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CHAPTER FIVE

MAKING THE ITALIAN OTHER

Blacks, Whites, and the Inbetween in the 1895 Spring Valley, Illinois, Race Riot

CAROLINE WALDRON MERITHEW

In August 1895, African American newspapers across the United States focused their readers' attention on Spring Valley, Illinois, a small coal-mining town one hundred miles southwest of Chicago. On August 5, a mob of Spring Valley's new immigrants (Italians, Poles, Germans, French, Lithuanians, and members of other ethnic groups) attacked the African American community. The rioters ransacked homes; assaulted men, women, and children; and fired shots at residents who fled in fear. At a moment when Reconstruction era rights were recoiling and Jim Crow segregation became entrenched, blacks were particularly concerned with the "race conflict" at Spring Valley. Collapsing the nationality of the rioters, an incensed reporter for the *Richmond Planet* wrote, "The Southern bourbon Negro-hater is not present in Illinois, but the Italian has arisen in his stead."¹ Topeka's *Weekly Call* stated that the "dago rioters, anarchists, rebellionists and assassins" had taken over the town. Even more troublesome to the editors was the fact that Governor John P. Altgeld refused to protect "the rights of citizens of his state" after blacks in Chicago had telegraphed him demanding that he do so. "The wolves have killed all the sheep, congratulate the wolf," the paper sarcastically stated. The *Weekly Call* made a clear distinction between citizens and the immigrant "other" to formulate a type of nativist hierarchy that, the editors hoped, might undermine the black/white race paradigm that was at the root of African American oppression in the United States:

We believe we should welcome every good citizen from the old world among us. But when the slum of scum of the old world lands on our shores and brings with him low, vicious murderous habits, and attempts to strike down the rights of American citizens, whether black or white, he should be put behind the bars or exiled and sent back to his native country if it takes the whole United States army to do it. The rights of American citizens who love their country and obey the laws thereof, are more sacred than the rights of any murderous lawbreaking dago the Almighty has ever made or ever will make.²

Just as blacks were challenging racism by attempting to shift focus away from race to citizenship after the riot, Italians were categorizing themselves both ethnically and racially. Chicago's Italian-language newspaper, *L'Italia*, depicted the community by combining national identification (Italianness) with a pan-European whiteness. Highlighting the bonds between new immigrants, the paper reminded readers that blacks "threatened the life of not only the Italians but of all the whites and their families" in Spring Valley.³

This essay takes the Spring Valley race riot and observes how blacks, Italians, and other new immigrants attempted to empower themselves and lay claim to status at the "nadir" of race relations in this country.⁴ The events leading up to the riot, the assault on the African-American community, and the aftermath of the attack led to vocal outcries against oppression. What constituted oppression, however, was open to interpretation. Furthermore, no group defined itself, or its other, in isolation. Rather, each side responded to the rhetoric of its "opponents" as well as of middle-class whites who became involved in the episode. The riot, then, became a type of social prism in which the meaning and consequences of racial prejudice refracted into clusters of nationality, ethnicity, and class.

Though scholars have overlooked the Spring Valley race riot—perhaps due to the dominance of large urban spaces in social history as well as the failure to incorporate foreign-language sources in the studying of race relations—the violence, in what today seems like a remote coal town, resonated with U.S. residents (native- and foreign-born) across the country.⁵ Spring Valley's race riot provided the medium through which distinct groups, inside and outside the mining community itself, identified themselves and others, as well as expressed what belonging to the Republic meant in the last years of the nineteenth century.

The riot is important because it alerts us to the fact that, in the 1890s, the constellation of racial divides in the United States were not fixed. Italians

and new immigrants racialized themselves in opposition to the racialization of blacks. Their racial position was complicated by the fact that the meaning of race was both intensifying and fracturing at the turn of the century. As Linda Gordon has argued, "The idea of race was becoming sharper and more stable—what varied were the meanings, numbers, and labels of these 'races.'" By 1911, the Dillingham Immigration Commission defined forty-five different racial groups based on what today we would term nationality.⁶ The multitiered racial hierarchy allowed men and women many others.⁷ Moreover, groups that shared a negative reference group did not automatically view each other as equals. For example, middle-class whites and new immigrants in the region viewed blacks as their other (though for different reasons). These two groups did not view each other as the same. Blacks may have dubbed new immigrants as white, but foreignness, not whiteness, is what made ethnics the others of the African American community. These oppositional identifications influenced the outcome of the events surrounding the riot.

The multiple and malleable definitions of the other allowed African Americans, native-born whites, and new immigrants to have a hand in defining racial boundaries, suggesting that becoming white and becoming American were closely connected but not inseparable at this historical juncture.⁸ By problematizing race and citizenship and acknowledging that these constructs had unique, though certainly indelibly linked, historical trajectories, we are better able to understand how and why racial and ethnic groups divided themselves, and what caused them to come together.⁹ Because race was not always constructed as a duality—the opposite of black did not always mean white—African American and ethnic residents were each able to take advantage of prejudice for momentary power.

