



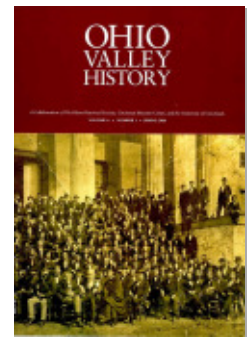
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Race, Sex and Riot: The Springfield, Ohio Race Riots of 1904  
and 1906 and the Sources of Anti-Black Violence in the Lower  
Midwest

Jack S. Blocker Jr.

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# Race, Sex and Riot:

## *The Springfield, Ohio Race Riots of 1904 and 1906 and the Sources of Anti-Black Violence in the Lower Midwest*

BY JACK S. BLOCKER, JR.

On March 7, 1904, a mob broke into Springfield, Ohio's decrepit city jail, easily overcame feeble resistance, and seized and lynched an itinerant Kentuckian, African American Richard Dixon. Dixon had been jailed for the fatal shooting of a police officer who was attempting to arrest Dixon for assaulting his common-law wife. The lynching took place in the evening, but despite the fact that the mob had been gathering before the jail all day the local authorities did not call for military support. Nor did they do so on the following day, believing the violence to be over. The mob re-assembled that evening and carried out a well-planned and coordinated attack upon the "Levee," a block of saloons operated mostly by African Americans. First, the entire crowd, estimated at between 1,000 and 1,500 men, visited the railroad yards of the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis Railroad (the "Big Four"), where they gathered combustible waste materials. Then they divided into three groups, each of which descended upon a selected saloon, drove out the occupants, and set the building on fire. All told, seven structures housing about 150 African Americans were destroyed. No one was killed because earlier in the day police had warned occupants to leave to escape the "unpredictable" mob. The fire department responded by watching the flames devour the brick and frame buildings, moving into action only to save a saloon operated by a white man. Troops arrived after the fires were out of control, but they acted only to prevent the



Cincinnati Enquirer headline, March 8, 1904. Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal, Cincinnati Historical Society Library

riot from spreading to other potential targets. After the burning of the Levee, city officials shut down five surviving saloons operated by African Americans. The seven buildings that were burned, some of them owned by whites, were valued at \$11,600. Neither rioters nor police officials were punished.<sup>1</sup>

Two years later, a second Springfield riot began with a barroom brawl. On one side were three white men, including one suspected of involvement, but not prosecuted, in Dixon's lynching. On the other side were two African-American men, Edward Dean and Preston Ladd. After cutting two of their opponents, Dean and Ladd fled. Shortly afterward, two African-American men shot and killed Martin Davis, a white brakeman, in the Big Four railway yards. Dean and Ladd were arrested and immediately spirited out of town by police. A mob formed and once again began its work by attacking saloons. This time police stopped them from burning the buildings, but the mob then began attacking nearby homes. "As if by common agreement," a local newspaper reported, "the mob confined itself to the homes of the colored people." Firefighters' hoses were cut when they attempted to put out the fires at the homes of blacks, but when the flames threatened to spread, rioters were heard to call out, "Let them alone! Whit[e] people live in those houses." The main attacks took place in a formerly white working-class area known as the "Jungles," where some of those displaced from the Levee by the 1904 riot had moved. Local white militiamen were slow to mobilize, reportedly out of sympathy with the mob. Although seven infantry companies did eventually report to duty, Springfield's African-American company of the Ohio National Guard was apparently not called. Mob attacks on African-American persons and property continued for a second and third night before military intervention finally brought the riot to an end. In all, thirteen buildings were destroyed, valued with contents at \$6,000. No one, however, seems to have been killed. This time rioters were prosecuted, but punishments were light. Local authorities who failed to quell the riots were reprimanded or dismissed.<sup>2</sup>

Race riots such as the two in Springfield represent only one form of anti-black violence. More common and widespread throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was lynching, which is usually defined as an illegal group action causing the death of a person or persons under the pretext of service to justice or tradition. Lynching has been more intensively studied than race riots, strikes, political mobs, and other modes of violence and conflict across racial lines. Lynching studies have understandably focused on the South, where most such attacks took place, and their authors have portrayed this form of anti-black violence as arising from interaction between African-American aspirations and behavior and white repression. As historian George Wright pithily summarizes, "Afro-Americans were lynched for getting out of the place assigned them by white society." Definition and enforcement of that place could vary across both space and time. After tracing a "geography of

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lynching” in Georgia and Virginia, historian Fitzhugh Brundage concludes:

Lynch mobs seem to have flourished within the boundaries of the plantation South, where sharecropping, monoculture agriculture, and a stark line separating white landowners and black tenants existed. In such areas, mob violence became part of the very rhythm of life.

Based on a sophisticated statistical analysis of lynchings across ten southern states, sociologists Stewart Tolnay and E. M. Beck agree. “Mob violence,” they write, played a “fundamental role . . . in the maintenance of southern society and economy. . . . [L]ynching was an integral element of an agricultural economy that required a large, cheap, and docile labor force.”<sup>3</sup>

Existing tallies indicate that lynchings in the North followed a similar chronological pattern to those in the South, with the peak of violence occurring in the two decades around the turn of the twentieth century. My own count of incidents of anti-black collective violence for Ohio, Indiana and Illinois—which I am calling the Lower Midwest—shows more than thirty lynchings, attempted lynchings, mobbings, and race riots between 1885 and 1910, the period when such violence was most intense. When anti-black violence is viewed from an African-American perspective—that is, after taking account of the number of potential victims—its Midwestern outbreaks become a more serious matter than it has heretofore been considered. During the period 1890-99, for example, the five African-American lynching victims in Ohio seem a small number compared to the twenty-seven in Virginia; but, since Ohio’s African-American population in 1890 was less than one-seventh the size of Virginia’s, Ohio’s rate of 5.7 victims per 100,000 of the population at risk exceeded Virginia’s, at 4.2. In the succeeding decade, the five lynching victims in Indiana among an African-American population of 57,505 yields a rate of 8.7, topping Virginia’s 1.8 for that decade and closing fast on Georgia’s 9.6, a rate produced by lynchings of ninety-nine black Georgians.<sup>4</sup>

