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PART THREE

Moving In and Moving On, 1860–1930

After slowing for a quarter of a century, African American migration into the Lower Midwest quickened during the 1890s and the first decade of the new century. The growing numbers of black Southerners entering midwestern towns may well have provided fuel for the white fears and hatred that produced such brutal results in the wave of mob violence that swept over the region during the same years. The conjoined impact of rising African American migration and swelling European American violence sent the three states on two divergent courses before a new current, the First Great Migration, realigned their paths once again. Migrant choices stemmed, however, from more than their experiences north of the Ohio River. Migrants’ southern origins, too, were in flux. As in the Lower Midwest, change in southern states proceeded at disparate speeds, with important consequences for migration.

When the unprecedented numbers of new migrants entered the region during the century’s second decade, they found a world that was radically changed from the one that had greeted their predecessors during the Civil War. Agriculture was in decline, with profound implications for the market towns that depended upon a healthy rural hinterland. Industry thrived, and so did cities, and the urban industrial jobs increasingly available for African Americans with the falling-off of European immigration during World War I was a leading cause for the new migrants’ presence. The larger African American numbers that already populated the Lower Midwest, a product of the previous half century’s migrations, could now provide much more information and support for the newcomers than they themselves had enjoyed. Among the knowledge those reconnaissance parties could pass along was the story of race relations during the previous half century and the conclusions the earlier migrants had drawn from living that history.