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THE SPRINGFIELD RACE RIOT OF 1908

Springfield, Illinois, at the turn of the Twentieth Century, was one of those mid-western cities which served as the mercantile center for a large rural population. Located in the middle of the rich farmland of Central Illinois, it provided this area with an aggressive approach to business that resembled that of the Yankee. But in its attitude toward race relations, Springfield was more Southern than Northern. The fact that Abraham Lincoln lived most of his adult life here, or that the city was the state capital of an urban, industrial state had little effect on the way in which the residents treated the Negro. In August, 1908, as the city was preparing to celebrate the centennial of the birth of its most famous son, a violent and bloody race riot struck Springfield.

People who knew Springfield well were not surprised at this outburst of mob violence. The capital had a reputation, partly justified, of being one of the most corrupt mid-western cities. Vice was a business protected by the authorities and overlooked by the respectable citizens. Staid Jacksonville, thirty-five miles to the west, believed that the capital could rival Chicago and San Francisco in the wickedness of its saloons, brothels, and narcotics dens. The *Chicago Daily News* agreed that "Vice and other forms of law breaking have been given a wide latitude here. The notoriety of Springfield's evil resorts has been widespread."¹

Washington Street east of the Capital was the center of this vice. Running between the Sangamon County Court House and the county jail, Washington Street was only two blocks north of the Capital Building and four blocks from Lincoln's home. Here, especially between Ninth and Eleventh Streets, Springfield's "evil resorts" were concentrated—brothels, saloons, gambling dens, second hand stores, and pawn shops. The Negro residential area flanked these blocks on both sides and extended to the east. Washington Street, the "block of crime," was noted for its lawlessness. Much of the political corruption for which the capital was notorious

¹Jacksonville (Illinois) *Daily Journal*, Aug. 18, 1908; *Chicago Daily News*, quoted in Chicago Commission on Race Relations, "The Springfield Riot," *The Negro in Chicago* (Chicago, 1922), 71.

took place here; Negro votes were bought and sold and the "degenerate" police force was "fixed." Policemen refused to enter this area unarmed or alone. On Christmas Day, 1865, two men were killed here in a clash between policemen and newly-discharged soldiers. Four years later a murder was committed on the same street, and in 1906 another murder. In 1905 a fatal duel was fought on Washington Street, and, in all, twenty-five men had been beaten or killed on this street since the Civil War.² This section of the state capital was truly a "disgrace and a stench to the civilized world."³

Race relations in Illinois, as throughout the nation, were at a critical point of development at the turn of the century. Feeling against the Negro ran high in Illinois because of the huge Negro influx to urban centers such as Chicago, Peoria, East St. Louis, and Springfield. This threatened the jobs of the whites as well as their superiority at the ballot box.⁴ In "Bloody Williamson" County in Southern Illinois, for example, non-unionized Negro miners acted as strikebreakers, with the result that in 1898 and 1899 violence flared at Virden and Carterville with seven Negro miners killed. Added to the threat of cheap Negro labor in the depressed mines were traditions of white supremacy dating back to ante-bellum days. Many Illinois towns prohibited Negroes from settling within their city limits, and few Illinois juries would convict a white of killing a Negro.⁵

In the middle of August, 1908, a Negro was in the county jail on Washington Street, indicted by the grand jury for the murder of a white man and awaiting trial. He was Joe James, a young vagrant from Birmingham, Alabama, who had stabbed to death Clergy A. Ballard early on the morning of July 5. Ballard, a middle-aged mining engineer, apparently discovered James in the bedroom of his pretty sixteen-year-old daughter Blanche, (trying to "outrage" her, the local news-

²(Springfield) *Illinois State Journal*, Aug. 16, 1908.

³Joliet *Weekly News*, Aug. 20, 1908.

⁴See Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, passim.; Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought. The Nadir 1877-1901* (New York, 1954), passim.; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom. A History of American Negroes* (2nd ed., New York, 1956), 426-435.