In analyzing the riot episode, I incorporate four fundamental tools. First, timing, though not everything, placed the event on the cusp of two sweeping chronological moments in American history: the end of the post-Civil War era, when racial justice and integration seemed possible and the beginning of the twentieth century, which marked a long period of increased racial violence and the abrogation of rights lasting for half a century.¹⁰ Second, place and location were also crucial elements in the evolution of the episode. Italians had considerable political power in Spring Valley, which made them fairly unusual among first-generation immigrants, and the town distinctive compared to other immigrant-receiving cities. This political control, however, neither extended beyond the municipal boundaries nor translated into economic power. Through place and location, I focus on the significance of

the local, because residents' experiences were inseparable from it. The riot episode did not end in the geographic space where the violence had begun. It quickly moved from a local incident, with limited repercussions, to a national and international phenomenon, with uncertain consequences. Third, demography influenced this transformation from the local and pushed events from the "village-outward." Spring Valley's population included men and women whose ties reached far beyond this small mining hamlet into America's rural South and urban North as well as around the world. The majority of blacks here had been born in the South during Reconstruction to parents who had been slaves. African American residents had strong beliefs about freedom, citizenship, and their position in American society. In turn, many of the immigrants in the region, though of the same generation as their black cohort, had no family or national connections with the crisis over slavery or the revolutionary moment that the Civil War engendered. This, in part, meant that they had vastly different experiences with American racism. Fourth, as noted above, group identification—racial, ideological, and national—rooted in past experiences also conditioned responses. Italians and other new immigrants, blacks, and native-born whites each categorized themselves in relationship to others. Groups made temporary affiliations as well as more lasting connections based on newly formed common ground created by the riot.¹¹

Incorporating these four analytic tools underscores the central theme of this essay and also extends recent scholarship that has begun to periodize the formation of racial consciousness. I argue that we cannot understand the meaning of whiteness—whether it was the culmination of a stage beyond the inbetween or a continuation of a racial identification after arrival—without taking account of black voices and African American reactions to new immigrant violence.¹² In turn, we cannot fully discern what racial categorization meant to Italians if we do not explore their own self-understanding of race and how that understanding changed over time.

PRELUDE TO THE RIOT

Events during the summer of 1895 were a product of the well-formed antagonism between Spring Valley, a booming coal community in north-central Illinois, and the county seat of Princeton. Spring Valley was dominated by working-class immigrants whose primary reason for being in America was to mine coal (or, in the case of women and children, to support a male head of household who worked underground). In the 1880s, the Spring Valley Coal

Company (SVCC) advertised for labor nationally and internationally. Families and single men alike migrated to the valley from other U.S. coal regions including places all over Illinois, Iowa, Colorado, and Pennsylvania, joining an earlier generation of skilled miners from Britain. By 1900, twenty-six different nationalities (Italian, French, Belgian, German, Polish, Lithuanian, Russian, Austrian, Slovenian, and others) worked in Spring Valley's mines. Italians—most from Italy's northern provinces—were the largest of these groups. Twelve percent of the mining town's inhabitants were born in Italy, and eighteen percent of the population had two Italian-born parents.¹¹

Spring Valley was not only an immigrant working-class town, it was a union stronghold. By the time the riot took place, the area had become a haven for militant trade unionists from Scotland and anarchist-socialists from Italy, France, and Belgium.¹⁴ With so many distinct groups of radicals, there were always ideological disagreements. During labor upheavals, however, Spring Valley miners worked together for a common goal—the unionization of their field, which would ensure better working conditions. The coal strike of 1894, which will be discussed shortly, was one such occasion when this diverse community came together.

The county seat of Princeton housed a vastly different culture than Spring Valley. Both charmed by the importance coal mines played in increasing the wealth of the county and alarmed by the militant activities of its new immigrant residents, Princetonians constantly tried to reform the immigrant coal miners who dominated the town.¹⁵ Princeton's residents were predominately farmers and merchants whose New England and Eastern ancestors migrated to the area in the 1830s. By the 1850s, the houses built here were "more or less pretentious" and suggested "luxury."¹⁶ This aspect of Princeton had not changed much when the Federal Writers' Project compiled the town's guidebook: "Princeton is a rich town—rich in lands and houses, and rich in ways of living."¹⁷ The political affiliation of much of the ruling class was the Republican Party, whose ties reached back to Lincoln's early career in the state (which may explain the tolerant, albeit paternalistic, attitudes toward blacks in 1895).¹⁸