No one has yet conducted an analytical study of anti-black violence in the North, where none of the specific conditions cited to explain southern lynching existed, although the new study of “sundown towns” by sociologist James Loewen represents a significant step in that direction. A general condition, however, may have been present. If northern whites did assign African Americans a “place” in their communities and African Americans transgressed their prescribed boundaries, then the fundamental trigger of southern lynching may well have produced racial explosions in the North as well. Viewing anti-black violence as a product of boundaries set by white racism and actions taken by African Americans that breached those limits at least provides a workable hypothesis, and one that places emphasis upon interracial interaction rather than portraying blacks only as victims.<sup>5</sup>



Identifying the limits of African-American freedom in the minds of white Midwesterners during the post-emancipation era is no easy task. The Civil War and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to

the Constitution swept away many legal barriers to African-American aspirations, and the shape of a new order took decades to coalesce. By the turn of the twentieth century, novel developments, such as a desire for reconciliation with a South where blacks were increasingly disfranchised and segregated, American imperialist ventures abroad, and racist intellectual currents, converged with, or diverged from, conclusions drawn from the experience of living in newly or increasingly biracial communities created by African-American migrations. If anti-black violence can be seen as a means of restoring informal limits



Cincinnati Enquirer headline, March 9, 1904. Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal, Cincinnati Historical Society Library

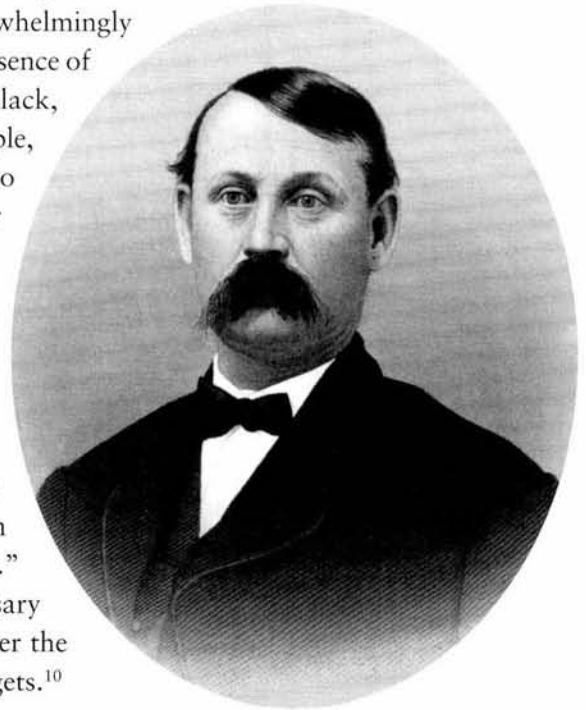
whites sought to place on African-American freedom—to replace the formal limits that had been reduced during the Civil War era—then it can be used to define those restrictions. White images of the black Other, however complex and contradictory, can in turn illuminate white identities and uncertainties.<sup>6</sup> This essay launches an exploration into the sources of Midwestern anti-black violence by using as a slipway Springfield’s race riots, two of the five that exploded in the region between 1885 and 1910.<sup>7</sup> These actions shared with other Midwestern mob attacks purposeful activity, coordination of movement, and deliberate selection of targets, which allow inferential analysis of the participants’ motivations.

Interracial tension, the most obvious background condition for the riots, certainly existed in Springfield; indeed, it sprang from multiple and historic roots. Springfield was an industrial center, and its production of agricultural implements, farm and mill machinery, woolen goods, carriages, and flour underwrote rapid population growth in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s. By the mid-1880s, William N. Whitely, the “Reaper King,” employed 1,500 workers in the world’s largest agricultural-implement factory. In 1886, however, a bitter strike organized by the Knights of Labor proved mutually destructive to both Whitely’s firm and the union. White workers did not forget that African

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Americans helped to break their pivotal strike. In the years leading up to the riots, evenly balanced local Republican and Democratic parties competed legally and illegally for the large African-American vote. In addition, attempts by white parents to force separation of black and white children and African-American parental resistance kept the schools tense.<sup>8</sup>

Yet counterforces were at work, too. In 1897, Springfield produced a national anti-mob and lynch law association, which attracted Kentucky's governor to its meeting in the Miami Valley city. In addition to a range of churches and voluntary associations, the African-American community created one of the first black YMCAs, with support from the local white chapter. A native African-American Springfielder who grew up in an overwhelmingly German-American neighborhood reported a complete absence of racial tension during her childhood: "I never felt I was Black, we never used the word Black, but we were treated as people, as human beings. I went along with the Whites and at no time would we ever feel that we were not wanted. Our neighbors were wonderful."<sup>9</sup> In February 1901, a series of frightening but physically harmless intrusions upon white women by a black man agitated the community. Police made an arrest, and the prisoner was identified by one of his alleged victims. Nevertheless, he was released after his alibi was substantiated. Even in the aftermath of the 1906 riot, a meeting of "Christian women," who were presumably white, "deplore[d] the recent manifestation of hatred against the colored people of our city as a race." Interracial tension provided a background and a necessary condition for the riots, but by itself it can explain neither the occurrence of the outbursts nor the mob's choice of targets.<sup>10</sup>



*William Whiteley.  
Cincinnati Museum  
Center at Union Terminal,  
Cincinnati Historical  
Society Library*

**E**lite involvement, which occurred in other incidents of Midwestern anti-black violence, may have emboldened anti-black mobs, although the evidence for Springfield is not conclusive. However, no question exists about the widespread approval given to the destruction of the Levee saloons. As one of the National Guard officers noted, the Levee "has been an eye-sore to the respectable element of the town for years, and its destruction was desired and, to a large degree, desirable." A prominent African American was quoted as saying that "the burning of the Levee . . . was one of the best things that ever happened to Springfield. It has for years bred nothing but crime and thrown a disgrace on colored people who have regard for law and right." He added, however, that African Americans generally were opposed to mob law and that he hoped no further mob violence would occur. Local newspapers, too, focused on the vice and crime rampant in the Levee district and the official complicity that allowed it to flourish, although such charges

were crafted to serve the usual partisan political purposes.<sup>11</sup>

Illicit activity, however, does not furnish an adequate explanation for the singling out of African-American businesses in the 1904 riot, nor for city officials' action in closing only African-American saloons in the aftermath of the burning of the Levee, nor for the attempted attacks on the same at the outset of the 1906 violence. As a local newspaper acknowledged, "there are white dives in the city equal in viciousness to any the mob's wrath destroyed in the Levee precincts." During the latter stages of the 1906 riot, the mob attacked the homes and businesses of African Americans who had no conceivable connection with vice or crime, such as an elderly minister and a funeral home. Still, this broadening took place only after the 1904 riot, the persecution of African-American saloonkeepers, and the initial attacks in 1906 had conflated white America's images of blackness, vice and crime. Similar choices were made by mobs in Evansville in 1903 and Springfield, Illinois in 1908. What happened in specifically African-American vice districts that could arouse such deliberate passion?<sup>12</sup>

