Mitchell, Alison (October 31, 1992). "*Anger, on Both Sides Of Eastern Parkway*". *The New York Times*. ISSN 0362-4331. Retrieved July 27, 2019.
44. [^] Goldschmidt, Henry (2006). *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press. p. 139. ISBN 978-0-8135-3883-9.
45. [^] Jerome A. Chanes, "Review of the Year: Intergroup Relations", *American Jewish Year Book (American Jewish Committee)*, 1994), p. 123.
46. [^] Kocieniewski, David (May 11, 1996). "*Hasidic Patrol Group Faces Questions After a Crown Heights Clash*". *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 12, 2010.
47. [^] [Conflict Control](#)^[permanent dead link], *The Jewish Week*, November 13, 1998.
48. [^] Greene, Leonard (August 13, 2016). "*Relatives of the two killed in Crown Heights riots to meet, 25 years after shared tragedy: 'There is still a numbness'*". *New York Daily News*. Retrieved August 30, 2016.
49. [^] Soltis, Andy (August 18, 2011). "*Fury over Sharpton speaking at Crown Heights riot-anniversary forum*". *New York Post*. Retrieved December 19, 2016.
50. [^] Chung, Jen. "Al Sharpton Regrets How He Handled Crown Heights Riot Reaction". *Gothamist*. gothamist.com. August 21, 2011. Archived November 28, 2014, at the [Wayback Machine](#)
51. [^] Klein, Dan. "Al Sharpton: I made 'mistakes' during Crown Heights riots". *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*. jta.org. August 22, 2011.
52. [^] Kampeas, Ron (May 20, 2019). "*Al Sharpton admits to using 'cheap' rhetoric about Jews*". *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*. Retrieved May 23, 2019.
53. [^] Kombluh, Jacob (May 20, 2019). "*Al Sharpton's mea culpa: I should have 'done more to heal rather than harm'*". *Jewish Insider*. Retrieved May 23, 2019.
54. [^] *Crown Heights: Blacks, Jews, And the 1991 Brooklyn Riot*, by Edward S. Shapiro, p. xvii.
55. [^] "*In Living Color: Homey The Sellout: Part 2*". *TV.com*. [CBS Interactive](#). Retrieved August 17, 2018.
56. [^] Stanley, Alessandra (February 16, 2004). "*TELEVISION REVIEW; Finding Crown Heights Peace: Hip-Hop and Hope*". *The New York Times*. Retrieved August 17, 2018.
57. [^] Davis Jr., Walter T.; Blythe, Teresa; Dreibelbis, Gary; Mark Scalese; Elizabeth Winslea (January 1, 2001). *Watching What We Watch: Prime-Time Television Through the Lens of Faith*. Westminster John Knox Press. p. 129. ISBN 9780664226961. Retrieved August 17, 2018.
58. [^] [Brooklyn Babylon](#) at [AllMovie](#)

