

The Racial Position of European Immigrants 1883–1941: Evidence from Lynching in the Midwest

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Abstract

The racial position of European immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries vis-à-vis blacks and whites is debated. Some argue that many European immigrant groups were initially considered nonwhite, while others argue that they were almost always considered white, if sometimes still from a distinct intrawhite racial category. Using a new dataset of all lynchings in the American Midwest from 1883 to 1941, we explore differences in collective violence enacted upon three groups: native-born whites, blacks, and European immigrants. We find that European immigrants were lynched in ways, and at rates, much more similar to that of native whites than to those of blacks. Blacks in the Midwest were lynched at roughly 30 times the rate of native-born whites and European immigrants, and were sometimes ritually burned in massive “spectacle lynchings” while native whites and European immigrants were never burned. We find suggestive evidence that European immigrants were perceived to have posed threats to the political order. Our results suggest that, in the American Midwest, despite nativist othering, European immigrants were fully on the white side of the color line, and were protected from collective violence by their white status.

Keywords

lynching, race, collective violence, comparative and historical sociology, political sociology

Introduction

Sociologists and historians have studied the racial boundaries between European immigrants, blacks, and native-born whites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century U.S. extensively, focusing mostly on formal legal or organizational practices. One point of broad agreement is that European Immigrants to the United States during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century enjoyed formal legal protections associated with whiteness.

However, systematic analysis of informal and extralegal practices has mostly been lacking, and some argue that some European immigrants were excluded from many of the informal

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privileges of whiteness (e.g., Roediger 2006). We ask whether European immigrants in the Midwest enjoyed the informal protections of whiteness against the practice of lynching.

Lynching is a form of collective violence, always illegal, that was nevertheless once widespread, and illustrates the often significant gaps between formal legal protections and actual social practice (Wells-Barnett 1892). Lynching in the Midwest, in particular, is an ideal case to assess the racial position of European immigrants vis-à-vis both native whites and blacks. The Midwest was unique in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for having a significant number of lynchings (Pfeifer 2013), alongside recent large influxes of both black American and European migrants, both of which drew hostility from native-born whites (Higham 1955). Thus, if there were a time and place in which new European immigrants did *not* receive the protections of whiteness against collective violence, it would likely be the Midwest during this period.

We draw on a new dataset of all lynchings in the American Midwest from 1883 to 1941 to advance our understanding of racial boundaries between native whites, blacks, and European immigrants. Our data show significant differences in the frequency with which blacks and Europeans were targeted for lynching, as well as in the characteristics of these lynchings, and the public rationale of lynch mobs. Specifically, European immigrants were:

1. Lynched at a population rate much closer to that of native whites than of blacks (roughly 1/35th the rate of black lynching).
2. Subjected to “spectacle” or “public torture” lynchings at a much lower rate than blacks, and at a similar rate to native whites.
3. Lynched for alleged violations of prohibitions on miscegenation or rape at a much lower rate than blacks, and at a similar rate to native whites.

Although European immigrants were generally treated similarly to native whites, the data reveal stark differences between blacks

and native whites. The lynching record in the Midwest, thus, suggests that the white-black color line was far more salient than any boundary distinguishing European immigrants from native whites (Fox and Guglielmo 2012). Nevertheless, there is some limited evidence of nativist reactions to European immigrants within our data, which we discuss below. Overall, the treatment of European immigrants, at least with respect to lynching in the Midwest, suggests they were afforded the full protections of whiteness.

The Racial Position of European Immigrants

Among scholars of race and immigration in the United States, there is broad agreement that at least some European immigrants were racialized in particular times and places. Disagreements exist, however, about whether this racialization placed some Europeans beyond the boundaries of a larger “white” racial category. Specifically, while scholars agree that some Europeans were considered racially different from native whites, scholars disagree over whether these Europeans were generally considered to be white. Some argue that historically, the correspondence between race and color in the popular imagination was much looser than it is today (Guglielmo 2003), and thus, Southern and Eastern European immigrants may have been understood upon arrival in the United States to be simultaneously white and racially inferior to other groups of white Europeans (Fox and Guglielmo 2012). Thus, although there was a racial hierarchy between Europeans, the debate is whether this hierarchy consisted of subcategories of whiteness, or whether some groups of Europeans were considered nonwhite. Because the white/nonwhite divide was the most consequential boundary in the racial order of the day (Du Bois 1903), the debate is more than just semantic, turning on whether Europeans received the considerable formal and informal protections of whiteness in the United States.

Evidence suggests that, despite notable exceptions with respect to the crafting of restrictive immigration policy (Kanstroom

2007), European immigrants in the United States enjoyed the myriad *formal* legal protections of whiteness. Because Congress declared in 1790 that “. . . any Alien being a free white person . . . of good character” was eligible to naturalize as a U.S. citizen (103), the entitlement of European immigrants to the benefits of state membership has never been challenged based upon this racial prerequisite (Haney López 1996). Similarly, while in 1900, all states south of the Mason-Dixon line, as well as 14 others, had anti-miscegenation laws banning relationships between black men and white women, there have never been legal prohibitions on intimate relationships between native-born white and European residents (Martyn 1979; Pascoe 2009). States such as Oregon, which prohibited blacks from residing in the state and debated Chinese exclusion, had no such ban on Europeans of any nationality (Schuman 1995). Not only membership, but the formal benefits of state citizenship, were protected for European residents, even as they were systematically curtailed for blacks. European immigrants were not the targets of convict laws, vagrancy laws, Jim Crow, or mass-disenfranchisement campaigns limiting political participation and concentrating institutional power among whites (Fox and Guglielmo 2012; Guglielmo 2003; Keyssar 2009). These formal legal and institutional practices are immensely significant and have generated rich documentary records that can be analyzed by scholars.

Informal social practices such as discrimination, however, also play a large role in demarcating racial boundaries, and in concentrating power and advantage. This distinction between formal and informal mechanisms of racial subordination is illustrated by the treatment of Mexicans in law and by custom in the United States during our period of study. Under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, all Mexican residents after annexation were entitled to “all the rights of citizens of the United States” (Trist 1848:13), and the U.S. Census did not distinguish Mexicans from whites until 1930. However, the actual treatment of Mexicans varied significantly across time and space, and the

exclusion of Mexicans from the institutions of local power was common (Fox and Guglielmo 2012).