Political and cultural differences between Spring Valley and Princeton were exacerbated by the 1894 strike. The labor upheaval was one of the most important causes of the riot, and it shaped the way in which county officials responded to the racial violence. While immigrant miners had proven that class cohesion could overcome ethnic differences, the defeat had demoralized the community. The SVCC managers underscored their power by forcing

miners who wanted to work again to sign a nonstrike agreement. Then, despite the promises, SVCC's manager hired blacks to replace union activists.¹⁹ *L'Italia* explained the betrayal: The company had rehired "Italians because it wanted to use them as long as they needed them and until they secured [African American] miners who worked for less."²⁰ In a letter to the *United Mine Workers Journal*, an Illinois miner explained the sequence of events and marked the bitter feelings against the black newcomers: "The majority was opposed to suffer any reductions and the result was as usual, scab labor, military power, strike ended, men discouraged, men victimized, operators employ whom they choose, while our best union men are allowed to walk the streets."²¹ Though native-born shared such sentiments, when the rioters eventually came to trial, it was the immigrants on whom the defense attorney focused his argument: "Ill feeling . . . existed on the part of the foreign miners against the colored miners."²²

Rank-and-file strike behavior, and authorities' response to it, inflamed the deep-seated prejudice between Princeton's elites and Spring Valley's workers. While the strikers included immigrants and native-born miners, newspaper reporters picked up on tactical differences and defined them in ethnic terms—"dagos and hunns" confronted an older generation of union leadership as well as the coal company.²³ Slurs against new immigrants and "alien" political ideology continued after the strike was over. County papers never tired of reminding readers of the anarchist threat to American political ideals: "The sidewalks of Spring Valley were Monday night decorated with large red letters extolling anarchy and calling on the workingmen to turn out May 1 and celebrate with anarchists." Immigrants and noncitizens had clearly become the other here.²⁴

The same things that drew class-conscious immigrant miners to Spring Valley made the place an affront in the eyes of Princeton's predominantly white Anglo-Saxon Protestant community. During a month when Billy Sunday held his religious revival meetings in the area, Princeton residents were particularly conscious of the differences between the county seat and its eastern neighbor. One newspaper reported, "There is to use a common phrase, a queer feeling pervading the English speaking community."²⁵ Those feelings were inflamed by an article that called on "good citizens of this county" to root out evil in Spring Valley. The paper insisted that the "better element had, in a word, to humanize, socialize, Americanize and moralize, the baser sort of this almost cosmopolitan population, in order to obtain and maintain a reasonably fair existence." To the Princeton elite, Spring Valley's immigrants were a demon other—"forces of vice and anarchy"—whom

American citizens should "beat down . . . though they may face death in the very attempt."²⁶ Others in Illinois agreed. A *Chicago Tribune* editorial told readers that "the largely alien and lawless" miners had made Spring Valley "a curse to this state."²⁷

In the mid-1890s, blacks were depicted in a less ominous light. One writer compared African Americans to new immigrants to illustrate the point: "The colored people of the 'Location' are orderly and law abiding, and are disposed to attend strictly to their own business. If as much could be said of some other nationalities, Spring Valley would have a much better name."²⁸ A coal company representative told the *Chicago Tribune* that he would protect African American workers because he had "more faith in them than in the Italians"—blacks, quite simply, "make better miners."²⁹ In another comparison that tied racial fears with sexuality and suggested that immigrants could be both white and other, the *Bureau County Republican*, reminded its readers that "During the year four men ravished girls in Bureau county . . . all four of the wretches were white men." The article's purpose was to condemn the era's rampant lynchings but it also revealed ethnic prejudice. The paper was "not yet prepared to say that it believes in the shooting and lynching of the Italians or Polanders," but it was reminding them to stay in their place.³⁰ After the riot, as blacks moved back to the Location, the SVCC was advised to "let the mob gang go in order to give them [blacks] steady work."³¹ Ethnic prejudice and racism, then, were rooted in the demographic contours and socioeconomic distinctions within Bureau County.

My argument here is not that Princeton's American-born middle-class white residents perceived blacks as their equals, but rather that they employed a racial hierarchy that included both new immigrant and African American others. Moreover, though some Princetonians described unassimilated ethnics as whites, the two populations were not the same. This suggests that, at the close of the nineteenth century, race and ethnic prejudice was based on intensely local experiences that mimicked, but did not necessarily mirror, the broader contours of American racism.³²

At the same time that middle-class whites were interpreting events through this multilayered race hierarchy, Italians and blacks invoked their own race evaluations. Italians, for example, used the riot to reinforce their common bonds as "*connazionali*" (co-nationals) while also categorizing themselves as white (a categorization that was not always confirmed by others). Investing in these dual identifications was the project of *L'Italia*. The paper combated "the lies" Princeton's newspapers sent out to the nation and supported their ethnic kin in Spring Valley. In one editorial, a Professor G.