⁵Paul M. Angle, *Bloody Williamson, A Chapter in American Lawlessness* (New York, 1952), 98-115.

paper reasoned,) struggled with the intruder and was badly cut with a razor. The intruder fled, but Ballard died of his wounds within a few hours. James, who had been released from the city jail only half-a-day earlier, was arrested and identified by Blanche and her brothers as the intruder. An infuriated mob snatched James from the police and beat him badly before he was taken safely into custody.⁶

After five weeks, it would seem that Springfield's citizenry had forgotten about James. Their attention was centered on more immediate concerns. The price of farm commodities had dropped, but the Springfield Senators were leading the Three I baseball league. Late summer clearance sales were in progress and, most important, the Presidential sweepstakes of 1908 had just been launched with the nominations of Republican William Howard Taft and Democrat William Jennings Bryan who was having a third try at the White House with the slogan "Shall the People Rule?" A bitter Republican primary fight for the Gubernatorial nomination had resulted in the selection of incumbent Governor Charles S. Deneen. Also of local interest, the Prohibitionist Party state convention was about to meet at Springfield's St. Nicholas Hotel to nominate state officers. On hand to lead the forces against Demon Rum was their Presidential candidate, Eugene Chafin of Chicago. The Prohibitionists were expected to poll at least 100,000 votes in Illinois in November.⁷

On the morning of August 14, as the capital's residents read their newspapers their thoughts were quickly focused to the Negro question.⁸ As they sipped their coffee they saw banner headlines in the *Illinois State Journal* shouting "NEGRO'S HEINOUS CRIME" or in the rival *Illinois*

⁶*Illinois State Journal*, July 5, 6, 1908.

⁷(Springfield) *Illinois State Register*, July-Aug., 1908, passim.; *Illinois State Journal*, July-Aug., 1908, passim.; *Jacksonville Daily Journal*, July-Aug., 1908, passim.

⁸The following account of the riot is taken from: *Illinois State Register*, *Illinois State Journal*, *Jacksonville Daily Journal*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *New York Times*, *New York Tribune*, *New York American*, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug. 14-31, 1908; Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 67-71; Adjutant General of Illinois, *Biennial Report, 1907-1908* (Springfield, 1909), 263-270; William E. Walling, "Race War in the North," *The Independent* LXV, pt. 1 (Sept. 3, 1908), 529-534.

State Register "DRAGGED FROM HER BED AND OUTRAGED BY NEGRO." The night before, the papers stated, a Mrs. Nellie Hallam had been assaulted and raped by a Negro. Quickly, no doubt, their thoughts went back to the events of a month earlier and the fact that Joe James, the Negro murderer, was in the county jail. Two outrages by Negroes in only five weeks!

That same morning George Richardson, a Negro, was arrested as he went to mow a lawn near the Hallam house, and he was identified by Mrs. Hallam as her assailant. Richardson was clapped in the county jail with James, and the story of his crime, as related by Mrs. Hallam and the newspapers, quickly circulated through the city.

Attractive, twenty-one year old Nellie Hallam had been married for four years to Earl Hallam, a streetcar conductor who worked until late at night. She was, said the local press, "a quiet, respectable young married woman, who had just four weeks ago buried her only living child." Usually she would retire early and leave a light burning in the bedroom until her husband returned from work. About 11:30 on the night of August 13 Mrs. Hallam was awakened by the touch of someone on her bed. Seeing the light turned down she asked: "Earl, what are you doing?" "I guess I am drunk," a muffled voice replied. Thinking this unusual she cried out, hoping to arouse her husband's parents who lived next door. But she was grasped by the throat and heard a strange voice hiss: "Keep still or I'll kill you." She could see by the dim light that her assailant was a Negro.

The intruder pulled Mrs. Hallam by the throat into the kitchen adjoining the bedroom, then onto the porch, down two steps and across the rough stone sidewalk, and then he fled. She was left bleeding and bruised, half-unconscious and thoroughly frightened in the garden. In a few minutes she was able to scream, rousing her in-laws and most of the neighborhood. The assailant's motive had been rape, apparently, because nothing was stolen and he had never mentioned robbery. It was soon discovered that he had gained entry by cutting the back screen door. Mrs. Hallam was sure that she could identify him.

The newspapers printed a gruesome account of the incident which heightened racial tensions. Editorially, the two local papers called for prompt punishment of the perpetrator of this "hellish" outrage and the suppression of the Washington Street establishments that bred "scores of worthless and lawless" Negroes.