Some argue that despite broad agreement over the legal protections afforded European immigrants, Europeans were not socially recognized as white, and, thus, outside the informal protections of whiteness. Roediger (2006) pointed to racialized language and images, pointing out, for instance, that slurs referring to Italians as “guineas” were rooted in the conception of Africans as cheap, disposable labor and, therefore, implied a comparison of the racial position of Italians as similar to that of blacks. Similarly, Ignatiev noted that blacks were sometimes referred to as “smoked Irish” (Ignatiev 1995; see also Arnesen 2001; Jacobson 1999). According to these arguments, the boundaries of whiteness once excluded large numbers of European immigrants. While such a reorganization of racial boundaries is plausible, and consistent with recent insights into how racial orders and practices change over time (Davis 2001; Kim 1999; Omi and Winant 2014; Painter 2010), systematic tests of whether some Europeans were outside the informal protections of whiteness have mostly been lacking.

Here, we argue that one test of whether European immigrants enjoyed informal protections of whiteness was whether their rate of subjection to collective violence (lynching) was similar to that of native whites, or more closely resembled the rate of black victimization. Scholars have shown that protections of whiteness against being subject to lynching were considerable. For instance, not only were blacks lynched at a rate far higher than that of whites (Tolnay and Beck 1995), blacks were also more often lynched in grotesque spectacles in front of massive crowds, where the victim was subject to public torture, than were whites (Smångs 2016). These spectacles served as a gruesome reminder that the protections of due process were guaranteed only to whites (Garland 2005). Thus, by analyzing differences in the subjection to lynching of black, European, and native-born white victims, we are able to determine whether European immigrants benefited from many of the protections

of whiteness that were denied blacks in the Midwest.

In addition to the racial position of European immigrants, we are interested in the extent to which European immigrants were subjected to violence based upon nativism, or concerns over their foreignness and willingness or ability to assimilate into the American nation, its culture, and political institutions (Higham 1955). Concerns over the imputed foreignness of European immigrants during our period could be interpreted either as a dimension of a particular historical racialization process (Kim 1999), or as a social boundary that is distinct from, but related to, race (Wimmer 2015). Our data, and the scope of this article, do not allow us to make sweeping claims about the relationship between race and nation. However, examining details of lynching events allows us to explore whether European immigrants during our period were subjected to violence as a result of nativism.

Case: Lynching in the Midwest

It is understandable that there is not much systematic evidence for whether European immigrants enjoyed the informal protections of whiteness, as informal interactions are far less likely to be recorded and preserved than the more bureaucratic interactions with the state, and laws that are codified.¹ For the most part, informal exclusionary practices such as employment discrimination are difficult to study even in the present. Thus, studying informal social protections requires an informal practice that is still visible in the historical record, and against which whiteness was a key protection. Lynching was not a formal, legal practice but is also still visible in the historical record.

Lynching has generally been defined as the murder of one or more victims by a mob of three or more people, in the claimed service of justice or tradition (e.g., Brundage 1993; Tolnay and Beck 1995). Lynching is *collective* in its organization—in that perpetrators of lynchings were groups—and *individual* in its liability—in that targets of

lynching were individuals or small groups of people supposed to have committed some specific offense against justice or tradition (Senechal de la Roche 1996). As murder, lynching was always and everywhere formally and explicitly forbidden by law in the United States. Numerous studies show, however, that despite its formal illegality, lynching was among the key pillars of white supremacy in the American South (e.g., Brundage 1993; Tolnay and Beck 1995). Whites were sometimes lynched in the South; however, whites were lynched far less than blacks, and even less so as a percentage of the population (Tolnay and Beck 1995). Moreover, blacks were sometimes lynched for alleged violations of “racial etiquette” and other small offenses against white supremacy, while white victims were comparatively more likely to have been lynched for violent crimes such as murder (Bailey and Tolnay 2015; Wells-Barnett 1892). Here, we draw on evidence from a new dataset of lynchings in the Midwest to assess whether European immigrants were afforded the protections of whiteness in this context.

Lynching in the United States

Although lynching became widespread in the American South shortly after the end of the Civil War, the period beginning around 1880 and stretching into the 1920s and 1930s is generally known as the Lynching Era.² It was during this time and place that lynching claimed the majority of its victims, and became a central mechanism of enforcement of the racial caste system in the American South. We know much about lynching from the study of the South during this era, with explanations focusing on ethnic competition and threat (e.g., Beck and Tolnay 1990; Tolnay, Deane, and Beck 1996), as well as the religious and political environment (e.g., Bailey and Snedker 2011; Hagen, Makovi, and Bearman 2013; Smångs 2016). These studies have shown that, while race relations were somewhat malleable according to local conditions in the South, few areas of the South remained untouched by lynching, either directly or through exposure

to lynching in nearby areas (Tolnay, Deane, and Beck 1996).

A few scholars have used lynching in the U.S. South to discuss the racialization of European immigrants. In the most prominent historical treatment, Nevels (2007) argued that the lynching of black men in Brazos County, Texas, helped European immigrants to claim whiteness in the county. However, Nevels's analysis includes only three lynchings, none of which were perpetrated by immigrants. Nevels's best evidence lies in the fact that a black man who had been charged with raping an Italian woman in Brazos County was not lynched, suggesting that the Italians were not seen as white. However, the historical record also contains many instances of black men accused of the rape of white women escaping lynching, even if many did not.³ As Benton-Cohen (2009) pointed out, Nevels's conclusions "must remain highly speculative" (p. 108).

Others have looked to the lynching of Italian immigrants in the South for evidence that Italians were excluded from the protections of whiteness. Webb shows that the lynching of Italian immigrants often resulted from economic threat, or was precipitated by charges of murder, but rarely charges of rape (Webb 2002). Drawing on a comprehensive inventory of Italian lynchings, Luconi argued that the lynching of Italians in the South was generally precipitated by political and economic conflicts between Italians and native whites, and that African Americans were sometimes lynched in the South following accusations of raping Italian women and small transgressions against Italian men. Luconi (2013) concluded that the history of lynching of Italians in the U.S. South suggests that Italians were perceived as less racially "other" than scholars "have usually acknowledged" (p. 137).

The American South, however, may not be the most rigorous test of whether European immigrants were generally afforded the protections of whiteness, because the black/white color line in the American South was highly institutionalized, and the abolition of chattel slavery in the South was relatively recent. In other words, the South was the place where the racial order was most thoroughly institutionalized

around a black/nonblack color line where being on the nonblack side of that line had for centuries protected one from slavery. Fox and Guglielmo (2012) argued that the unique force of the black/white color line in the South derived from the wide array of legal and customary practices by which blacks were segregated from whites and excluded from institutions of political and economic power. Thus, the South was perhaps where European immigrants would be *least* likely to be excluded from the protections of whiteness, as these protections were the most well-defined, and focused on the presence or absence of African ancestry (Davis 2001).