Finding an answer to this question requires assembling a set of fragmentary clues. Apart from the stereotypical labels, such as "dives" and "gambling hells," that appeared in contemporary press accounts, little is known about the internal activity of Springfield's vice district at the turn of the century. Inquiry therefore must begin with its external aspects, such as its name. Why was a downtown city block without a waterfront called "the Levee"? The answer seems to lie in the influence throughout the Miami Valley of Cincinnati, the metropolis that dominated the region economically and culturally throughout much of the nineteenth century. During the heyday of the steamboat on the Ohio River, Cincinnati had a "Levee" district, and it housed and entertained African-American river workers, the boatmen and stevedores who provided the skills and the muscle that moved the goods and the boats. Cincinnati's Levee was one of the city's vice districts during the late nineteenth century, but official pressure during the 1890s seems to have dispersed part of its population elsewhere, including to Springfield. The name and the shame went with the players and the game.<sup>13</sup>

Writer Lafcadio Hearn, then a Cincinnati newspaper reporter, described in careful detail what went on in the Queen City's Levee and in a larger African-American neighborhood called "Bucktown" during the 1870s. These areas housed permanent residents as well as transients. They represented the parts of the city in which the most extensive and intimate contact took place between African-American and white residents. Historian Kevin Mumford calls such areas "interzones," places on the margins of urban life that straddled hardening boundaries between African-American and white communities. White women lived there, as prostitutes and as the mistresses or wives of African-American men. White men came to the Levee and Bucktown to visit African-American



## TORCH

Set in the "Jungles"

And Springfield, Ohio, is again in a bad spot.

Race Hatred Follows After a Negro's Crime.

And a Mob Chased Every Black They Found.

Buildings Fired or Battered To Pieces.

While Militia Halted on Its Special Trains.

Night of Terror in Which the Lives of Whites Lost. Torches Sent By mob, Patients at Hospitals.

## RACE RIOT RAGES IN SPRINGFIELD.



A View of the Riotous Scene in Ohio.



A Street Scene in Ohio, Showing Rioters.

## BOLT

Shot By Roosevelt

That Forced the Operators To Talk About Peace.

Is Claimed By Ellis as His Own Thunder.

Steel Company Takes the Credit For the Coup.

Call Issued For a Meeting To Day and Another Given Last Week In St. Paul.

## ROOSEVELT'S IDEAL FIGHTER.



THEODORE ROOSEVELT

ADMIRAL DEWEY

## WORDS

Of Togo Are Quoted

By President Roosevelt To the Army and Navy

While Preparing For a Far East Campaign.

Battle Ship This and Other War Craft In East.

To the Region of the Manure in China.

British Gunboat Is Ordered To the Langkat River.

Sinking of American Man-of-war, Who Got From Manure, Is Called By the Manure To Coast.

prostitutes or mistresses. From Hearn's and other descriptions it is quite clear that interracial intimacy in Cincinnati's vice districts involved white men and women of all classes.<sup>14</sup>

In Cincinnati and elsewhere in the urban North and South, white patronage of black entertainment and the black sex trade created a market that was served in large part by African-American entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship in vice in turn resolved a paradox for African Americans forged by the circumscription of opportunities in other business sectors and the white demand that African Americans "play by the same rules whites followed to achieve success." Vice entrepreneurship brought limited economic gains for African Americans while confirming European-American stereotypes of black decadence or primitivism. Such stereotypes both limited and, within bounds, freed African-American modes of expression. In southern vice districts, writes Leon Litwack, young blacks "created and sustained a culture of their own, with its distinctive language, rituals, and modes of expression, and its distinctive ways of grappling with their condition and prospects."<sup>15</sup>

**H**earn perceived African-American expression in the Levee and Bucktown as uniquely spontaneous and unconstrained:

It is a very primitive kind of life; its lights and shadows are alike characterized by a half savage simplicity; its happiness or misery is almost purely animal; its pleasures are wholly of the hour, neither enhanced nor lessened by anticipation of the morrow. It is always pitiful rather than shocking; and it is not without some little charm

Cincinnati Enquirer  
headline, February 28,  
1906. Cincinnati Museum  
Center at Union Terminal,  
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of its own—the charm of a thoughtless existence, whose virtues are all original, and whose vices are for the most part foreign to it.

Describing a dance in the Levee, Hearn became more specific:

The dancing became wild; men patted juba and shouted, the negro women danced with the most fantastic grace, their bodies describing almost incredible curves forward and backward; limbs intertwined rapidly in a wrestle with each other and with the music; the room presented a tide of swaying bodies and tossing arms, and flying hair. The white female dancers seemed heavy, cumbersome, ungainly by contrast with their dark companions; the spirit of the music was not upon them; they were abnormal to the life about them.



