

The Sociogenesis of a Race Riot: Springfield, Illinois, in 1908, by Roberta Senechal. Blacks in the New World. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990. xiv, 231 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendixes, notes, index.

REVIEWED BY WILLIAM L. HEWITT, BRIAR CLIFF COLLEGE

On August 14 and 15, 1908, a race riot occurred in "Abraham Lincoln's hometown," six months before the celebration of the centennial of Lincoln's birth. This historical irony "presented the northern public with the startling spectacle of whites lynching blacks and burning their homes within a half-mile of the Great Emancipator's homestead" (2).

Violence had erupted when a white mob could not inflict immediate "justice" on two black prisoners in the Sangamon County Jail. One had been arrested for the alleged rape of a white woman and the other for the alleged murder of a white man. Rumors of the formation of a lynch mob induced the jailers to transport the two prisoners to the Bloomington, Illinois, jail. The white lynch mob retaliated by rampaging through the black sections of town, the Levee and the Badlands. The mob lynched one black man and the next night slit the throat of another black man as the rioters vandalized and destroyed twenty-one black businesses and left more than forty blacks homeless after burning their residences.

In the introduction to her study of the Springfield riots, Professor Roberta Senechal rejects a popular explanation for race riots, including the Springfield riot, proposed by historians influenced by sociological and psychological theories. The explanation, loosely termed "social strain," attributes antiblack violence to unsettling demographic changes, such as a rapid increase in the population of African-Americans in the community; black residential "invasion" of white neighborhoods; increased use of blacks as strikebreakers; or black competition for jobs in a particular industry.

Using newspaper archives, census and court records, and oral histories, Senechal interprets the Springfield riots from another perspective. After identifying 190 rioters and their victims through the careful use of these sources, she finds evidence to rebut the social strain interpretation. The Springfield riot was "a workingclass riot," (110) but "most of the rioters' occupations involved no contact or competition with blacks" (115). In fact, there seemed to be little hostility toward blacks in Springfield from the immigrants who lived and worked in closest proximity to blacks. Lithuanians and Poles who lived nearest to blacks did not participate in the riots.

Who were the rioters, then? Most of them were males in their mid-twenties who were not southern in background, dispelling the myth that antiblack sentiment was a southern import and not indigenous to this northern community. Italian, English, and especially Irish immigrants who did not live in neighborhoods with blacks constituted an unusually large proportion of the rioters. Rioters seemed to be whites who lived near enough to the black community to *fear* neighborhood encroachment before the fact, and whites who worked in jobs where blacks had *not yet* made inroads, but might do so as they improved their station in life.

Upper-class whites, who had even less direct contact with blacks than workers who might feel threatened by encroachment, also showed hostility toward blacks and encouraged the rioters. Senechal concludes that "class was the major dividing line. Better-off whites had the 'luxury' of both social and geographical distance from blacks" (194). Upper-class whites saw blacks as emblematic of larger civic problems such as drinking, vice, and political corruption. The increased participation of blacks in civic affairs and, more important, their increased economic success made them "pretentious" and "arrogant" according to upper-class whites. "During the riot," Senechal points out, "the deviant character of this black progress was demonstrated by the selection of black achievers as prime targets for attack" (195). In Senechal's thesis, "black success generated social danger" (151). When later combined with rapid population increases by blacks in northern cities during World War I, black success provided a potent pretext for race hatred and white reaction.

In the aftermath of the riots, the white woman whose alleged rape had sparked the violence dropped all charges against the accused black man. The assailant turned out to be her white boyfriend who had been seen leaving her home, so she invented the story of a black rapist to cover it up. The black man accused of murder was convicted by an all-white jury and hanged. The accused rioters, by contrast, pleaded guilty to minor charges and paid minor fines; one of the ring-leaders served thirty days for petty larceny. Most blacks who had fled the rioting returned. Better-off blacks organized a law and order league to battle crime in the neighborhood, and thus allay white fears of alleged black criminality. White civic leaders also had the riot in mind when they changed the city government from a ward system to a commission system, which "did significantly reduce blacks' and working-class whites' roles in city politics" (184). In a final irony, the subsequent gala Lincoln birthday celebration on February 12, 1909, "was for whites only" (185).

Senechal's study is a worthy contribution to the Blacks in the New World series. Her historiographical essay as an introduction to her study might deter some less scholarly readers, and may have been more appropriately placed as an afterword, but this is a minor matter of personal preference. Her well-written and well-documented investigation provides both general readers and scholars with much useful information and interpretation about class, race, and racism in the Springfield riot, in particular, and race riots in general.

Germans in the New World: Essays in the History of Immigration, by Frederick C. Luebke. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990. xxii, 198 pp. Notes, table, index. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JOHN D. BUENKER, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-PARKSIDE

Of all America's myriad immigrant groups, none came in greater numbers over a larger span of time or made more of an impact on the Midwest than did the Germans. Yet, as Frederick C. Luebke observes, few groups have received less serious analysis because no others have been so divided by religion, political persuasion, socioeconomic status, occupation, culture, or social character. With language as their only unifying characteristic, Germans were much slower to organize on a national scale for any common purpose, thereby necessitating focus on the state or local level. Luebke, the author of previous books on the political life of Germans in Nebraska, on Germans in Brazil, and on German-Americans in World War I, goes a long way toward remedying that neglect by placing German immigration within larger conceptual frameworks. Successfully avoiding the pitfalls of elitism and filiopietism, Luebke has gathered together a spectrum of ten sociohistorical essays, written and revised by him over a quarter-century, that view the German immigrant experience as a "process of change over time in ethnic minority group culture as it interacts with other groups, native and immigrant, within a specific physical and social environment" (152). At the same time, the essays serve as a map of the author's intellectual odyssey and of the evolution of the "new" immigration history.

Luebke's interest in immigration history originated in his own search for identity and self-location, a quest that is reflected in the focus of the first five essays, which deal directly with the efforts of German-Americans to adapt to the American environment over time. The first examines how the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church reacted defensively to its minority status in America through language maintenance, printing and publishing outlets, and parochial schools, semi-

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