Lynching in the Midwest 1883–1941

We argue that the Midwest during the Lynching Era provides insight into whether European immigrants were generally afforded the informal protections of whiteness. If there was a region where European immigrants were treated as nonwhite, and were not afforded the full protections that native-born whites enjoyed, we expect that the Midwest would be that region. Our reasoning here is based on four demographic and historical factors. The Midwest during this period was a place where: (1) rates of lynching were high enough that many were at risk of lynching, (2) there was recent or ongoing growth in both the black and European populations, (3) anti-immigrant hostility was high among native whites, and (4) the black/white color line was not as institutionalized as in other places with appreciable black populations. We discuss these factors below.

The Midwest witnessed dramatically fewer lynchings during the Lynching Era than did the South, and, for this reason, most studies focus exclusively on the South (Pfeifer 2013), where sociologists have been studying lynching for more than a century (Cutler [1905] 1969; Raper 1933). However, the Midwest did witness its share of lynchings, due in part to the fact that unlike the Northeast, the state and statist politics were not sufficiently developed and legitimated to stop lynchings from occurring altogether (Pfeifer 2013). Unlike the "Wild West," however, government in the Midwest

was not so weak as to be unable to stop lynchings when it so desired. Thus, lynchings in the Midwest, like in the South, generally represented the kinds of murder that the state chose not to bring to court, or where juries refused to convict perpetrators. As in the South, we argue, a key factor was whether the victim was afforded the protections of whiteness.

The Lynching Era also encompassed significant immigration and settlement of European migrants to the Midwest. From 1880 to 1910, roughly 1 million German and 1.5 million Scandinavian immigrants settled in the Midwest. Although immigration from other Southern and Eastern European countries remained low, the Irish-born population in our seven Midwestern states peaked at 377,334 in 1880, with the Italian-born population reaching a high of 254,739 in 1930. In reaction to this influx of linguistically and culturally dissimilar migrants, many native whites adopted exclusionary attitudes. One result of these anti-immigrant attitudes was the Prohibition movement, which in the Midwest was organized around anti-immigrant sentiment (Andrews and Seguin 2015; Gusfield 1986), while in the South, the movement was focused on antiblack racism and religious appeals (Blocker 1989; Lewis 2009). The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, was also powerful in the Midwest, and was a strongly nativist group, stressing “one hundred percent Americanism” and anti-Catholicism (Pegram 2011). The Klan was particularly strong in Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio (McVeigh 2009:15–17). The Indiana Klan at one time proposed to drop dynamite on a chapel at the University of Notre Dame from a hot-air balloon (Lantzer 2009:129). The strength of the 1920s Klan in the Midwest and elsewhere had to do with cultural threats brought on largely by European immigrants (McVeigh 2009).

Suspicious concerning the political allegiances of the foreign-born were heightened by labor unrest and a few highly publicized acts of violence, many of which occurred in the Midwest (Higham 1955). The Haymarket Affair of 1886 in Chicago, for example, in which eight police officers dispersing a meeting of anarchists were killed, and 59 others

injured when a bomb explosion was followed by gunfire, contributed to widespread anxiety about the moral and ideological threat posed by foreign nationals (Avrich 1984). These suspicions were amplified by the 1901 assassination of President McKinley by Leon Czolgosz, a Midwestern anarchist of Hungarian ancestry. McKinley’s death ultimately led to the passage of the Anarchist Exclusion Act of 1903, the first bill to permit the ideological exclusion of “unassimilable” foreigners (Kanström 2007).

While anti-immigrant politics were well-developed in the Midwest, the Great Migration also brought blacks to the Midwest in appreciable numbers for the first time. Between 1910 and 1930, roughly 1.6 million blacks left the South for cities in the North and Midwest in the Great Migration, dramatically reshaping the racial landscape of the cities and towns in which they settled. These migrants possessed relatively high levels of human capital (e.g., literacy, skills, education) compared with those blacks that stayed in the South (Katznelson 2005; Tolnay 2003). This migration was met with hostility from native-born whites as well as European immigrants (Massey and Denton 1993). But compared with the South, the recency of the Midwest experience with sizable black populations suggests that the black/white color line had far less time to become institutionalized. Under these more ambiguous conditions, it might be more likely for Europeans to be excluded from the protections of whiteness enjoyed by native-born whites.

Hypotheses

Our lynching data allow us to test two main sets of hypotheses with respect to the racial position of European immigrants. Our first and primary set of hypotheses concerns whether European immigrants enjoyed the informal protections of whiteness against lynching. A second set of hypotheses concerns whether there is evidence that European immigrants were subject to lynching as a result of the nativism of the period. To assess the racial position of Europeans in a racial order organized primarily by the black/white color line,

our hypothesis testing makes use of comparisons between black, native-born white, and European immigrant lynching victims.

Whiteness Hypotheses

Our first hypotheses concern the rates at which native-born whites, blacks, and European immigrants were lynched. First, we compare racial group differences in lynching rates between the South and the Midwest to assess whether regional differences in the institutionalization of the black/white color line translate to differences in lynching practice. We test this by comparing black/white population level risk of being subjected with lynching across region.

Hypothesis W.1: Differences in black/white rates of lynching were greater for the South than for the Midwest.

Our central hypotheses about lynching and whiteness concern whether European immigrants were granted the informal protections of whiteness against lynching. If, during our period, the protections of whiteness were reserved for native-born whites, and withheld from European immigrants, then Europeans may have been lynched at a rate closer to that of blacks, or in between the rates of blacks and native-born whites. However, we hypothesize that European immigrants were commonly treated as white and granted the formal and informal protections of whiteness. Thus, we expect that European immigrants were lynched at rates similar to those of native-born whites, and at rates lower than those of blacks.

Hypothesis W.2: For European immigrants in the Midwest during our period, the population-level lynching risk was significantly lower than that of blacks and did not differ significantly from that of native-born whites.

Our next hypotheses concern the supposed “offenses” for which victims were lynched, by race. Race is popularly understood in the United States to be based upon phenotype and ancestry, and commonly misperceived or

intentionally constructed as “natural” (Omi and Winant 2014). For instance, racial boundaries between blacks and whites were constructed by policing reproductive practices, and group position was maintained through hypo-descent, the practice of assigning offspring the racial identity of the ancestor with the subordinated identity—the “one drop rule” (Davis 2001). Because racial taxonomies are understood to be biological in folk theories of race, race prejudice, and anxieties about group position have often been organized around concerns of “purity” and “pollution” (Douglas 1966; Wimmer 2013).