The accused George Richardson was, according to the newspaper accounts, an ex-convict in his early 'thirties who had served time for murder and had been out of prison for only two years. (Actually, Richardson was a sober and industrious citizen who had never been arrested before.) Mrs. Hallam was able to identify him at a preliminary hearing by his voice, not by his appearance, although later she was able to pick him out of a line-up as her attacker. On the basis of Mrs. Hallam's testimony, Richardson was charged with rape and bound over to the grand jury. He had come to the hearing protesting his innocence, and he and his wife swore that they were at home, several blocks from the Hallam house, at the time of the attack. This testimony convinced no one after Mrs. Hallam's positive identification. Later that afternoon small groups of irate citizens began to mill around the jail where the two Negroes, James and Richardson, were being held. The crowd was not yet a mob; it was leaderless and non-violent, and the sheriff managed to preserve order all afternoon. He made no attempt to disperse the crowd which, by 5:00 P.M. of that hot August Friday, had grown to about four thousand persons. Many were merely curious bystanders, many were tourists and shoppers in town for the evening and anxious to see what the excitement was about, others were youthful thrill-seekers, but many were motivated by race hatred and, in the case of immigrant laborers, anxious to put the competing Negro in his place.

The sheriff by five o'clock had become very concerned about the safety of his prisoners, his jail, and himself. The size of the crowd was menacing, and in their pushing and joggling they portended violence. By removing the Negro captives, Sheriff Charles Werner reasoned, he could ensure their safety and get the crowd to disperse, since without the prisoners there would be no reason for milling around the

jail. So the authorities arranged to divert the attention of the crowd by sending fire engines dashing down the street in front of the prison, while Richardson and James were taken out the rear into a waiting automobile and rushed to the outlying village of Sherman. Here they were put on a train for Bloomington where they would be safe in the state prison until their trial.

The crowd outside was in an ugly mood. The sun had raised tempers; many of the crowd had missed their dinners, which added to their irritation; and the authorities seemed to be taking no heed of their presence. By sundown the crowd had become an angry mob.

The more aggressive and able men became the mob's leaders, and they set up a shout for the Negro prisoners. Sheriff Werner appeared, awed by the size of the throng before him, and he tried to convince the people that the Negroes were gone, that there was no reason to congregate before the jail. Few persons heard him above the din of the mob, and those that heard did not believe him. Finally he was able to convince those within earshot that they should appoint a delegation to search the jail. Part of the mob conferred and a committee was jostled forward, amid shouts of suspicion and disbelief, to accompany the sheriff into the prison.

The air was tense with expectancy as the mob awaited the return of their representatives. Finally the committee emerged, empty-handed, and reported that Richardson and James were nowhere to be seen. Some believed the sheriff had been telling the truth, that the captives had been removed. But many felt the officials were lying—the prisoners were merely hidden. It was clear, regardless, that the Negro prisoners were not available to be punished by the mob.

Should no one be punished for the brutal crimes? The story circulated through the gathering at dusk that the owner and driver of the car which had removed the Negroes from their grasp was Harry T. Loper, the owner of a restaurant five blocks from the jail. Perhaps one of the sheriff's deputies told them. Perhaps Sheriff Werner himself wanted to ease the pressure on the jail and himself by diverting the mob

elsewhere. With no Negro prisoners to punish, the mob could at least wreak havoc on the person and property of Harry Loper.

At the restaurant they milled about, hooting and threatening, but with no one willing to take the first violent step. Loper appeared in the doorway with a gun, ready to protect his person if not his property. He later explained to the newspapers:

I have been through one riot, in Cincinatti in '83, the greatest in the country; when 100 men were killed. It was to avoid loss of life that I took those men out of town. I did not want to favor the man [Richardson]; I have no interest in him whatever, and would go just as far to punish him as anybody, but after going through the Cincinatti riot, and knowing this Sheriff as I do, I knew he would be killed first before he would let the jail be taken. I thought I would save life by removing the colored men.⁹

Violence started at Loper's about 8:30 P.M. when someone overturned Loper's automobile standing in front of the restaurant. Then a brick was hurled through the plate-glass window of the building. Policemen and local units of the militia, which had been called out an hour earlier, were helpless to stay the mob. Many of the crowd had spent the waiting hours drinking, and beer bottles were thrown along with the bricks. Each crash brought new cheers and added to the flames of excitement. Cries of "Curse the day that Lincoln freed the nigger" and "niggers must depart from Springfield" came from the mob. Someone shouted: "Abe Lincoln brought them to Springfield and we will drive them out," and again "we want the nigger and we will apply the rope." The policemen could only smile and watch; none were ready to step into the path of the flying missiles, and they were too small a group to stop a mob of thousands. The entire front of the restaurant was quickly demolished.