*Lafcadio Hearn.  
Cincinnati Museum  
Center at Union Terminal,  
Cincinnati Historical  
Society Library*

According to Hearn, blacks—and only blacks—had rhythm.<sup>16</sup>

Lafcadio Hearn was certainly not the first European American to be fascinated by African-American music and dance. He took his place in a long line stretching back to the European explorers of Africa and forward to the tradition's best-known expression in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.<sup>17</sup> Nor was he the only white slummer in Cincinnati during the 1870s. At least one tavern in the Levee, Pickett's, presented "theatricals" by "real negro minstrels, with amateur dancing performances by roustabouts and their 'girls.'" Police on the Levee beat, reported Hearn, "nightly escort fashionably dressed white strangers" to the performances.<sup>18</sup> Hearn's invocation of the notion of "primitive" to describe Levee life, however, was innovative. European-American performers on the northern stage who impersonated African Americans during the 1870s generally likened them to immigrants: Irishmen or Germans in blackface. Not until the 1880s would such performances respond to audience demands for a more authentic, "southern" black image by representing African Americans as "primitive" peoples of "backward" lands.<sup>19</sup>

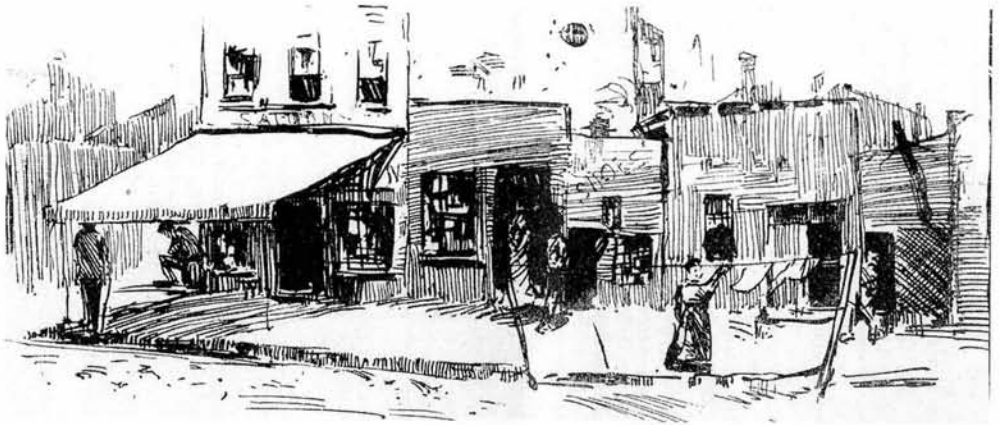
**W**hat Lafcadio Hearn witnessed on the Levee in Cincinnati was, in fact, one of the most strongly African-influenced dimensions of African-American culture. African dance styles survived slavery and began to shed their spiritual clothing after emancipation. In addition, post-emancipation black mobility brought about cross-fertilization among previously regional dance styles. When Hearn used the phrase "patting juba," he may have been referring specifically to the juba, a competitive dance of the West Indies in which a man or woman challenges a member of the opposite sex to a contest of dancing skill. "Patting juba" was used in the United States to

refer to the practice by observers of keeping time for the dancers by clapping, stamping and slapping thighs, so what Hearn saw may have been a modified form in which women competed with each other while men provided rhythmic accompaniment.<sup>20</sup>

African-influenced dance forms did not appeal equally to all levels of the African-American community. In fact, with the exception of the cakewalk, working-class and middle-class African Americans performed different dances in different kinds of places and to different music.<sup>21</sup> Respectability meant adopting white forms of leisure: classical music, or at least mainstream popular music, and dress balls featuring quadrilles, waltzes, polkas, grand marches, and schottishes. Bands or orchestras provided the music. Meanwhile, in jook joints and honky-tonks, members of the rural and urban working class were swaying in African-derived dances such as the congo, juba, buzzard lope, and snake hips. One or two guitarists or a beat-up piano furnished the accompaniment. Elite blacks saw themselves as the progressive element of the African-American community and took it as their mission to “civilize” their social inferiors, which meant, among other tasks, purging African ingredients from black cultural styles. Ironically, as scholar Katrina Hazzard-Gordon points out, the white tradition, which middle-class blacks regarded as the ideal, “was stagnant. In music and dance, the seeds of the future lay in the African past.”<sup>22</sup>

This was certainly true of music. During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the hotbed of American musical creativity lay in the rural jook joints and ur-

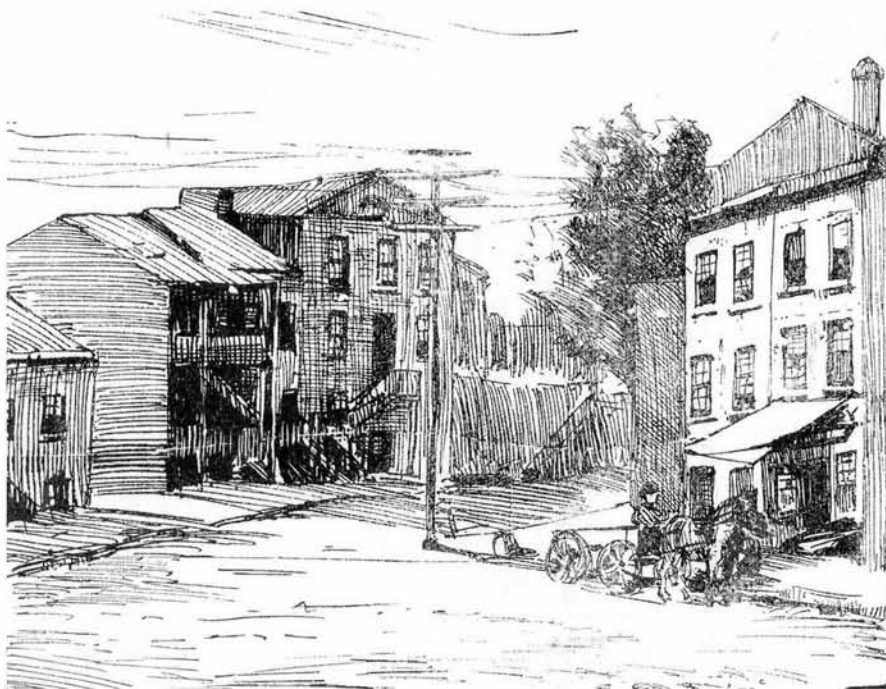
ban vice districts from which the African-American middle class so desperately sought to distance itself. These were the years when the blues, ragtime and jazz emerged, musical styles hammered out by hundreds of working-class musicians performing in thousands of formal and informal working-class venues, surrounded by drinking, gambling and prostitution. Both the blues and jazz are generally thought to have originated in the South and moved northward along the Mississippi River, but there is evidence for more multi-centered origins. Indeed, anthropologist Harriet Ottenheimer argues that the blues first appeared in Midwestern towns along the Ohio River, where the meeting of migrants from various southern regions in settings culturally influenced by European immigrants brought about the necessary cross-fertilization.<sup>23</sup>