Lynching of blacks tended to occur as a reaction to perceived racial threat, or challenges to racial boundaries (Brundage 1993; Corzine, Creech, and Corzine 1983; Tolnay and Beck 1995). Anxiety over challenges to white supremacy was often articulated as specific concerns about the threat of miscegenation and the supposed sexual threat black men posed to white women (Hall 1993; Wells-Barnett 1892). Given the supposed racial inferiority of large numbers of European immigrants to the United States during our period, it is possible that native-born whites were concerned about miscegenation with new European immigrants. However, if as we expect, European immigrants enjoyed the informal protections of whiteness, the rate at which the lynchings of European immigrants were justified by citing allegations of sexual assault or miscegenation should be lower than the rate for black victims and should not differ significantly from the rate at which native-born whites were lynched for alleged sex crimes. Thus, expanding upon the findings of Bailey and Tolnay (2015:190–93), we expect,

Hypothesis W.3: For European immigrants in the Midwest during our period, the risk of being lynched for allegations of rape was significantly lower than that of blacks and did not differ significantly from that of native-born whites.

Our next hypothesis concerns how lynching ritual and spectacle varies depending on whether victims were afforded the protections

of whiteness. We begin by outlining our expectations regarding the lynching of black victims. Scholarship on lynching in the American South has shown that lynchings varied considerably in their ritualistic elements and audience. What Brundage (1993:19–20) called private and terrorist mobs were made up of between three and 50 people, and lynched their victims with minimal ritual or publicity. Brundage (1993:36) found that ritual was far more prevalent and significant in larger “mass” mobs of 50 or more people. Following Brundage, Smångs (2016) classified mobs composed of greater than 50 people as “public” lynchings, as well as those lynchings in which other aspects of public ritual were present (pp. 20–21). In the South, mobs that lynched blacks, as opposed to whites, were much more likely to be public than private (Smångs 2016:29–30). Drawing from these studies of lynching in the South, we form a hypothesis about a more stringent class of public lynching, the spectacle lynching. We define spectacle lynchings as those lynchings that involved a mob of at least 500 people and/or those in which the victim was burned.⁴ Both quantitative and qualitative study of these kinds of lynchings suggest that they carried a stronger racial meaning, and were central to the support of white supremacy in the South (Brundage 1993; Garland 2005; Smångs 2016; Wood 2009), but also in the handful of cases analyzed outside the South (Downey 2013; Downey and Hyser 2011; Madison 2001). Scholars have also argued that burning victims was a central “purity” ritual enacted against black victims (Harris 1984; Patterson 1998; Wood 2009), hence,

Hypothesis W.4: European immigrants will be lynched in spectacle lynchings at a similar rate to native whites, and at a lower rate than blacks.

Nativism Hypotheses

Apart from the protections of whiteness, or considerations of racial hierarchy, was the subjection of European immigrants to collective violence influenced by concerns over their foreignness or about their being unassimilable?

During our period, a number of nativist threads coalesced into periods of hysteria over new European immigrants, and their perceived threat to American culture, and politics (Kanstroom 2007; Schrag 2010). Immigrants can be seen as threatening shared national values, political culture, or the status of natives (e.g., Andrews and Seguin 2015; Higham 1955; McVeigh 2009). They may also be perceived as potentially disloyal when there is an interstate conflict with their country of origin or ancestry, as were German Americans during World War I (Kennedy 2004), or Japanese Americans during World War II (Robinson 2010).

Race and nation are linked of course, but here we assess whether European immigrants in the Midwest were subject to lynching as a result of nativism, rather than racism. We hypothesize that,

Hypothesis N.1: The rate of lynching of European immigrants is higher during the World War I years: 1914–1918.

Hypothesis N.2: The rate of lynching of European immigrants for perceived threats to the political order is higher than those of native whites or blacks.

Data

Assembling the Lynching Inventory

We gathered data on lynching events from seven Midwestern states (Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin) from 1883 to 1941. We chose these specific states for three reasons. First, we wanted to analyze states without direct and recent experience with slavery—as in states to the south such as Missouri, Kentucky, and West Virginia. Second, we wanted to analyze states without a strong frontier influence, such as the states to the west, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, which did not have a strong state monopoly on violence. Third, we do not include states in the Northeast, such as Pennsylvania and New York, that did not experience many lynchings, owing largely to a stronger state criminal justice apparatus and

tradition (Pfeifer 2011). We chose this period because it spans the Lynching Era.

To gather these data, we followed other lynching scholars beginning with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and *Chicago Tribune's* contemporaneous lynching inventories. The *Chicago Tribune*, beginning in 1882, published yearly summaries of the year's lynching victims including names (when possible), the date, the victim's race, and the location of the lynching. The NAACP later began to assemble their lynching inventory, strongly influenced by the *Chicago Tribune's* inventory. These inventories relied on contemporaneous accounts in other papers and are known to have numerous false positives—that is, they identify lynchings that did not actually happen (Tolnay and Beck 1995). Thus, following other scholars, we validated the lynchings in these inventories through local newspaper accounts. We used a number of electronic, fully searchable, newspaper archives.⁵ If we could not find a paper within the same state reporting the lynching, we considered it “unconfirmed.” In most cases, when we were not able to confirm a lynching, we were able to see how the erroneous lynching event made it into the original lynching inventories. For instance, both the NAACP and the *Chicago Tribune* list a lynching victim “unknown negro” lynched on April 1, 1892, in Millersburgh, Ohio. The *Marysville County Union Journal*, had reported a lynching occurring on April 1 in Millersburgh of the “hardest looking man” that the county had ever seen. Two weeks later, on April 14, it was explained by the *Mansfield Weekly News* that the original lynching report was an April fool's joke spurred by the “lynching” of an iron effigy, and that a Columbus correspondent had “bit” on the ruse and published a “lynching yarn.”

Having verified these original lynching inventories, we then compared our data with an independently gathered inventory of lynching events in the Midwest from historian Michael Pfeifer (Pfeifer 2013). Pfeifer did not rely on the original NAACP and *Chicago Tribune* inventories; nevertheless, our inventories show substantial overlap during our period

(1883–1941): of the 126 confirmed lynching events in our inventory, 100 (79 percent) were also in Pfeifer's inventory. The most serious point of disagreement between our original inventory and Pfeifer's is that he has identified a number of lynchings in Iowa during 1883 from a dissertation source (Black 1912), which we subsequently verified with local papers on our own, and added to our inventory. We also found lynchings in Pfeifer's data with which we disagree, and believe local sources suggest that they did not occur or were not properly classified as lynchings. For example, Frank and John Anderson are listed in Pfeifer's index as having been lynched in Iowa in June of 1883. However, our review of local newspaper reports uncovered that these men were reportedly shot by a single individual, and, thus, do not meet the criteria for classification as a lynching. These minor differences aside, we reiterate that our original efforts yielded substantially similar inventories to those of Pfeifer's. In our final data reported in this article, we use the original lynchings we confirmed from the NAACP, *Chicago Tribune*, and Pfeifer inventories.