The rioters were led into the interior of Loper's by a woman, later identified as Kate Howard, a plump, middle-aged widow whom the local press described as "a new Joan of Arc."¹⁰ "What the hell are you fellows afraid of?" she asked.

⁹*Illinois State Journal*, Aug. 15, 1908.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, Aug. 16, 1908.

“Come on and I will show you fellows how to do it. Women want protection and this seems to be the only way to get it.” Mirrors and furniture, bottles and glasses, were quickly destroyed. Within an hour the restaurant was completely wrecked, a total loss to Loper. What was not destroyed was carried away—the chandeliers, furniture, and fixtures were piled in the street and later burned. The stock of the bar was rapidly consumed, adding to the fever pitch of the mob. Thousands of spectators had gathered by this time, watching the mob and cheering them on with frenzied shouting and curses, the children as excited as their parents.

The “climax of the evening” occurred shortly before ten o’clock. One of the group applied a torch to Loper’s automobile and to the piles of loot. Alcohol was added to the blaze and at the same time policemen finally fired on the mob which had begun to shoot up the remains of the restaurant. Two waiters at Loper’s were hit. One, Louis Johnson, was fatally wounded by a stray bullet through his abdomen. Another lost his right arm because of cuts from flying glass.

At this point Mayor Roy R. Reece appeared in the middle of the crowd and made an appeal for law and order. But his reading of the riot act was shouted down and the Mayor was almost crushed by the mass of people. He sought refuge in near-by Mueller’s Cigar Store where he spent the remainder of the evening.

Meanwhile, part of the mob had not gone to Loper’s but remained at the jail, not convinced that Richardson and James were gone for good. Here they hurled bricks and insults at the police and the militia defending the bastion. Another committee was appointed to search, and they reported to the mob again that the two Negro prisoners had indeed been removed. Hearing this, the throng slowly retreated from the jail, and by 10:00 P.M. this area was almost deserted. Shortly after this time the incendiaries in front of Loper’s restaurant had begun to leave. The mob’s appetite for violence not having reached satiety, they decided to inflict a general punishment on Springfield’s Negro population. By this time, approximately 10:00 P.M., dozens of spectators

had been hit by stray bullets and flying glass, and many policemen and militiamen were clubbed or hit.

There had been isolated attacks on innocent Negroes while the mob was at Loper's and the jail. At least five Negro porters were beaten at the railroad depots. Several attacks were made on the Negro residential area about eight o'clock with Negroes seeking refuge in street cars. But as crowds clogged the streets, the streetcar service had to be abandoned and terrified blacks were dragged from the cars by frenzied whites. One such Negro fled to Court House Square, where Presidential candidate Eugene Chafin was speaking to a Prohibitionist rally. With no place to hide, the Negro darted onto the speaker's platform behind Chafin. "Stand back, gentlemen," the candidate warned the pursuers, "or I'll shoot the first one of you who touches this man." The Negro slipped off into the crowd, and Chafin was stoned by the crowd, his face badly bruised.

The most concerted attack on the Negro residential district was at about eleven o'clock, after Loper's had been wrecked and the rioters had left the jail. Property valued at more than \$150,000 was lost, as the mob wrecked almost every building on Washington, Jefferson, and Madison Streets between Eighth and Twelfth Streets. It appears that the mob leaders were careful in destroying only homes and businesses which were either owned by Negroes or served a Negro clientele. (White handkerchiefs marked the homes and businesses of whites, and these were left untouched in the midst of the general destruction.) Second hand stores were looted for guns, ammunition, and other weapons. Bars such as "Dandy Jim" Steele's Delmonico Saloon were ransacked with many bottles of liquor carried away. Barrels of whiskey were burned in the streets. From the restaurant of Charley Lee, a Negro, over \$200 worth of champagne was carried off, bought in anticipation of the tourist trade which the State Fair would bring.