*Bucktown illustration by Voght. The Week Illustrated, Vol. 1, No. 11. Nov. 10, 1883. Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal, Cincinnati Historical Society Library*

Wherever the blues, ragtime and jazz first emerged, these novel musical forms were being played in Midwestern towns by the turn of the century. W. C. Handy heard the blues sung in Evansville during the early 1890s. Jazzman Artie Matthews learned ragtime as a teenager in Springfield, Illinois, brothels and clubs before 1905. Born in Springfield, Ohio, in 1902, clarinetist Garvin

Bushell encountered the full range of African-American musical styles before he left his hometown for New York City seventeen years later. Like working-class African-American dance, these musical forms shared African roots while representing the shape of popular styles to come.<sup>24</sup>



*Bucktown illustration by Voght. The Week Illustrated, Vol. 1, No. 11. Nov. 10, 1883. Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal, Cincinnati Historical Society Library*

African roots, some of the dances and songs would have horrified respectable blacks and whites with their explicit or thinly-veiled sexual content. Here was the freedom allowed to African-American entertainers and their customers by the badge of primitivism. But the freedom granted to African-American culture also proved attractive to white men and women by virtue of its contrast to the straight-laced public style of middle-class America. The culture of the vice district stirred African-American workers not only because it spoke directly to their experience, but also because of the expressive relief it furnished from the subordinate positions and menial occupations to which they were confined. But that culture also lured white men doubtful of the foundations of their masculinity in a modern world of impersonal forces. It also enticed a smaller number of white women discontented with, or shut out by, a world of repressive sexual morality.<sup>25</sup>

White society, in sum, was a prisoner of its own myths, its own exclusions, and its own repressions. The more it denied African Americans access to remunerative, prestigious or fulfilling “legitimate” occupations, the more powerful incentive whites created for ingenious, ambitious or desperate blacks to direct their energies into “illegitimate” ones. The greater the contrast white society drew between its own rationality and self-control on one hand and the

**I**n the saloons, brothels and honky-tonks of urban vice districts, music and dance were inseparable from, and provided vehicles for, the pursuit of sexual pleasure. In addition to their



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primitivism and sensuality of Africa and, by extension, the African-American character on the other, the more some of its own members would be drawn to the greater freedom and fuller self-expression represented by this Other. The more white official voices made of black sexuality, the more some whites of both sexes would want to experiment to see if it were really true. As historian David Zang writes, “the idea of black sexual prowess . . . helped to establish a complementary myth of white sexual inadequacy that sentenced white males to a prison of their making. It became the only American jail to which blacks held the keys.”<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that the underground society that sprang into existence wherever whites were drawn to black music and dance and sex across the color line was merely a matter of whites shaping black behavior. Rather, African Americans responded creatively to the incentives provided unwittingly by white America, and the results confronted whites with a new set of phenomena, which they could choose to regard as opportunities or problems.

In large northern cities with highly differentiated internal arrangements, where vice districts were far removed from most European-American residential areas, many whites did not have to make such a choice. They could generally ignore the doings of the small African-American working-class population, unless their revels too publicly attracted a member of their family or social circle. In small towns and small cities, however, where structures devoted to industrial, commercial, residential and leisure activities were less likely to be separated by distance, the tinkle of the piano, the shouts of the dancers, and the trysts of prostitutes and their customers could not be ignored for long. Nor could the violence produced by too much liquor, sexual competition or racial antagonism.<sup>27</sup>

Springfield in 1904 was such a “walking city.” The Levee flaunted its attractions two blocks from the Big Four railway station, the town’s busiest hub. Factories operated nearby. A single block to the north lay East High Street, “the most beautiful as well as the most fashionable residence thoroughfare in the city.” White residents were deeply involved in the Levee’s affairs. Individual whites owned most of the buildings in which the gambling, liquor sales and prostitution went on, and breweries owned most of their fixtures. Furthermore, the Levee served both black and white customers. Music was both part of the festivities and a target of the 1904 riot, as evidenced by the destruction of a piano along with the saloon in which it stood, and reports that pianos in other buildings were threatened by the mob.<sup>28</sup>

The available evidence suggests, then, that the Levee was an interzone, a crossroads where whites encountered African Americans and their culture in an atmosphere suffused with sexual overtones. That interracial sex lay at the heart of the mob’s concerns is suggested by the request for police protection made one week after the 1904 riot by William Clark, the white proprietor of

one of the destroyed saloons. Clark admitted that he had a “bad reputation in the saloon business,” but he declared that “his home was perfectly straight.” Except for the fact that he rented a part of the house to an African-American husband and his white wife, who had persuaded him to seek police aid in the face of threats.<sup>29</sup>

In part, then, mob violence in Springfield seems to have stemmed from a felt need to police racial borders, to punish the purveyors of a culture that seduced some whites away from respectability and blurred the line between black and white worlds. But another motive may have been at work, too, if the rioters themselves were among the previous patrons of the Levee. A local newspaper claimed that the 1904 rioters were all less than twenty-five years of age. For such persons to destroy an African-American saloon, brothel or honky-tonk denied its power to excite, to draw the customer into pleasures “wholly of the hour,” a “thoughtless existence” away from the pressures of time, competition, and the strictures of moralists. Or so they might have thought. For the image at which they struck, like Lafcadio Hearn’s picture of the Cincinnati Levee, only partially reflected the reality of African-American life. The rest whites had imagined by themselves.<sup>30</sup>

Springfield’s riots in 1904 and 1906 make manifest a dimension of anti-black violence that was only latent in other such incidents. When African Americans entered Midwestern towns, they walked into the midst of an ongoing cultural clash between respectable and disreputable classes. African Americans who found opportunity in the vice business placed themselves, willingly or not, on the disreputable side. In part, this was a class war, as black elites joined white elites in anathematizing working-class cultural expression. But it was just as much a cultural struggle, since some upper-class and middle-class white men, and a few women of the same classes as well, crossed the lines into enemy territory. No wonder the “Christian women” of Springfield preferred to portray the basic issue as racial, since in the class and cultural wars some of their own were missing in action.<sup>31</sup>