Tonnello stated that Chicago's American reporters must have "stomachs made of bronze which were solid and robust enough to digest the carrots [sent by the Princeton] clowns." "Shame on you," Tonnello scolded, "for all the bad humor and race hatred. . . [and] all of the infamy directed against the poor Italians."³³ The paper was battling prejudice and fomenting racism at the same time, as it drew ties between Italians and other Europeans. "All of the white element that populated the town" had "chosen to unite to run out the Blacks by force," one article stated.³⁴

Despite the Italian efforts to build strength through whiteness and nationality, American Blacks came out ahead in 1895 because they had a more nuanced comprehension of the U.S. race hierarchy.³⁵ African Americans successfully brought the most violent of the riot perpetrators to court and waged a bold and successful battle against the aggressors. Their actions must be viewed in the local and national historical context. During the 1890s, Jim Crow racism was solidifying and legalizing racial segregation. Spring Valley blacks, who had recently migrated from the South, were closely connecting to the losing battle to keep the Fourteenth Amendment the law of the land. As the famous *Plessy v. Ferguson* case was being fought in the U.S. Supreme Court, blacks held that "Citizenship . . . has no color."³⁶ African American Illinoisans also focused their legal challenges on the rights of all Americans, regardless of race, to equality before the law. In so doing, they utilized the county's nativism, contrasting their own citizenship with the foreignness of the upper Illinois valley's Italian population.

During the 1894 strike, immigrant and native-born white miners also used prejudice to define their place in the community, codifying their plight with stereotypes about race and slavery.³⁷ "Our condition is worse than the black slave," one strike flyer announced, continuing, "Let us then be prepared to enter this struggle . . . and put an end to this infernal system of monopoly, oppression and wage slavery."³⁸ In the summer of 1895, Spring Valley's miners again used the concept of chattel to express their frustration. The earlier comparison had served as a positive call to action. A year later, slavery was a metaphor that expressed their economic and psychic condition. In August 1895, the defeated men sent out a press release to convey their desperation. Just four days before the riot, the *Journal of the Knights of Labor* published their plea, which concluded: "Chattel slavery is preferable to industrial slavery." The *Journal* noted that miners in Illinois had "mounted the auction block and begged to contract themselves into slavery for the common necessities of life."³⁹ Just like antebellum workers, Spring Valley's activists clearly had race and slavery in mind.⁴⁰

It is important to note that while most miners believed class ties could not mitigate racial difference, there were a few (whites and blacks alike) who disagreed. At a rally before the riot, Jean Brault, a Belgian immigrant and anarchist, urged class solidarity. Brault "declared what is the duty of every anarchist to declare, that it was not black workers who deserved to be shot at—they were driven by hunger to work for lower wages. Rather, Dalziel [the SVCC manager] was guilty of offering black workers a lower wage so he could exploit them."⁴¹ In an attempt to forge an interracial union, one Spring Valley correspondent to the *United Mine Workers Journal*, almost certainly black, claimed that "the colored men here are all good practical miners." This writer argued that if the coal company manager "thinks he is living in slavery times he will be disappointed."⁴²

This last effort to unify black, white, and immigrant workers in 1895 failed. In the wake of the riot, African Americans combated oppression by capitalizing on their citizenship rather than their class. Italians and other new immigrants heralded their whiteness for power. As *L'Italia* put it, Spring Valley miners could not spend another day facing "the new nephews of Uncle Tom," who, they claimed, undermined wages and weakened their union efforts.⁴³

RACIAL VIOLENCE

The summer of 1895 was a rough one for Spring Valley residents. Coal mining, always slow during the warmer season, was in a particularly deep slump.⁴⁴ Within five years, the United Mine Workers of America would become one of the strongest interracial and interethnic organizations in the country, but in 1895 it was a defeated union without a contract.⁴⁵ The event that sparked the riot fed fears, antagonisms, and prejudices that were well entrenched in the community. In turn, the riot reinforced power relations and the racial order on the town and the county levels.

On Saturday, August 3, 1895, Barney Rollo, an Italian miner, was mugged by a group of men, who may have been black. The attackers stole the weekly wages the miner had just picked up, took his watch, and shot Rollo, leaving him on the side of the road.⁴⁶ The next morning, city police arrested five African American men "without warrant and carried [them] to the City Hall." At a preliminary hearing, the men pleaded not guilty. Before the court proceeding was over, the sound of the fire bell had called together a mob that gathered in the town center. The crowd included people from a multitude of nationalities but Italians led the throng and were, most likely, in the majority.⁴⁷

Authorities freed the prisoners after the crowd had gathered. At some point that morning, police returned to the Location and searched blacks' homes.⁴⁸ "Plainly," a later investigation argued, the police were "searching to see how many colored homes had firearms."⁴⁹ In other words, the officers, in cooperation with the rioters, had planned the attack ahead of time.

The riot embodied the entanglement of economic circumstances, racial violence, and status in the community. The timing of the attack, midmorning, suggests that the rioters viewed themselves as powerful citizens of Spring Valley who thought that they could get away with an invasion in broad daylight. The multiethnic make up of the crowd indicates that, despite Rollo's Italian nationality, various ethnic groups felt wronged by the robbery and were able to come together despite their language and cultural differences. *L'Italia* reported that "Italians and people from other nationalities [were] indignant," and that they believed that blacks had given "the ultimate and most terrible provocation" for violence.⁵⁰ The German-language paper *Vorbote* echoed the sentiments, highlighting the pan-European white connection: "Yes, in less than two hours, 5000 battle-ready white miners would be assembled. The workers say that they had silently endured the infringements of the negroes long enough."⁵¹ The *Chicago Tribune* stated that "the polyglot foreigners" together determined to keep their town white.⁵²