Direct comparison to other lynching inventories is impossible because we analyze different regions. However, there are a few reasons to suspect that our data are at least as accurate as other inventories. First, we have had the advantage of using many recently digitized local newspapers. Second, the Midwest region had a more highly developed press during this period than did the South (Starr 2005:145). Third, because lynchings were far less common in the Midwest than they were in the South, it is likely that they were considered more newsworthy (see, for example, Gorman and Seguin 2015; Oliver and Myers 1999); indeed, many articles discuss the novelty inherent in so-called “northern lynchings.” Fourth, the *Chicago Tribune* is far closer to these states than it is to other southern states, and given the *Tribune's* importance to lynching studies—both as its own inventory and due to its influence upon the NAACP's subsequent inventory—proximity to the *Chicago Tribune* likely makes our data more accurate (on the relationship between proximity and accuracy

Table 1. Lynching in the Midwest 1883–1941 by Race and Nativity.

State	European immigrant	Native-born white	Black	Native American	Total
Illinois	3 11.54%	9 34.62%	14 53.85%	0 0.0%	26 100.00%
Indiana	1 2.44%	28 68.29%	12 29.27%	0 0.0%	41 100.00%
Michigan	1 11.11%	7 77.78%	1 11.11%	0 0.0%	9 100.00%
Ohio	0 0.0%	7 38.89%	11 61.11%	0 0.0%	18 100.00%
Wisconsin	1 20.00%	4 80.00%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	5 100.00%
Iowa	0 0.0%	18 94.74%	0 0.0%	1 5.26%	19 100.00%
Minnesota	1 12.50%	3 37.50%	3 37.50%	1 10.00%	8 100.00%
Total	7 5.26%	76 60.9%	41 32.33%	2 1.5%	126 100.00%

of event reporting, see, for example, Myers and Caniglia 2004).

We coded information about the alleged offenses of lynching victims from our local newspaper reports. These alleged offenses generally appear in media reports because many victims had been legally detained for some offense before being lynched, or because mobs would make claims about the victims' "crimes" as a way to justify their lynching.

Descriptive Results

We confirmed 126 lynchings, of which 41 victims were black, 76 victims were native-born whites, two were Native American, and seven were European immigrants. All save one of the lynching victims in our data were male. Lynching of women was rare, but not unheard of, in other areas of the country (see Segrave 2010). Table 1 below shows counts of lynching victims by state, race, and nativity. Figure 1 shows the more detailed county-level geography of lynching over the period.

Figure 2 presents the uneven temporal decline in lynching by race of the victim, as a plot of five-year moving average event counts.

This figure shows that yearly counts of lynchings of black victims remain relatively stable throughout our period, when compared with the significant decline in yearly lynchings of non-black victims and that, although the majority of lynching victims in our study were native-born whites, blacks were lynched at dramatically higher rates. While early in the period, there seem to have been a number of frontier-style lynchings of whites with relatively few black victims, later in the period (roughly post-1910), which encompasses the Great Migration, there were 10 black victims, three native-born white victims, and four European-born victims—two of whom were purportedly lynched over nativist concerns, and one for vagrancy.

Hypotheses and Results

We restate our original hypotheses below, and discuss their support in our data. We use simple bivariate *t*-tests, alongside descriptive statistics, to test differences in lynching rates. As we believe that we have the nearly universe of events during this period, comparisons of lynching rates allows us to leverage the several years during which no lynchings occurred, and to test whether there

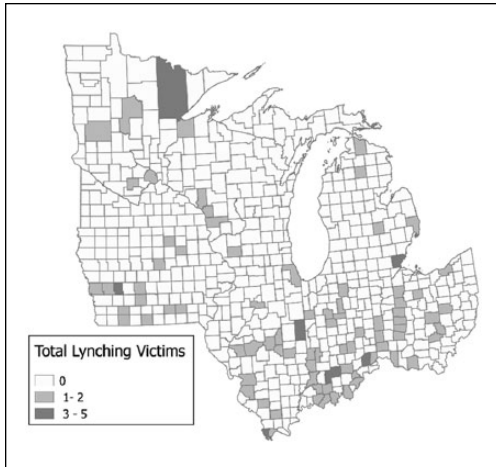


Figure 1. The geography of lynching in the Midwest 1883–1941.

were significant differences in rates of subjection to lynching by race and nativity.

Whiteness Hypotheses

Hypothesis W.1: Differences in black/white rates of lynching were greater for the South than for the Midwest.

We find mixed support for hypothesis W.1. While the *absolute* gap between black and white lynching rates was higher in the South than in the Midwest, the *relative* gap is much greater in the Midwest. Using Census data, we measured the native-born white, European immigrant, and black population in both the South and Midwest to calculate lynching risk rates across groups. These rates use averages of the decennial population to calculate incidences of lynching per million persons. Because the Tolnay-Beck lynching data for the South is not coded for nativity, we were forced to collapse the native-born white and European categories for comparison.⁶ We constructed a regional measure of the disproportionality of black lynching rates by dividing the black lynching rate by the population lynching rates for blacks, native-born whites, and European immigrants.⁷ We find that the lynching rate for blacks in the South was 2.77 times as high as

the total population lynching rate for the South. However, the lynching rate for blacks in the Midwest was 16.26 times as high as the overall rate for the Midwest, and the difference between regions is statistically significant ($p < .001$). Thus, despite differences in the institutionalization of the black/white color line across regions, proportionally, the black/white difference in rates of subjection to lynching was larger in the Midwest than in the South. Figure 3 presents a regional comparison of group lynching rates.

Hypothesis W.2: For European immigrants in the Midwest during our period, the population-level lynching risk was significantly lower than that of blacks and did not differ significantly from that of native-born whites.

Our comparison of lynching rates across groups provides strong support for hypothesis W.2. The lynching rate for blacks in the Midwest over our period was 97.86 per million. The lynching rate for Europeans in the Midwest was dramatically lower than the rate for blacks at 2.76 ($p < .001$). In addition, the lynching rate for Europeans is lower than the lynching rate of 4.11 for native-born whites in the Midwest, although this difference was not statistically significant. Thus, blacks in the Midwest were subjected to lynching far more frequently than were both native-born whites or new European immigrants, and the rates of subjection to lynching for native-born whites, and Europeans were statistically indistinguishable.⁸ Had European immigrants been lynched at rates equal to that of blacks, we would have observed roughly 250 such lynchings, rather than the seven that actually occurred. Our next hypothesis concerns the alleged offenses of lynching victims.

Hypothesis W.3: For European immigrants in the Midwest during our period, the risk of being lynched for accusations of rape was significantly lower than that of blacks and did not differ significantly from that of native-born whites.