When the Springfield riots are placed in the context of Midwestern anti-black aggression, white violence against blacks appears as not a unitary but a diverse phenomenon. It could take several different forms, and it could stem from any or all of several sources. Violence could erupt as an expression of white insecurity in a competitive society, not necessarily because their newly emancipated competitors were black or the color line porous, but because in the precarious world of industrializing America men had all the competition they could stand and more. They competed with other native-born whites most of all, but also with the burgeoning numbers of immigrants, and perhaps most disturbingly with the trusts and combines mysteriously appearing in their world. To burn a saloon was to destroy one of the few businesses in which African Americans had established a foothold. Some of the violence in both the rural

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and the urban Midwest erupted during conflicts between labor and capital, and to attack African-American workers while denying them entry to one's union was to protect one's job.<sup>32</sup> In Springfield, industrial workers owned many of the homes attacked in the second riot. Despite all the rhetoric about African-American inferiority, whites knew that African Americans, given half a chance, possessed both the incentive and ability to run them a hard race for the limited goods available. Black workers and businesspeople became targets because whites thought that they could get away with attacking them, because powerful whites would sustain and protect the attackers. In this motivation, as in the incidence and forms of violence, Midwestern whites' attacks on blacks shared in the tradition of southern anti-black violence.<sup>33</sup>

Competition could be political as well as economic, although the distinction between the two is more illusory than real. Politics constituted merely another route to control over social resources: power, wealth and prestige; good schools; access to public accommodations; and clean and well-policed neighborhoods. Once disfranchisement began to thin the ranks of African-American voters in the South, politically-induced violence became more likely where African Americans remained a political force, or were increasing their strength, as they did in the Lower Midwest when migration from the South swelled after 1890.

Sexual competition, too, drove anti-black violence. As in political contests, northern black men stood a better chance of competing than their southern counterparts. Although the numbers are small, rates of interracial marriage reflect their success, since at the end of the nineteenth century African-American men were much more likely to intermarry than African-American women. Although less than 10 percent of African Americans lived outside the former slave states in 1900, a national census sample shows that nearly one-third of the interracial marriages found outside the military occurred in the non-southern states.<sup>34</sup> Cincinnati and Pittsburgh in 1880 contained much higher proportions of interracial married couples than the national average.<sup>35</sup> Among Cincinnati's interracial marriages during the 1870s was the short-lived union of Lafcadio Hearn and former slave Alethea "Mattie" Foley.<sup>36</sup> In the early 1890s, the daughter of a Washington Court House, Ohio druggist was living in a common-law relationship in Columbus with an African-American man, and this was no doubt only one example of such relationships.<sup>37</sup> The marriage of Frederick Douglass, the country's most prominent African American, to a white woman, Helen Pitts, was well known. In symposiums in the *North American Review*, Douglass and other writers pointed to the existence of such relationships and predicted their spread in the years ahead.<sup>38</sup> Outside marriage, the urban North presented African-American men with much greater opportunities for commercial or other consensual sexual intimacy with white women than did the South or the rural North.<sup>39</sup> And during the African-



American migrations into the Lower Midwest between 1860 and 1900, young males predominated.

White men employed what means they could to prevent certain kinds of interracial sexual relationships and to strike back at those who entered them. In defiance of Ohio's civil rights law, Springfield, Ohio segregated its theaters. In Indiana in 1879, Vigo County authorities arrested, jailed and convicted an African-American man for violating the state's anti-miscegenation law by marrying a white woman. A white woman in Springfield, Illinois was arrested, convicted and fined for "associating with Afro-Americans." In Sandusky, Ohio, a masked and armed mob of neighbors riddled with bullets the home of a prosperous white farmer and his African-American wife, wounding both. Marrying Mattie Foley cost Lafcadio Hearn his reporting job at the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. The rhetoric used by European-American spokesmen also betrayed their fears that white women might sometimes freely choose African-American men. "Low, degraded, shameless, white brutes called women," reported a newspaper in Greensburg, Indiana, "have been known to congregate at these negro dives and have for their associates and companions buck negroes and negro wenches."<sup>40</sup>

Violence intended to deter or punish sex across the color line aimed to control the behavior of both sexes and "colors," although African-American men and white women represented the principal offenders. The image of the black rapist that justified mob violence explicitly targeted African-American males, but also served the latent purpose of driving European-American women under the "protection" of white men. The true record of sexual violence in early-twentieth century America shows that the most serious harm to girls and women was committed by boyfriends, neighbors, fathers, and male relatives. Yet in the public press, the dominant rape narratives focused upon the dangerous foreigner or "black brute." "These rape narratives," writes historian Mary Odem,

warn[ed] young women that the pursuit of social autonomy leads to sexual violence and that security rests upon obedience to and supervision by fathers or father figures in the home. Rape stereotypes thus served to strengthen patriarchal authority and, ironically, may have rendered women and girls more vulnerable to sexual abuse within the home.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, white violence could be a means of denying the truth that whites found at least some aspects of black culture powerfully attractive. Those aspects were to be found not among blacks trying to be respectable, but in working-class culture. The music and dance of the African-American working class attracted whites precisely because in the contrast with the imagined

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black Other, whites had defined themselves into a cultural box that was too confining. Ignoring the poverty and ill health that scored black life at the bottom, whites imagined that poor African Americans were enjoying something for which there was little room in bourgeois life during the Gilded Age; they were having fun. Lafcadio Hearn certainly thought so:

To the curious visitor . . . the merits of the performance, although an excellent one, was far less entertaining than the spectacle of the enjoyment which it occasioned--the screams of laughter and futile stuffing of handkerchiefs in laughing mouths, the tears of merriment, the innocent appreciation of the most trivial joke, the stamping of feet and leaping, and clapping of hands--a very extravaganza of cachination.<sup>42</sup>