This is what the mob had in mind when, at ten o'clock in the morning, it set out for the Location, led by a band that played renditions of the American national anthem.⁵³ On their way, the crowd stopped at the home of S. M. Dalzell, SVCC manager, and "demanded the immediate discharge" of all the African American workers as retribution for the Rollo robbery. Dalzell refused because "They are American citizens."⁵⁴ Arriving at the Location, some in the mob stopped at a saloon before beginning the house raids. Rioters "poured through the village," wielding miners' picks and clubs, and firing "old, rusty guns."⁵⁵ They broke down doors, "went into the cellars, [and] pushed their rifles in windows," capturing and beating several blacks as they fled for their lives.⁵⁶ Women and children "screamed, and fled terror stricken, while the men, equally helpless, were savagely driven into the woods."⁵⁷ Rioters invaded homes and dragged residents outside, into the middle of the mob. On the street, men, women, and children were "knocked down" and "kicked unmercifully."⁵⁸ The Norman Bird family was attacked just as they finished breakfast. Mr. Bird was "repeatedly struck" while his wife and daughter headed for the woods to hide. Unable to outrun her attackers, Mrs. Bird "begged upon her knees for mercy, but her only reply was a shot in the face from the revolver of one of the men."⁵⁹ By the end of the raids,

there were at least fourteen casualties and six missing. All of the victims survived—a rare conclusion in the history of American race riots.⁶¹ For the moment, black residents took refuge in Seatonville, another mining town about six miles west of Spring Valley.⁶¹

The attack was not yet over. The Monday after the riot, miners held a mass meeting of more than a thousand people who vowed to keep blacks out of the town and out of the mines. One speaker told his audience “he would not stop with the negroes but would settle it once and effectively with Manager Dalzell of the coal company, who . . . deserved all the blame, as he had brought the negroes here.”⁶² The meeting adopted a resolution that gave African American inhabitants and their families until five o’clock Tuesday evening “to leave the city, and to carry off their effects.” Anything left would “be declared confiscated and destroyed.”⁶³ On Tuesday afternoon police were stationed near the Location to deter “destruction of property.” The guards were joined by the mayor, but no one made any attempt to stop the evacuation or to temper the crowd that had gathered there. “Women and children were driven from their homes, were abused and insulted and their trunks and belongings were dragged about and despoiled. Wagons were hurrying about gathering up household goods and carrying them off on all the principal highways.”⁶⁴

African Americans did more than flee; they fought back. At the same time that miners in Spring Valley had gathered and resolved to racially “cleanse” their union town, blacks were holding their own meeting. The race riot coincided with a camp meeting that brought more blacks to Seatonville.⁶⁵ Victims of the riot and religious leaders worked together. At one o’clock in the morning on Monday, August 5, blacks met at Union Church, where participants agreed to remain in Seatonville until they could organize armed resistance. A committee was appointed to go to Princeton “to secure supplies and the 300 repeating Winchester rifles.”⁶⁶

Spring Valley’s African American residents were not alone in their outrage. All over Illinois, blacks expressed indignation and tried to assert their power. In Peoria, African Americans tendered an offer to “assist in the protection of the colored men.” Galesburg’s blacks were “terribly incensed over the action of the miners.” Seventy-five blacks in Evanston denounced the sheriff and the mayor, and sent a telegram to Governor John Altgeld “praying upon him to give the colored people of Spring Valley adequate protection.”⁶⁷ At a mass meeting in Elgin, blacks passed a resolution lambasting county and state authorities for failing to punish the rioters. “Colored people in East St. Louis held an indignation meeting to denounce the failure of

Illinois authorities to protect the Spring Valley negro miners."⁶⁸ In Rockford and Moline, groups met at each town's African M.E. church. In the former city, they commended coal mine manager Dalzell for his "declarations that he knows no man by color and only by American citizenship." The latter sent word that "200 men can be readily secured" here for help and said they would work "in conjunction with those from Chicago."⁶⁹

Chicago's African American community did the most for the riot victims. At Quinn Chapel, in a meeting that included Ida Wells Barnett, her husband, F. L. Barnett, and other prominent members of the community, there was "a prolonged and heated discussion" about whether or not to "take the law into their own hands." By the end of the night, there was a compromise that included the formation of a riot investigating committee. They also resolved to press the authorities to protect the "lives, liberties, and homes" of "these exiles," and they called on the governor to ensure that all Illinois residents could "earn an honest living in a lawful manner in any part of the state." Finally, the meeting's participants rendered "every possible assistance in the protection and defense of our unfortunate brethren in the exercise of their lawful rights."⁷⁰ Within a week, the Quinn Chapel committee had raised fourteen hundred dollars and finished their investigation. Besides the details of the riot, the committee assessed Illinois's blacks' ability to prevent and respond to this type of violence. "We are compelled to admit that we have no cause to congratulate ourselves for our share in the settlement of this affair."⁷¹ The committee believed that help had not arrived as quickly as it should have because "of all nationalities upon this continent the most persecuted and yet the most helpless is the negro." They vowed to formulate a "plan of action which will make us less dependent upon white people and more capable of defending ourselves."⁷² Despite this harsh assessment, African Americans had made a difference by helping to focus national attention on the riot, thus undermining Spring Valley officials' tacit approval of events.

