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Chapter 2

“Let Each Reader Judge”: Lynching, Race, and Immigrant Newspapers

In June 1903, newspaper readers throughout the country learned of a particularly brutal outbreak of lynch law. “Negro Lynched—People’s awful justice condemns criminal,” proclaimed the headline of the torture of George White in Wilmington, Delaware. Subheads focused not on the actions of the mob, but rather that the “Negro robbed and murdered the daughter of Evangelical minister E. A. Bishop,” a crime for which he “was summarily burned alive.”

The writer began his story not with the violence of the mob that seized White from his jail cell, but rather with a lengthy description of the black man’s “awful crime.” “Horrible was that crime to which he alone confessed in the following words: ‘My boss Woodward sent me to the field and when I went there, I saw the pastor’s daughter. I sneaked up on her and grabbed her by the neck and demanded all her money.’ The girl gave him all she had, 60 cents. Then she begged God for mercy, that he wouldn’t hurt her. He made sure she couldn’t cry out, and choked her to suppress her screams, choked her until she lost consciousness.” The account neglected to mention this “confession” was delivered while White had a noose around his neck and was threatened with being burned alive. “He would not have been lynched if he had been a white man,” the reporter admitted. “It was said, though, that he was a beast in human form and in an instant he was handed over to the authority of the lynch mob.”

The article went on to detail the process by which more than 300 men broke into the jail and delivered White to mob justice, with “the terrible theater as the crowd of people emptied their revolvers into him.” After detailing White’s cries for mercy, the writer noted, “At the end of this horrible justice everyone made sure to cut off a piece of his body to take for themselves as a souvenir!” After the lynching, “The people partied in the morning and the peace of the grave reigned over the whole countryside. The people bloodily avenged the death of a poor girl!”¹

By 1903 such lynchings were a common occurrence not just in the South, but even in states with significant urban, industrial centers such as Delaware, Minnesota, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Nor was the macabre, detailed coverage of the torture and mutilation of George White atypical, for many newspaper articles

went into elaborate descriptions of the burning alive of human victims or their vivisection by souvenir hunters. Lynchings indeed served as “theaters” in which white supremacy was reasserted—in one well-publicized 1911 case in Livermore, Kentucky, literally staged as theater.² The wide dissemination of such stories via newspapers broadened the white public’s policing of the nation’s racial boundaries beyond those who actually took part in and witnessed these lynchings.³ Moreover, as in the account of White’s lynching, the assumption of authority by whites to judge and execute sentence against offending blacks was often portrayed as a restoration, not a disruption of “the peace of the grave” that should reign over a white-dominated countryside. In its excruciating detail of White’s crime, his torture, and the tropes of white citizens acting to restore racialized justice, this account was quite prosaic.

As Leon Litwack, Grace Elizabeth Hale, and others have noted, more than five thousand such lynchings were recorded between 1890 and 1930, with many broadly publicized via newspapers and, later, radio accounts of these rituals of white supremacy. George White was not alone in his suffering or in the elaborate coverage given to his death.⁴

What was seemingly unusual about this article is that the account was written in Slovak and informed an immigrant readership of the racial mores and atrocities of America. That a Slovak newspaper saw fit to reprint such an account in a paper that otherwise advertised old country news, church socials, and picnics, may at first seem surprising. Why did this concern immigrants, or the paper’s editors? What message did editors hope to convey to their foreign-language readers by placing this horrific tale on the front page as its lead story?

Yet the account of White’s brutal torture and execution at the hands of more than 300, as reported in *Slovák v Amerike*, was only one of hundreds that appeared in Slavic papers. By the first decade of the twentieth century Slovak and Rusyn newspapers, such as *Slovák v Amerike*, *Jednota*, and *Amerikanský ruský viestník*, had published hundreds of accounts of lynchings. By the 1910s the earlier newspapers were joined in this journalistic obsession with race by *New Yorkský denník* and *Národné noviny*, founded in 1913 and 1910, respectively. Into the 1920s all these papers continued to feature lynching accounts on an almost weekly basis. Many of these lynchings occurred in places where few immigrants settled—although some early twentieth-century lynchings occurred in places where Slovaks lived.