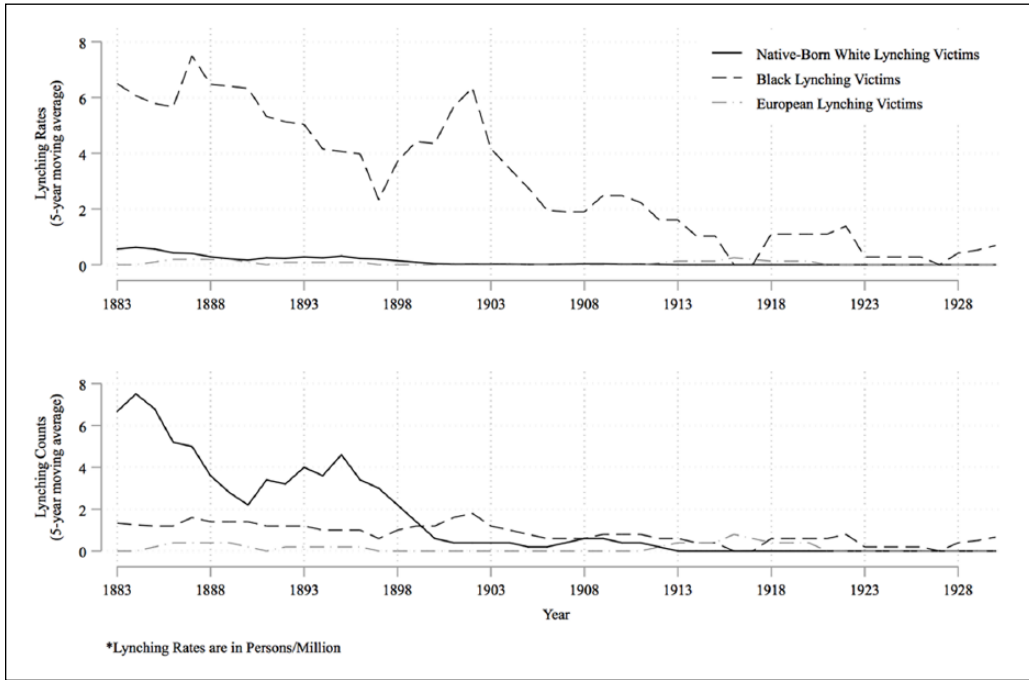


Figure 2. Lynching victims over time, rates, and counts.

In support of hypothesis W.3, blacks were lynched for supposed sexual assault at much higher rates than were members of any other group in our sample (see Figure 4). Over our period, the rate at which blacks in the Midwest were subject to lynching for alleged crimes of a sexual nature was 47.74 per million, compared with rates of 0.68 for native-born whites, and 0.79 for European immigrants ($p < .001$ for both comparisons). Furthermore, we find no statistically significant difference between the rate for native-born whites, and the rate at which European immigrants were subjected to lynching for alleged sex crimes. This lends support to the idea that blacks were seen as threatening in a way consistent with racist tropes of black masculinity and sexuality, while European immigrants were not. Figure 4 also shows that the relative frequency of the types of alleged offenses of lynching victims varied considerably by their race and nativity. See Table 2 below for details on how specific offenses were coded. Our next set of analyses

concerns the rituals and characteristics of lynchings in the Midwest.

Hypothesis W.4: European immigrants will be lynched in spectacle lynchings at similar rates to native whites, and at lower rates than blacks.

We find support for hypothesis W.4. Although mobs of 50 or less committed the majority of lynchings in our sample, 29 of the victims in our sample, 17 of which were black, were reported to have been lynched by mobs numbering 500 or more (see Table 3 below). We find evidence that the types of ritual violence inflicted upon lynching victims varied by race; notably, only black victims' bodies were burned (five victims). The rate at which black victims were subject to spectacle lynching was 38.19 per million. This is significantly higher than the rate at which either native-born whites or European victims were subject to torture and desecration at the hands of massive crowds, at 0.68

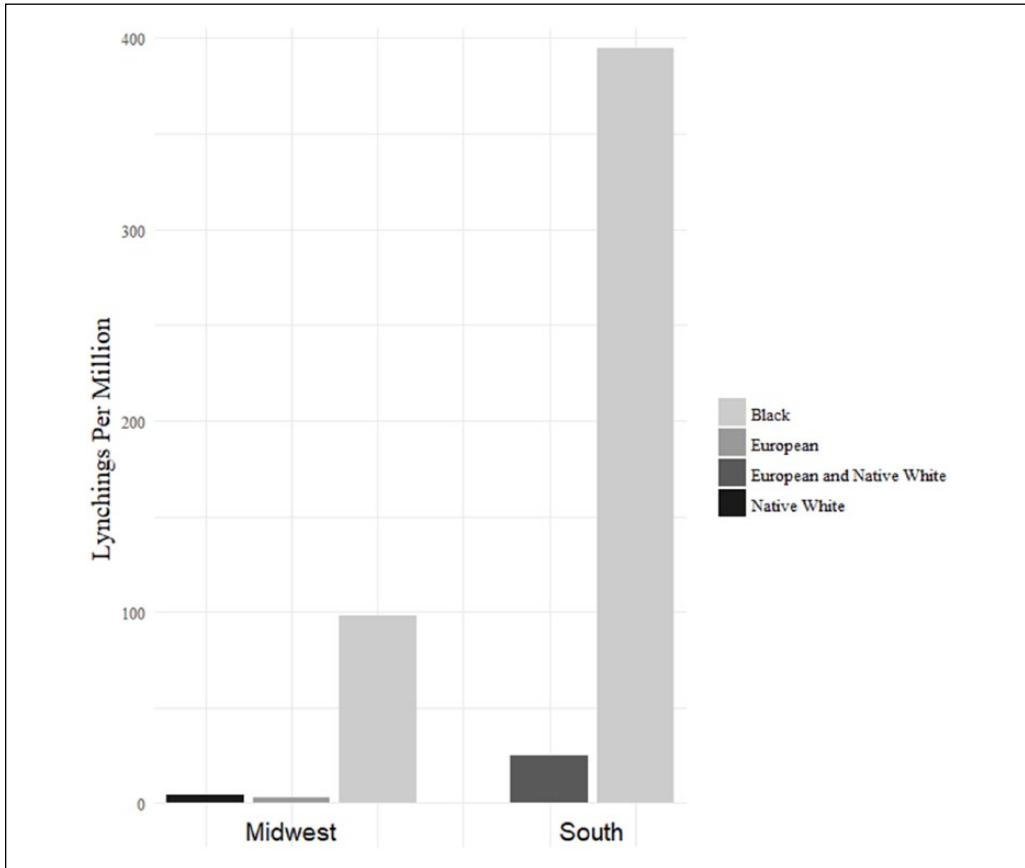


Figure 3. Lynching risk, by race and nativity.

and 0.039 ($p < .01$ and $p < .001$, respectively).⁹ In addition, there is no statistically significant difference between rates of subjection to spectacle lynchings for native-born whites and European victims. Indeed, only one European-born victim died in a spectacle lynching,¹⁰ and none were burned.