African American community organizing had a ripple effect that reached supporters of the rioters and victims alike. The Italian consul general in Chicago reacted to the Quinn Chapel meeting and other signs of African American indignation by sending telegrams to Governor Altgeld and meeting with Chicago Mayor Swift. The consul urged the governor to "reestablish peace" by preventing blacks from going to Spring Valley. He repeated his concerns to Swift, demanding that police arrest the black delegation before they left for the riot scene. Swift refused, but allayed some of the consul's fears. Cook County's branch of the American Protective Association (an anti-immigrant organization) called Spring Valley's mayor a "coward, disloyal and

anti-American" because "he did not use his authority to quell the recent riot."⁷³

Indeed, Mayor Martin Delmagro clearly knew about the attack at the Location on Sunday morning, but he did not notify County Sheriff Atherton Clark until noon.⁷⁴ Before Clark got to the scene, Delmagro had countermanded his request for assistance. The sheriff thought the mayor's change of mind was odd, and he, along with five other county men, decided to investigate. In Spring Valley, they met with the mayor and manager Dalzell. The county group found the mayor unwilling to help because "he thought it would be a dangerous venture for him to offer interference." There were no further official decisions made that day. The sheriff, however, was suspicious of Delmagro's intransigence and he continued to probe. On his way back to Princeton, Clark stopped in Seatonville to visit the refugees. "They wanted the sheriff to furnish them arms for self protection." Clark declined, saying he had to "proceed according to law." Two days later, Governor Altgeld sent a telegram to Clark, inquiring about the situation.⁷⁵

The response that Altgeld received pushed him to send state Assistant Adjutant General Bayle, who arrived in Spring Valley on Wednesday. Bayle found a community divided. Immigrants had met before Bayle's arrival and, *Vorbote* reported, "The miners, who don't speak English, about 200 in number . . . made a resolution whereby no colored person (not excluding women and invalids) would be permitted to remain inside the town borders after this evening."⁷⁶ The assistant adjutant general attended another mass meeting with approximately six hundred people present. The presence of two prominent local United Mine Workers of America members, James O'Connor and John Mitchell, suggests that the union was involved. In fact, it was the first time that the miners' organization took a public stand on the riot. About the meeting, one Chicago reporter stated, "Every nation in Eastern and Southern Europe was represented. Every motion that was made, and every speech, had to be repeated at least six times, and each time in a different language."⁷⁷

The main order of business at the meeting was a motion which indicated that some members of the organization opposed the riot violence.

Resolved, That we, miners of Spring Valley, in mass meeting assembled, declare it to be our belief that all men regardless of race, color, or creed, are born with the same equal rights and should enjoy the same opportunities in pursuit of life and happiness. Resolved, That we denounce any attempt at the suppressing of these rights as unjust and barbarous and pledge ourselves to maintain law and order so far as . . . in our power. Resolved, That we are

ready now to resume work providing the Spring Valley Coal Company is ready to start the mines.⁷⁸

The sentiments are among the clearest indications of organizer's commitment to interracial unionism for which the United Mine Workers is so well known. The discussion that followed shows that not all were inclined to agree with this type of inclusion. After reading the resolution, the chair asked for debate. Many of those in attendance asked whether passing this resolution would allow blacks to return to the city. "Through various interpreters," the chair evaded the question. When the resolution finally came up for a vote, the chair "declared it carried," though some accounts noted a tie.⁷⁹ Union miners were split and the fault line seemed to divide new immigrants from an older generation represented in the local union leadership.

After the meeting, Bayle conferred with city officials, journalists, and union representatives O'Connor and Mitchell. The latter two used Bayle's presence to press the company to rehire men who had participated in the 1894 strike—one of the union's main concerns from the beginning. Manager Dalzell told them that he was willing to "take back all of the miners who had quit work save those who had committed crimes." O'Connor responded that we "expect that all shall be allowed to return to work." Dalzell, in turn, reminded him that the blacks were also "anxious to come back," and added that he had already promised that the company would allow them to work again. Dalzell believed that, under the miners' resolution, SVCC could do that. O'Connor agreed, but stated that the company "must not hold us all responsible" if African American workers were "stabbed in the back." The union representatives then implored Dalzell to wait at least a few days before blacks were brought back—he was clearly balancing the wishes of the racist immigrant rank and file, whose numbers were key to a strong organization, and the ideology of interracialism that was essential for union success nationally. The manager refused: "I take this to mean that the miners have withdrawn their resolution [and] that only white miners shall be employed in the mines." He then turned to Mayor Delmagro and said, "The colored people who were driven out of Spring Valley told me they were ready to come back. Are you ready to protect them?" Delmagro agreed to try. The settlement may have been "amicable," as one report noted, but it was certainly a delicate agreement.⁸⁰