Much of the eastern end of the city was in flames by 1:00 A.M. The first fires started at the corner of Ninth and Jefferson Streets, and they spread quickly along the rows of clapboard wooden structures. A whole row of hovels on both sides

of Tenth Street north of Madison burned to the ground, and then the red light district along Ninth Street. In all, eighteen separate fires burned simultaneously, with a four square block area between Ninth and Eleventh Streets and Madison and Jefferson Streets levelled by flame. The city firemen were helpless, because the mob would allow them to save only the lumberyards in the area.

The casualties continued to mount. More stray bullets whizzed through the streets after the looting of guns from the pawn shops and as many in the mob became more intoxicated. Any Negro unlucky enough to be caught by the mob was beaten, including many of the Negro hotel workers in the city, stranded at their jobs when the rioting started. The star pitcher for Springfield's league-leading baseball team was shot in the leg. Hidden in the crowd, many persons delighted in throwing bricks at police and militia. By Monday morning four whites, all of them spectators, would die of wounds from stray bullets. The culmination of this violence was the lynching of two Negroes.

The first victim was Scott Burton, an old, inoffensive Negro barber. About 2:00 A.M. a mob set fire to Burton's wooden frame house, and the old Negro grabbed his shotgun as he fled the blaze. Several shots came from the mob, so Burton fired a load of shot into the mob to defend himself. In turn he was shot four times by the mob, and his fallen body was dragged through the streets on a rope. Finally a likely looking tree was found and Burton was lynched. Several persons began to mutilate his corpse still further with guns and knives, but at this moment a large enough detachment of militia from Decatur arrived to disperse the crowd and cut down Burton's dead body.

Judge Lynch's second victim was an eighty-four year old Negro cobbler named William Donegan, whose good reputation was marred, in the eyes of the rioters, by the fact that he had been married to a white woman for over thirty years. Donegan was found sleeping in his back yard and quickly hanged to a tree across the street, only one block from the State House. Not yet dead, his throat was then cut and his body hacked with knives. Again militia arrived and dispersed

the lynchers, and amazingly, the old cobbler was still alive. He was rushed to the hospital, but he died the next morning.

Most of the damage had been done by the time these lynchings occurred. By early Saturday morning the mob was tired and order was restored. The riot was checked, and remained checked, largely because of the intervention of large numbers of state militia. Local units of the militia were called out at six o'clock on Friday evening, but there were not enough of them to control the mobs. Governor Deneen, therefore, at the urging of Sheriff Werner called in by telephone and telegraph militia companies from Peoria, Pekin, Bloomington, Quincy, and Chicago. Enough men had arrived by 3:30 on Saturday morning to be able to take control of many of the trouble spots. By breakfast time about 1,800 militia were camped at the arsenal, the capital grounds, and Lincoln Park. The total by Sunday stood at 3,691 men commanded by Major General Edward C. Young.

Springfield resembled a city in wartime on the morning after the riot, with squads of soldiers patrolling the streets, and entire battalions concentrated in the Negro area. Tents were pitched on the grounds of the state buildings and cavalry units rode through the downtown area. These soldiers did their job well—the city remained relatively quiet for the remainder of the weekend. “Cowed by the display of military force,” said a local newspaper, “and awed by superior armament and grim determination by the authorities, the spirit of the mob was broken at the first clash and the rioters fell back, beaten yet breathing threat of violence.”

A large-scale exodus of Springfield's terrified Negro population was one of the first concrete results of the riot. About three thousand Negroes sought refuge at the National Guard's Camp Lincoln on the outskirts of the city. Few Negroes were foolish enough to report for work on Saturday, and most of those that did were sent home by their employers. Many firms discharged their Negro help, and others received anonymous threats to do so or else suffer the consequences. Since many Negroes were now jobless as well as homeless, small wonder that thousands of them left the city and never returned. Hundreds left on foot while the

more fortunate rode in extra coaches which the Wabash Railroad put on to carry the refugees to points west. (But a few Illinois towns—Jacksonville and Peoria, for example—refused to allow these Negroes within their city limits.) Some sought asylum in Chicago and St. Louis. This exodus caused another casualty, the seventh death to result from the riot. A Negro baby died of exposure near Pittsfield, Illinois, as her parents were walking west to escape the mob.