Nativism Hypotheses

Hypothesis N.1: Rates of lynching of European immigrants are higher during the World War I years: 1914–1918.

With respect to hypothesis N.1, not only were Europeans subject to lynching at higher rates throughout the years of World War I, the only lynchings recorded in our inventory

during these five years were of European victims. The average annual lynching rate for Europeans increased to 0.214 during the years of World War I, from an average annual rate of 0.034 during the rest of our period ($p < .001$).¹¹ The heightened incidence of the lynching of Europeans during these years, and the specific details of these lynchings, suggest that the lynching of Europeans in the Midwest may have been motivated by nativism during World War I. We find four lynchings of European victims during the World War I years. Further supporting our interpretation that these lynchings were motivated by nativism, the 1918 lynching of Robert Prager was attended by explicitly nativist ritual. Prager—alleged to have committed a “disloyal utterance”—was paraded through the

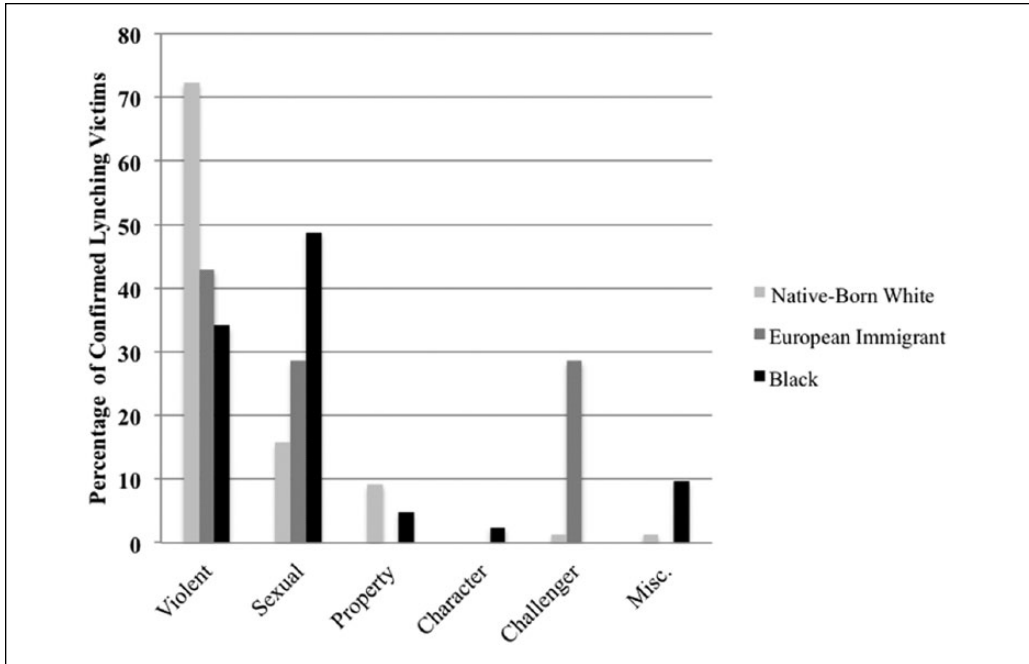


Figure 4. Alleged threats of lynching victims, by race and nativity.

Note. The figure displays differences in the proportion lynched by the category of alleged offense of the victim, and their race/nativity. Native-born whites are disproportionately lynched for offenses such as murder, black victims are disproportionately lynched for alleged offenses such as rape, while European immigrants are disproportionately lynched over threats to the nation, such as alleged disloyalty during times of war. While European immigrants appear to be lynched disproportionately for rape relative to whites, the difference is not statistically significant.

Table 2. Categorization of Offenses.

Violent	Sexual	Property	Character	Challenger	Miscellaneous
Assaulting girl	Murder and rape	Burglary	Being quarrelsome	Alleged disloyal utterance	Making threats
Attempted murder	Rape	Larceny		Being antiwar	Race riot
Dispute with miners	Rape and incest	Robbery		Refusal to join Black Legion	
Murder	Sexual assault	Forgery			
Murderous assault	Assaulting young girl				
Wife beating					
Wife murder					
Assault					
Fighting					

Note. Table 2 displays alleged offense of lynching victims categorized by class of offense. This categorization of offenses is borrowed from Bailey and Tolnay (2015:192).

streets of Collinsville, Illinois, purportedly forced to kiss the American flag, then hanged. Consistent with the “anti-radicalism” that

Higham (1955) argued was a significant component of the nativism of the time, two other Europeans were lynched during these

Table 3. Spectacle Lynchings in the Midwest (1883–1941).

Year	State	Victim name	Race and nativity	Mob size	Alleged offense	Lynching method
1908	IL	Scott Burton	Black	“Hundreds”	Race riot	Hanged then burned
1886	OH	William Mussell	Native-born white	500	Murder	Hanged
1883	MI	Tillot Warner	Native-born white	500	Rape	Hanged
1888	IL	William Moore	Black	500	Rape	Hanged
1891	IN	Charles Hawkins	Native-born white	500	Murder	Hanged then shot
1900	IN	Thomas Henderson	Black	500	Murder	Hanged then shot
1900	IN	Bud Rowland	Black	500	Murder	Hanged then shot
1903	IL	J. D. Mayfield	Black	600	Murder	Burned
1884	OH	Dick Hickey	Native-born white	900	Murder	Hanged
1888	WI	Andrew Grandstaff	Native-born white	1,000	1,000	Hanged
1908	IL	William Donnigan	Black	1,000	Race riot	Hanged
1883	IA	William Barber	Native-born white	1,000	Murder	Hanged
1883	IA	Isaac Barber	Native-born white	1,000	Murder	Hanged
1887	IN	John Christianson	Danish or Norwegian	1,000	Murder	Hanged
1892	OH	Joseph Lytle	Native-born white	1,000	Wife-murder	Hanged
1882	OH	Frank Fisher	Black	2,000	Rape	Hanged
1884	WI	Nathaniel Mitchell	Native-born white	2,000	Murder	Hanged
1896	MN	Dorman Musgrove	Native-born white	2,000	Murder	Hanged
1897	OH	Click Mitchell	Black	2,000	Assault	Hanged and tortured
1894	OH	Seymour Newland	Black	2,000	Rape	Hanged
1901	IN	George Ward	Black	2,000	Murder	Beaten then burned
1910	OH	Carl Etherington	Native-born white	2,500	Murder	Hanged
1920	MN	McGhie	Black	5,000	Rape	Hanged
1930	IN	Thomas Shipp	Black	5,000	Murder, and rape	Hanged
1920	MN	Elias Clayton	Black	5,000	Rape	Hanged
1930	IN	Abraham Smith	Black	5,000	Murder, and rape	Hanged
1920	MN	Elmer Jackson	Black	5,000	Rape	Hanged
1909	IL	Henry Salzner	Native-born white	10,000	Murder	Hanged
1909	IL	William James	Black	10,000	Murder	Burned
1903	IL	David Wyatt	Black	10,000	Attempted murder	Hanged then burned

Note. Victims burned after death highlighted in gray. Cases are sorted by mob size.

years, one for connection with a labor dispute, and another for being antiwar.