Under the watchful eye of Governor Altgeld, who had threatened the town's officials with a militia invasion, the mayor "swore in 50 conservators of peace." Less than a week after the riot, black miners returned to work in Spring Valley.⁸¹

RACE, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE SEARCH FOR JUSTICE

With the violence over, Spring Valley blacks fought back by successfully using the legal system and incorporating the language of citizenship to argue their case. As the defense lawyer put it: "He had heard the expression 'American citizen' used in this trial to a considerable extent until it now rung in his ears."⁸² Their court victory was, in part, the result of several factors. Illinois's blacks' swift reaction to the riot, one that included setting up a statewide organizational network, was key. The 1895 response fits into the larger pattern of African American resistance to subjugation. For example, a dozen years later, after the 1908 race riot in the state capital, Blacks founded the NAACP.⁸³ But, in Bureau County, residents won their legal fight also because they were able to tap into prejudice against ethnic others that was so much a part of the relationship between Princeton and Spring Valley.

In addition, Spring Valley blacks were prompted to action, and succeeded in their fight, because of the assistance they received from African American communities around the nation. The Quinn Chapel committee, which had urged the victims to bring a civil suit against the city to recover damages, organized a "relief fund to be used in supplying food and necessities to the victims of the riot" because, as they put it, "they are in distress, and we should aid them."⁸⁴

African American newspapers around the country also assisted their Spring Valley brethren publishing reports to help bolster the prosecution. Many stories incorporated language that highlighted the distinctions between southern and eastern European immigrants and American citizens, a tradition that had begun with Frederick Douglass.⁸⁵ The 1895 accounts tended to group together immigrants and singled out Italians for the brunt of their criticism. The lumping of ethnic populations may have been a reflection of early reports about the demographic makeup of the rioters. It might also have been a product of black-Italian relations in the cities where the newspapers were published. *L'Italia*, for example, helped readers justify the violence by drawing on familiar stereotypes and making connections between African Americans from one of Chicago's multiethnic neighborhoods and Spring Valley's Location. Describing the latter, the paper noted, "Together with the miners there were also jailbirds . . . who used to infest South Clark street in Chicago . . . [T]hey lived off of the Italian miners principally plundering the streets and their homes."⁸⁶ The black press fought these racial caricatures by contrasting Italians and citizens. The Baltimore *Afro-American* wrote: "The Italian outrage on colored laborers in Spring Valley, Ill., will result in no benefit to the foreign labor element in the United States . . .

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the verdict of the public is against the Italians."⁸⁷ The *Langston City Herald* called the Spring Valley Italians, "a band of lousy, dirty, despicable, low bred, treacherous dago miners."⁸⁸ To the *Richmond Planet*, "the Italians of Spring Valley" were "misguided foreigners" who did not understand "the right to labor is a right guaranteed by our laws." The paper questioned how anyone could "have so mistaken the spirit of our institutions." It urged Spring Valley blacks to "Purchase Winchester rifles," ending the article with "Lynch-law must go!"⁸⁹ If anyone had missed the message, the next issue of the *Planet* stated, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, "the Southern bourbon Negro-hater is not present in Illinois, but the Italian has arisen in his stead."⁹⁰

With this type of backing from all over the United States, blacks in Spring Valley were enabled to heed the Quinn Chapel committee's advice. In September, residents of the Location "presented a claim to the city council for damages," asking for two thousand dollars "for injuries and loss of property . . . sustained by them in the recent riot."⁹¹ Later in the fall, Spring Valley residents joined other Illinois African Americans in a conference in the state capital—an "outgrowth of the late mob violence against the colored people." Here, blacks continued to castigate the "band of outlaws and red-handed midnight assassins" involved in the riot.⁹² The assembly pledged itself "to do all in our power to bring the guilty perpetrators of these atrocious acts to justice."⁹³

Blacks also started a criminal case against their attackers. On Thursday, August 15, a group of men and women from the Location, accompanied by Representative Buckner of Chicago, went to Princeton and "made complaints before Justice A.M. Swengle."⁹⁴ They argued that the violence was "contrary to the statute and against the dignity of the people of the state of Illinois."⁹⁵ Sheriff Clark issued thirty-six warrants and he, along with ten of the victims, went to the SVCC No. 3 mine to make the arrests. As the miners came up on the cage, the victims of the riot "would take hold of certain of them, saying to the sheriff: 'This man broke in our door,' 'that man struck me with a club.'"⁹⁶ Clark arrested somewhere between twenty-three and twenty-five men. At the preliminary hearing on Saturday, Justice Swengle split up the defendants into two groups to be tried separately, setting bail at three hundred to five hundred dollars each.⁹⁷

Most of the defendants were recent immigrants unlikely to receive fair treatment in Princeton.⁹⁸ Because many of these men could not speak English, the court was required to find Lithuanian, French, and Italian translators.⁹⁹ To be sure, the defendants understood their standing in the county seat. Many had been harassed and a few had been arrested during the 1894 strike. For exam-

ple, Jean Brault, the Belgian miner who had counseled solidarity in 1895, had participated in looting a company store during the 1894 strike.¹⁰⁰