Springfield's citizens encouraged this Negro migration. Few Negroes got their jobs back, and grocers refused to sell food to the blacks. (The state of Illinois was forced to buy \$10,000 worth of groceries for the capital's Negroes.) The press agreed that the city would be better off with fewer Negroes, and surrounding towns took precautions so that they would not pick up the emigrants. At the village of Buffalo, fifteen miles from Springfield, this sign was posted at the railway station:

All niggers are warned out of town by Monday, 12 m. sharp.
Buffalo Sharp Shooters

One experienced reporter felt that these racial tensions in Springfield would last in spite of the exodus. William E. Walling, writing in *The Independent*, believed "the whole awful and menacing truth" was "that a large part of the white population of Lincoln's home, supported largely by the farmers and miners of the neighboring towns, have initiated a permanent warfare with the negro race."

Saturday, August 15, was orderly in spite of rumors of further violence. Mayor Reece, at 4:30 A.M., had ordered all the saloons closed, but the authorities found this difficult to enforce. In addition to the normal Saturday crowds, thousands of sightseers flocked to the capital from as far away as Chicago. Post card vendors sold dozens of pictures of Mrs. Hallam and of the devastated Loper's Restaurant, and hundreds of the more lurid-minded tourists fought for splinters of the trees where Burton and Donegan were lynched to carry home as souvenirs. But if they came expecting violence, they were disappointed. A local political heeler who had been injured by Negroes on Friday night failed to enlist a mob to renew the attacks on the Negro quarter.

Policemen arrested about 150 suspected mob leaders on Saturday. Three of the suspects were believed to have led the mob attack on Loper's and the two lynchings. Abe Raymer was an immigrant, a Russian Jew who had moved to Springfield about a year earlier from St. Louis and was employed as a waiter. He was about thirty years old and admitted belonging to a Zionist organization, but he denied being an anarchist. Ernest "Slim" Sullivan was also young, and unemployed. Kate Howard, "the new Joan of Arc," was a forty-two year old widow, plump and sallow faced, and employed as the keeper of a rooming house. The police believed that she led the attack on Loper's Restaurant and helped to lynch Burton. They found looted property in her possession, and she proudly displayed buckshot wounds in her pudgy arms—from Scott Burton's shotgun, the authorities surmised.

A special grand jury was summoned on Monday August 17 to investigate the causes of the riot and indict the leaders of the mob, whom State's Attorney Frank L. Hatch promised to prosecute promptly and vigorously. Policemen in plain clothes busily gathered evidence against the alleged instigators of the violence, but threats from the mob restrained many persons from testifying. Another Negro was beaten by a crowd of whites, and employers of Negro servants continued to receive threats to discharge their black employees. But the saloons did remain closed all week, and local police tightened up on law enforcement, raiding saloons and brothels and ordering "undesirables" out of the city.

On Tuesday, Springfield was calm enough to watch an exhibition baseball game between the New York Giants and the Springfield Senators.

About two thousand of the militia had been sent home by Thursday, and there were no further outbursts of mob action. The grand jury indicted the suspected mob leaders—Abe Raymer, "Slim" Sullivan, and Kate Howard—for criminal conspiracy and, except for Sullivan, for murder. George Richardson was also indicted for criminal assault. Twenty-two year old Roy Young, an unskilled laborer, confessed to being a leader in the attack on Loper's and to

starting at least ten of the fires in the Negro quarter himself. In all, 117 indictments were handed down by the grand jury, most of them for malicious mischief.

Only one of these rioters was found guilty. Kate Howard, swearing her innocence, committed suicide by taking poison as she was being led away to jail. Raymer was acquitted on all counts, and the State's Attorney felt that if Raymer could not be convicted with the mass of evidence against him, then no one could. The remaining indictments were dropped. Only Roy Young, who had confessed, was convicted; he drew a sentence for burglary, arson, and rioting. And George Richardson, the alleged attacker of Mrs. Hallam, was exonerated. On September 1 she signed a statement that neither Richardson nor any other Negro had been her assailant. She was attacked, she said, by a white man whose identity she refused to disclose.