Hypothesis N.2: The alleged offenses of European immigrant lynching victims are disproportionately perceived to be threats to the political order.

In support of hypothesis N.2, no black victims were alleged to have committed crimes that we categorize as challenging the political order. In contrast the rate at which Europeans

were lynched for alleged challenges to the political order was 0.79. However, as the rates for most years for this class of crime are 0, this comparison is merely suggestive, and is not statistically significant in a two-tailed test ($p = .089$).¹² Figure 4 shows that European immigrant victims were more often lynched over nativist concerns, because their loyalty to the United States was questioned, or for supposed anarchist or communist leanings. In Figure 4, we categorize these acts as “challenger” offenses, following Bailey and Tolnay (2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we used new data on lynching in the Midwest to ask an old question: was European immigrants' position in the American racial hierarchy closer to that of native whites, or to native blacks? That is, on what side of the color line did European immigrants fall? Although much work has shown that European immigrants were generally not excluded from the legal and institutional protections of whiteness (e.g. Fox and Guglielmo 2012; Haney López 1996), we show that they also enjoyed the protections of whiteness with respect to the extralegal and extra-institutional violence of lynching. European immigrants were lynched at similar rates to native whites, far less often than blacks, and generally without the ritual spectacle that black victims often suffered.

Given the distinction made between color and race in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is possible that European immigrants, particularly those from Southern and Eastern Europe, were considered by many native whites to be racially inferior, even if they were also considered and treated as though white (Guglielmo 2003). Our data do not allow us to test these more subtle distinctions, and we must leave tests of more subtle racialization for future research. There is, however, some limited evidence in our data that European immigrants were subjected to lynching violence as a result of nativism—particularly during the World War I era. Given the fact that only seven European immigrants were lynched over this period, itself powerful evidence that Europeans enjoyed the protections of whiteness, we do not have a sufficiently large sample of European immigrant lynchings to say for certain.

Our findings also hold when looking at the subjection to lynching of Southern and Eastern European immigrants. The only Southern Europeans that were lynched were Italians, and their lynching rate was much lower than the rate for blacks. We do *not* argue that European immigrants, particularly those from Southern and Eastern Europe were not discriminated against in a variety of ways on the basis of what was contemporaneously

termed “race,” rather, we argue that this discrimination was qualitatively different in nature to the practices by which whites, often violently, separated themselves from blacks. This becomes especially evident in light of the fact that the practices by which large numbers of blacks have been excluded from venues facilitating the acquisition of opportunity, wealth, and status have been remarkably adaptable and persistent. In contrast, the practices by which European immigrants were barred from advantages associated with whiteness, such as employment, homeownership, union participation, associational membership, and protections against lynching, were not widely practiced, let alone institutionalized in ways that continue to impact the racial order of today.

We found also that lynching reflects a powerful black/white color line in the Midwest as much as it did in the South. Although the Midwest had lower absolute rates of lynching than the South, blacks in the Midwest were in far greater danger of being lynched than were whites in the South. Moreover, relative gaps in the lynching rates between blacks and whites were much higher in the Midwest than in the South. Thus, on a historical note, lynching may have been different in *degree* between the Midwest and South, but it was not all that different in *kind*—in both places, its practice primarily reflected a powerful black/white color line.

If European immigrants had been denied the protections of whiteness as some research has suggested (Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 2006), and the boundaries of whiteness had later expanded to include them, we might expect that these boundaries will expand to include other groups in the future. Our research suggests, however, that the white/nonwhite color line was not blurry in this respect, and European immigrants were clearly on the white side of that line. Thus, this article joins a growing body of evidence demonstrating the durability of the white/black color line, and the categorization of European immigrants as white on arrival to the United States (Fox and Guglielmo 2012; Guglielmo 2003).

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Notes

1. Fox and Guglielmo use restrictive housing covenants to analyze the informal exclusion of Mexicans. Massey and Denton (1993) show that European immigrants were somewhat residentially segregated, but never on the scale of blacks. To some extent, racialized language, as discussed by Roediger in the case of Europeans, is recorded in newspapers; however, newspapers generally use more formal language, and are likely not a systematic representation of less formal language use.
2. That Reconstruction is generally not included as part of the Lynching Era appears to be an artifact of when systematic data on lynching began to be collected by the *Chicago Tribune* in 1882. There is some substantive justification for not including Reconstruction in that the character of racial violence was different: Reconstruction era violence was often more overtly political repression, and also directed at white Republicans ("scalawags"; see Foner 1990).
3. Consider, for example, the many black men legally executed for the charge of rape.
4. Victims were sometimes burned alive, and other times posthumously.
5. We used the following Web sites to find local papers: newspapers.com, newspaperarchives.com, chroniclingamerica.loc.gov, and Proquest's *Historical Newspapers*: <http://www.proquest.com/products-services/pq-hist-news.html>.

6. We attempted to estimate the European lynching rate from the Bailey-Tolnay (2015) inventory, but it was not clear to us how nativity might have affected inclusion into the inventory, and not clear how the missing years in the inventory might also affect risk estimates.
7. It was not possible to simply look at the ratio of black to white lynchings because many years contained no white lynchings, and, thus, the ratio in those years would be undefined as a result of dividing by zero.
8. This is not an artifact of pooling all European groups together. Groups such as Irish and Italians, who have been argued to be particularly racialized, had victim rates of zero, and roughly 17 per million, respectively.
9. This is also true if we only compare the absolute number of spectacle lynchings without correcting for population size.
10. The lynching of German immigrant Robert Prager may have also qualified. However, the exception here illustrates the rule in that Prager was lynched for alleged national disloyalty and the lynching itself featured nationalist elements such as forcing Prager to kiss the flag. Thus, the spectacle of Prager's lynching incorporated nationalistic, as opposed to racial, imagery.
11. To check the robustness of this finding, we compared the lynching rate for World War I years with the annual rates for the period prior to World War I. In this test, the non-World War I rate was not biased downward by the long decline in lynching counts and rates later in the twentieth century, and results were similar.
12. This would be significant if we employed a one-tailed test, which might be justified as we do have a directional hypothesis; however, we use only two-tailed tests throughout.

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