By the analysis presented above, anti-black violence in the Lower Midwest is overdetermined. That is, the factors cited could well have existed generally throughout the region, but the evidence indicates that incidents of anti-black collective violence flared only in some, indeed, in a minority of communities. Some communities avoided violence because the number of African Americans was simply too insignificant to be a threat.<sup>43</sup> Communities with recorded outbreaks of anti-black violence were characterized by a relatively large African-American proportion of their population. For example, African Americans made up 11.1 percent of Springfield's population in 1900, while the average black percentage in all Ohio urban places was only 3.4 percent.<sup>44</sup> In those places, "too many blacks" could refer to any or all of a variety of complaints: too many workers competing for the available jobs; too many saloonkeepers harboring gamblers and prostitutes and musicians playing crazy music; too many voters supporting the wrong party; too many black men gaining access to white women; too many black men limiting white men's access to black women; too many white women gaining sexual access to black men; too many black men and women having fun; too many white men and women having fun in their company. The combination of complaints varied in breadth and intensity from community to community, and even in places where grievances were broad and deep, lack of leadership or absence of a precipitating incident may have forestalled violence. An uncommon event, violence required the coming together in precise though varying combinations of a mixture of favorable conditions and propelling forces.

**T**he appearance in the urban Lower Midwest of a relatively high level of anti-black collective violence points directly to the unsettled nature of race relations there during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. A society in which relationships of domination and subordination are well entrenched, as scholars such as George Fredrickson and James Scott

have argued, does not require spontaneous extra-legal outbursts of violence against the dominated in order to maintain the control of the dominant. Instead, the normal institutions of society do the job, justified in their operation by the society's ruling ideology. Lynchings were virtually unknown, for example, in South Africa under apartheid.<sup>45</sup> In the North after Emancipation, however, the institutions that had maintained white domination over African Americans before the Civil War generally lost their power to do so.

Meanwhile, the number of African Americans was growing, and they were settling in communities where blacks had hardly been a presence before. No law prevented African Americans from living where they wished, taking any job they were capable of performing, or—except in Indiana and Nebraska—marrying whom they pleased. Formally, they stood as equals to every other American, and African Americans seized opportunities to infuse formal equality with functional content. Not only were blacks constantly pressing against the boundaries of their place, but also the crossing of whites into African-American spaces implicitly denied the inferiority that the very notion of a black place asserted. By the 1890s, southern racist ideologues were busy crafting an ideology of black primitivism to rationalize renewed subordination, but the flourishing violence in both the South and the North shows how little they had achieved. Normal measures may have slowed black progress and inhibited black assertiveness, but they had not succeeded in preventing either. ❖

1. For accounts of this riot see: *Springfield Press-Republic*, Mar. 7-11, 1904; Adjutant General of Ohio, *Annual Report, 1904* (Worthington, OH: Department of the Adjutant General, 1904), 8, 430-44; *Broad Ax* (Chicago), Mar. 12, 1904; *Cleveland Gazette*, Mar. 12, 19, 1904; David A. Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line, 1860-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 254-56.
2. *Springfield Daily News*, Feb. 28, 1906. For a description of the 1906 riot see also: *Springfield Daily News*, Feb. 27, Mar. 1-2, 8, 1906; *Cleveland Gazette*, Mar. 17, Apr. 7, 1906; Adjutant General of Ohio, *Annual Report, 1906* (Worthington, OH: Department of the Adjutant General, 1906), 6-7; Gerber, *Black Ohio*, 256-57.
3. George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and 'Legal Lynchings'* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 10; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 159; Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 255.
4. Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, Appendixes A and B.
5. James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: The New Press, 2005).
6. Gerber, *Black Ohio*; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana before 1900: A Study of a Minority* (1957; rep. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century*, ed. and with a final chapter by Lana Rugamer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), ch. 1; Roger D. Bridges, "Equality Deferred: Civil Rights for Illinois Blacks, 1865-1885," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 74 (Summer 1981), 83-108.
7. The other three took place in Akron, OH in 1900, Evansville, IN in 1903, and Springfield, IL in 1908.
8. Edwin Smith Todd, *A Sociological Study of Clark County, Ohio* (Springfield: Springfield Publishing Co., 1904); *Williams' Springfield City Directory, 1870* (Cincinnati: The Williams Directory Company, 1870); *ibid.*, 1892-93; *ibid.*, 1901; Gerber, *Black Ohio*, 254-55.
9. *Cleveland Gazette*, June 26, 1897; Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky*, 178; T. C. McMillen, *The Springfield, Ohio, YMCA: 1854-1954* (Springfield, OH: Young Men's Christian Association, 1954), 57-8, 115-16; Interview, Mary Blue Wynne, Jan. 15, 1987, St. James AME Church (Cleveland) Oral History Project, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH (hereafter WRHS).
10. *Springfield Press-Republic*, Feb. 18, 1901; *Springfield Daily News*, Mar. 2, 1906.
11. Adjutant General of Ohio, *Annual Report, 1904*, 434-35, (Report of Colonel H. E. Mead); *Springfield Press-Republic*, Mar. 11, 1904. See also Todd, *Sociological Study*, 112-13.
12. *Springfield Press-Republic*, Mar. 16, 1904. Accounts of these riots may be found in Brian Butler, *An Undergrowth of Folly: Public Order, Race Anxiety, and the 1903 Evansville, Indiana Riot* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000); and Roberta Senechal, *The Sociogenesis of a Race Riot: Springfield, Illinois, in 1908* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).