The citizens of Springfield did not seem ashamed of the violence. Most persons in the capital city found "mitigating circumstances" for their hatred of the Negro. "Springfield had no shame. She stood for the action of the mob," wrote an out-of-town reporter. Many persons in Springfield told him: "Why the niggers came to think they were as good as we are." The *Illinois State Journal* believed the riot had been inevitable because of "the negroes' own misconduct, general inferiority, or unfitness for free institutions. . . ." One white minister in his sermon recommended Negro disfranchisement, the Southern remedy to the race question, and four other Protestant ministers urged swift "justice" to the Negro. Even Governor Deneen blamed Burton for his own death, saying that if Burton had not fired into the mob, then he would not have been lynched.¹¹

Why was Springfield so unrepentant? The Negro there made up only about one-tenth of the 50,000 population, scarcely enough to threaten the supremacy of the whites. Many of the capital's residents, however, were of Kentucky and Southern Illinois origin, where traditions of white supremacy were very strong, and many laborers in Springfield—almost every employee of the street railway system, for example—

¹¹Walling, "Race War in the North," 529-532.

were Southerners. Other Springfielders in business and vacation travels through the South had seen and approved of enforced separation of the races. Foreign-born Americans, moreover, did feel a real competition from unskilled Negro workers in the Springfield area, and there is good indication that many of the rioters were of immigrant stock.¹²

The race riot made Springfield the center of state and national attention, and most of this publicity was unfavorable. Newspapers in Illinois were shocked by this violence so close to their own doorstep, they believed the riot a disgrace to the fair name of Illinois, and they tended to blame the riot on Springfield's lax law enforcement and corrupt government. The comment of the Joliet *Weekly News* was typical: "Springfield's government has for years been notoriously bad. The reign of crime has been without intermission. . . . For many years it has been sowing the wind. Now it has the cyclone. It is feared that like Sodom and Gomorrah, the place lacks ten righteous men."¹³ But some Illinois papers tended to blame either the Negro or foreign immigrants for the violence. The Quincy *Journal* stated that if Joe James had been promptly tried and executed the riot would have been averted.¹⁴ The Kankakee *Daily Republican* felt that the cause of the racial tension was the Negroes' desire for complete equality which the whites would never allow, and urged as a solution the old and impractical plan of colonizing the Negroes back in Africa.¹⁵ The newspaper in Freeport believed that "such a riot could not have occurred where the foreign population of Polaks and Italians was not large. The ignorant foreigners from the coal mines were its principal rioters."¹⁶

The metropolitan press in the North generally deprecated the riot in harsh terms. Cartoonist McCutcheon of the Chicago *Daily Tribune* pictured a white mob chasing terrified Negroes in front of Lincoln's tomb, with a Negro being lynched just to the right of the tomb.¹⁷ Pulitzer's St. Louis

¹²*Ibid.*, 532-534.

¹³Joliet *Weekly News*, Aug. 20, 1908.

¹⁴Quincy *Journal*, Aug. 17, 1908.

¹⁵Kankakee *Daily Republican*, Aug. 15, 1908.

¹⁶Freeport *Journal*, Aug. 19, 1908.

¹⁷Chicago *Daily Tribune*, Aug. 15, 1908.

Post-Dispatch emphasized the Lincoln theme; "It was one of the worst . . . race riots that ever disgraced the country, and the disgrace is the more humiliating in that the outrages were perpetrated under the very shadow of Lincoln's tomb."¹⁸ The New York *Tribune* agreed that Lincoln's home had been "shamed."¹⁹

Southerners naturally noticed the riot, and moderate papers there such as the New Orleans *Picayune* and the Louisville *Courier-Journal* pointed out that Southern whites deplored racial violence as much as Northerners did. But for the most part, the Southern press took an "I told you so" attitude, telling the North to put its own house in order before trying to be the guardian of the Southern Negro. Racists in the South—men such as James K. Vardaman—gleefully shouted that the riot proved the Negro and the white could never live side-by-side in any section of the country.²⁰

The riot was quickly forgotten, except by the Negro, both in Springfield and throughout the nation and attention was again focused on events of greater moment—the Presidential campaign and the major league baseball pennant races. The Negro did not forget, and Southern racists like Vardaman, in their jubilation at these signs of deteriorating race relations should have remembered that in the North the Negro had the right of suffrage and often a good education. Here the Negroes might organize an effective protest. This happened directly as a result of the Springfield race riot.

Until the violence at Springfield, so close to the centennial of the Great Emancipator's birth, the only attempt at concerted Negro action to protest his inferior political and social status had been ineffectual. The Negro was not united on the need for action, let alone the proper course of action. Many followed Booker T. Washington's passive program of improving the economic status of the Negro before agitating for civil rights. But one segment of American Negroes was impatient with Washington's formula. Led by bearded, scholarly W. E. B. DuBois, a professor at Atlanta University and

¹⁸St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, Aug. 16, 1908.