While blacks could rely on county officials for help, Spring Valley's city council was on the immigrants' side. During the arrests at the mine, Mayor Delmagro and several aldermen appeared at the shaft and did all they could to protect the accused rioters. Their presence was another indication of the interethnic ties of this community's population—the city council was composed of English, Irish, Russian, Polish, and Scottish aldermen.¹⁰¹ The town's elected representatives had asked Sheriff Clark to try the men in Spring Valley, but the sheriff told them that this “would be impossible as the warrants were made in Princeton.”¹⁰² The defendants then tried to get a change of venue, claiming obvious bias on the part of the assigned judges.¹⁰³ Their request was approved, and the trial was heard by another judge.¹⁰⁴ By November the proceedings were over. The jury found eight of the defendants guilty of riot and criminal assault.¹⁰⁵ Seven were sent to the state penitentiary; the eighth was under twenty-one and could not, under state law, go to jail. The nationalities of those sentenced were Italian, Polish, and French. Those who were set free were French, German, Belgian, and U.S.-born. The mix of nationalities, of the guilty and nonguilty groups, is one of the most telling illustrations of the bonds that immigrants had created. These ethnics were not only willing to live and work in the same community, their violent actions show that they had created a common identity based on boundaries of consciousness, outside of which were African American others. Despite similar economic circumstances among Blacks and new immigrants—and, more important, immigrants' willingness to bridge cultural divides for union power—this hybrid community was formulated upon the desire for white privilege.¹⁰⁶

The rioters had misjudged their position because they did not fully understand the multiple identification of others in the community. African American plaintiffs won because they were able to highlight the foreign other of American citizens and downplay racial difference. They also succeeded for two other reasons: (1) they had the emotional and monetary support of blacks around the country; (2) Spring Valley blacks understood the rift between city and county officials, and used it to build an alliance with Princeton residents. To be sure, this was a tenuous and temporary partnership. We should not, however, ignore its implications if we hope to understand how and when immigrants' became white.¹⁰⁷ Blacks were able to combat racial violence by emphasizing their citizenship.¹⁰⁸ As one group of black observers pointed out in the riot's aftermath, the “mob must be taught that the American people will not tolerate any such outlawry.”¹⁰⁹

Just as blacks triumphed because of their insight into relations between immigrants and native-born, immigrants failed because they had misjudged their position as one of multiple others. Responses to the verdict suggest distinct perceptions of the relationship between ethnicity and race.¹¹⁰ The way they reacted to the guilty verdict underlines a burgeoning race consciousness. This consciousness melded with their own understanding of class. At one point, the defense lawyer tried to explain this relationship. Blacks had been used as strikebreakers in Illinois's coal mining district, he told the jury, and they were naturally the "silent enemy" of the "white miners."¹¹¹ During the closing arguments, the lawyer repeated claims about prejudice in the court. This time he played upon the connection between ethnicity and American identity. In particular, he "thought the people were too much prejudiced against the Italians because they were not American citizens."¹¹² The jury was not swayed by these arguments. Immigrants had transgressed ethnic lines and attempted to fuse ties as whites.

Finally, the rioters' decision to ask for a retrial illustrates that they had a new understanding of their position in the community. Their nine reasons for a new hearing included the use and misuse of evidence as well as the prosecution's failure to show intent. But what was particularly unbearable to the defendants was that "the counsel for the prosecution . . . indulged in remarks and gestures and exclamations calculated to influence the minds of the jury . . . and to rouse race prejudice and passion."¹¹³ Immigrant miners had become more aware of America's racial order and their uncertain position in it. Over the next months, they worked hard to strengthen white ties and gain racial power. For example, in December, the community held a musical benefit (likely to raise money for the rioters). "There will be music for all . . . la Marsellaise [*sic*] for the French, the royal march and the Hymn of Garibaldi for the Italians; 'Last Rose of Summer' for the Irish, 'Home Sweet home' for the Americans and for all, a short number one program."¹¹⁴

CONCLUSION

The violence of August 1895 reveals the multiple dimensions of racial formation and prejudice in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. The Spring Valley riot also alerts us to the way in which local circumstances affected the American race paradigm and, moreover, how native-born whites, new immigrants, and blacks each had a hand in cultivating the relationships within this paradigm. Italians and other new immigrants had begun to self-identify as white though their own classification did not automatically

create ties to the middle-class white power structure, which continued to view them as other. African American residents in this coal community used citizenship and the precarious racial placement of new immigrants to define the other and to challenge racial violence in the courts. The successful battle they waged was both a part of their rapid and cohesive organizing in response to the attack, and their capacity to exploit the white power structure's perception that Spring Valley ethnics were a greater threat to the community than were its African American residents. The riot history, then, helps to untangle the complex connection between racialization and citizenship, clarifying a struggle in which new immigrants' assimilation into whiteness was molded by black resistance to race-based nationality.