13. Gerber, *Black Ohio*, 101-03, 427. A portrait of the Levee district during the 1860s and 1870s can be found in Nikki M. Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), ch. 10.
14. Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Lafcadio Hearn, *Children of the Levee*, ed. O. W. Frost (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 34-5, 43, 76, 80, 85; Gerber, *Black Ohio*, 101-03.
15. Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 358, 434.
16. Hearn, *Children of the Levee*, 61-2, 77.
17. Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 87; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 151-66.
18. Hearn, *Children of the Levee*, 84.
19. Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 129-36.
20. Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance: From 1619 to Today* (1972; 2d ed., Princeton, NJ: Princeton Book Co., 1988), 27-9; Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin': The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African-American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), chs. 1-2; Shane White, "It Was a Proud Day": African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834," *Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994), 46; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, ch. 8. Scholar Nikki Taylor suggests a more proximate source in a dance created in the United States during the 1840s by the great African-American performer William Henry Lane, known as Master Juba; *Frontiers of Freedom*, 285n40.
21. Historian Christopher Reed argues that the cakewalk was not an exception to this generalization. The cakewalk, he writes, originated from the black working class as a "caricature of Nordic pretense and arrogance," and was considered "an embarrassment to the black elite"; "All the World Is Here!" *The Black Presence at White City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 65. However, notices of cakewalk contests in African-American newspapers make clear that these were sponsored and patronized by the black elite. See, for example, *Illinois Record* (Springfield), Mar. 16, 1898; *Recorder* (Indianapolis), Jan. 7, 1899. While noting the difference between African-American middle-class and working-class dance styles, Tera Hunter points out the permeability of the boundary between the two; *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 172-75.
22. Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin'*, ch. 2 (quotation on 76). Tera Hunter agrees, pointing out as well that "Black migration to urban areas (and white 'slumming') played a large role in contributing to the sudden popularity of dance in the dominant society in the 1910s and transformed social dancing itself"; *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 170.
23. Harriet Ottenheimer, "Blues in the Heartland: African-American Music and Culture in the Middle West," in *Black Heartland: African American Life, the Middle West, and the Meaning of American Regionalism*, ed. Gerald Early (St. Louis: Washington University African and Afro-American Studies Program, 1997), 16-36.
24. Ottenheimer, "Blues in the Heartland," 28-32; David A. Jasen and Trebor Jay Tichenor, *Rags and Ragtime: A Musical History* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 182-83.
- For the increasingly common appearance of blues songs by the last decades of the nineteenth century, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 201-02, 221-22. For the penetration of new musical styles into the rural and small-town South at the turn of the century, see Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 383-84.
25. Mumford, *Interzones*, 146-47.
26. David W. Zang, *Fleet Walker's Divided Heart: The Life of Baseball's First Black Major Leaguer* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 12.
27. Mumford, *Interzones*, 122.
28. *Springfield Press-Republic*, Mar. 9-11, 1904; Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color Line: American Negro Citizenship in the Progressive Era* (1908; rep., New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 208.
29. *Springfield Press-Republic*, Mar. 15, 1904.
30. *Springfield Press-Republic*, Mar. 10, 1904. For insightful discussions of the appeal of saloon culture to male workers, see Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003); and Madelon Powers, *Faces along the Bar: Lore and Order in the Workingman's Saloon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
31. *Urbana Informer*, Apr., Aug. 1903; Myra B. Armstead Young, "Lord, Please Don't Take Me in August": *African Americans in Newport and Saratoga Springs, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 132-33; Booker T. Washington, quoted in, *Freeman* (Indianapolis), Aug. 29, 1908; Mumford, *Interzones*, 32. The hatred was mutual. After the Rev. Reverdy C. Ransom, pastor of the Institutional Church in Chicago, denounced policy-shop gambling from the pulpit, a bomb blew up the end of the church in which he and his family lived; *Broad Ax* (Chicago), May 9, 1903. For a discussion of this point in the context of the Women's Temperance Crusade, see Jack S. Blocker, Jr., "Give to the Winds Thy Fears": *The Women's Temperance Crusade, 1873-1874* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 93-123.
32. Of the fourteen men convicted of participation in the 1906 riot, only two could be identified in the federal manuscript census for Clark County: Harry Garber was listed as a factory machinist, and Frank Young was a locomotive fireman. Those charged are listed in *Springfield Daily News*, Mar. 1, 9, 1906.
33. George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 251; Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 237; Thomas Holt, "Racism and the Working Class," *International Labor and Working Class History* 45 (Spring 1994), 93-4; Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence*, 122-24; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 151, 309; Jacqueline Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 269.
34. Deborah Lynn Kitchen, "Interracial Marriage in the United States, 1900-1980" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1993), 114-16. All interracial marriages in the military were of Native American men and white women.
35. Paul J. Lammermeier, "The Urban Black Family of the Nineteenth Century: A Study of Black Family Structure in the Ohio Valley, 1850-1880," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (Aug. 1973), 446n18. The comparison is to the

- earliest national rate known, that for 1900. For examples of specific couples, see *Cyclone and Fayette Republican* (Washington Court House, OH), Aug. 30, 1894; interview, Lillian Bean, no date, Black Oral History of Canton, Ohio, Stark County District Library, Canton, OH; "The Family of Jacob Henry and Rosalie Dete Davis," typescript in Russell H. Davis Papers, Container 1, WRHS.
36. Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 40-44.
  37. *Cyclone and Fayette Republican*, Washington Court House, OH, Oct. 4, 1894.
  38. Oliver Johnson, "The Future of the Negro," *North American Review* 139 (July 1884), 94; see also the views of Charles A. Gardner at 79. Frederick Douglass, "The Future of the Colored Race," *North American Review* 142 (May 1886), 438-9.
  39. Mumford, *Interzones*, 100. Examples are cited in Hearn, *Children of the Levee*, 76; and Elliott M. Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917* (1964; rep., New York: Atheneum, 1972), 198.
  40. Interview, Mrs. Mary Blue Wynne, Jan. 15, 1987, St. James AME Church (Cleveland) Oral History Project, WRHS; *Indianapolis Leader*, Nov. 29, 1879; *Freeman* (Indianapolis), Dec. 2, 1893; Mumford, *Interzones*, 168; *Greensburg New Era*, May 9, 1907, quoting the *Greensburg Standard*, date unknown.
  41. Mary E. Odem, "Cultural Representations and Social Contexts of Rape in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Lethal Imagination: Violence and Brutality in American History*, ed. Michael E. Bellesiles (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 362-63. See also Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston, 1880-1960* (New York: Viking, 1988), ch. 7.
  42. Hearn, *Children of the Levee*, 89.
  43. Historian Joe William Trotter, Jr., argues that Milwaukee was such a place; *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 229.
  44. These figures are derived from an SPSS file containing demographic and other data for all Ohio urban places, 1860-1930.
  45. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 251; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Fredrickson also cites the antebellum South as a society in which a system of domination was well entrenched. But slaves were lynched; see Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 79; and Elizabeth Pleck, *Rape and the Politics of Race, 1865-1910*, Working Paper No. 213 (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1990), 5.