¹⁹New York *Tribune*, Aug. 16, 1908.

²⁰All cited in *Illinois State Journal*, Aug. 18, 1908.

the first Negro to receive a Ph.D. in history from Harvard, they wanted a more militant approach.²¹

Before 1908 there had been two attempts at collective Negro action, the first the establishment in the 1890's of the Afro-American Council which aimed at consolidating public opinion behind the Negroes' plight. The other attempt was the Niagara Movement, a meeting of twenty-nine Negro intellectuals, DuBois among them, at Niagara Falls, Canada, in June 1905. (The group met there because of racial discrimination at the Buffalo hotel where they made reservations for the conference.) Their hope was to form a national protest organization, with branches in each state, to fight against discrimination, segregation, and Washington's gradualist policy. The Niagara Movement incorporated, passed vigorous resolutions, and held annual meetings, at Harper's Ferry in 1906, at Boston's Faneuil Hall in 1907, and at Oberlin in 1908. (This led Kelly Miller to comment sarcastically on the choice of sites: "We may well except a future session at Appomattox. . .") But the Niagara Movement was never anything more than a "feeble junta," with all of Washington's influence thrown against it.²²

The race war at Springfield, especially at so untimely a moment as the preparations for the Lincoln centennial celebration, stirred both Negroes and certain Northern whites out of their lethargy and demonstrated the need for a more powerful protest organization. Reporter William E. Walling,

²¹On Washington's program and DuBois' opposition see: Mary L. Chaffee, "William E. B. DuBois' Concept of the Racial Problem in the United States," *Journal of Negro History*, XLI (1956), 241-258; Samuel R. Spencer, Jr., *Booker T. Washington and the Negro's Place in American Life* (Boston and Toronto, 1955), passim.; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 384-390; Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (New York, 1951), 827-886; William E. B. DuBois, *Dusk of Dawn* (New York, 1940), passim.; Roi Ottley, *Black Odyssey* (New York, 1948), 219-221; Arna Bontemps, *The Story of the Negro* (New York, 1948), 185-193; William E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, 1903), 50-51.

²²On the Niagara Movement see: Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1944), 742-744; DuBois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 224; William E. B. DuBois, *Black Folk, Then and Now* (New York, 1939), 215; E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (New York, 1949), 523-524; Aptheker, *Documentary History*, 897-915; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 438.

who covered the riot for the liberal weekly *The Independent*, was shocked by the events at the capital and issued a plea for a revival of the spirit of abolitionism to protect the Negro and safeguard his rights. Several Northeastern reformers had read Walling's concluding plea, and on the basis of this they issued a call for a conference to meet at Springfield, Illinois, the scene of the riot, on February 12, 1909, the Lincoln centennial, to discuss the Negro problem. The call was written by Oswald Garrison Villard and linked the old abolitionist spirit to the new protest movement. The leaders were two New York social workers, Mary White Ovington and Henry Moskowitz, and among those attending the conference with them were Walling, Villard, DuBois, John Dewey, James Adams, William Dean Howells, John Milholland, and Livingston Farrand—a very distinguished gathering of social workers, educators, jurists, professors, religious leaders, and publicists. The Conference, meeting only six months after the riot, established the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, incorporated in 1910.²³

Out of the violence at Springfield had come the organization of the first really effective Negro protest. The N.A.A.C.P. was not able to prevent the recurrence of race violence—witness the rash of race riots immediately after World War I—but it could focus national attention on these incidents, point the finger of scorn, and bring Negro discontent into the open. Each case of discrimination was publicized and many cases were brought into the appeal court systems with N.A.A.C.P. financial aid. Had the Springfield race riot not occurred at such an inopportune moment and at a place where the Lincoln aura was the strongest, the N.A.A.C.P. might not have been established.

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²³On the establishment of the N.A.A.C.P. see: Mary White Ovington, "The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," *Journal of Negro History*, IX (1924), 107-116, and *The Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York, 1947), 100-107; Aptheker, *Documentary History*, 915-928; Frazier, *The Negro in the United States*, 524-526; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 439-440.