As in the article concerning White, Slovak lynching accounts often followed the lead of mainstream (white) papers and foregrounded moral equivalencies between black criminality and white mob violence. While the assertion of vengeance might be macabre, such accounts provided a narrative that justified such extraordinary assertions of “the people’s justice” by the enormity of the black victim’s crime against white women or children. The article on White was not atypical in summoning the mob’s “authority” to act; mob actions were characterized not as disruption but rather restoration of the peace and social order. Once White had been lynched, the peace of the countryside could supposedly

reign once more. Yohuru Williams notes that the evidence for White's alleged "crime" was circumstantial at best, and that his lynching occurred in a state with a long-standing history of extralegal violence against blacks. When black ministers asserted White's innocence and demanded an inquest into the lynching, white mobs indiscriminately attacked any blacks they found walking or riding through Wilmington. These details were omitted, however, from the Slovak account. Lynching was characterized as necessary when lenient courts failed to "avenge a poor white girl."⁵

Race was not an entirely unfamiliar concept to many South and East European immigrants, but newcomers did have to learn what the Jim Crow hierarchies meant in their new homelands. Indeed, almost from the moment they got off the boat, immigrants have been telling stories about their first bewildered encounters with the "Negro," if one can believe what immigrant newspapers report.⁶ The first sighting of blacks by steerage passengers became a trope, representing newcomers' fear and amazement at this frightening place, the United States. Newspapers did more than report existing facts, however. From humor pages to lynching reports, immigrant publications phrased community experiences in increasingly racial terms.

Immigrant papers provided extensive coverage of race. Graphic accounts about mutilations of lynching victims often appeared in the same issues containing minstrel-show jokes in "humor columns." Reading frequent accounts of lynchings, race riots, and the "savage" non-Europeans under imperial rule helped Slovak readers to "naturalize" the black-white divide characterizing reports about race in their ethnic newspapers.

Articles included in Slovak newspapers for humor and as accounts of lynching, race riots, colonialism, and other racial matters were, for the most part, reprints from English-language new sources, but immigrant editors had to select these stories for inclusion in their papers. Moreover, writers of letters to the editor often argued vociferously with papers' stances on labor, politics, Slovak nationalism, and other topics. Such backlash is absent on the matter of lynchings, race riots, and portrayals of blacks. Either no immigrant readers saw fit to write condemning lynchings or editors neglected to publish letters. In either case, most stories of lynchings were left to stand alone, with little editorial condemnation, as a commentary on the new country's racialized landscape.

As Christopher Waldrep argues, "White Southerners, and the nation as a whole, created an intellectual environment that sometimes tolerated, and on occasion actively encouraged, mobbing. The creation of that tolerating environment took place in the imagination of men and women, in oral conversation, and on the pages of newspapers and magazines."⁷ That newspaper-aided process occurred among immigrants, too. Selective reprinting of articles from other sources reflected and shaped discourse that defined racial identity as black or white. These publications aided in putting in place boundaries defining appropriate Slovak social identity as being in the latter group.

Hale has demonstrated that English-language papers were full of graphic reports of lynchings. Such accounts, she argues, served to create as well as publicize the caste system and shore up the solidarity of the Caucasian race.⁸ For immigrants sifting their way through a new land's racialized shibboleths, racial community was even more directly formulated around an imagined whiteness fostered, in large measure, through cultural productions such as the immigrant press. Indeed, lynching was such a new phenomenon to Slavs a new English loan word had to be created. Although many stories described the work of lynch mobs using “zničiť” (destroy), “zabiť” (slaughter), “vraždiť” (murder), or “strielať” (shoot), very quickly “lynčovať” was invented. (Curiously, “pogrom,” a concept with which East Europeans were familiar, was not used to refer to lynchings, even in the infamous case of the lynching of Leo Frank, a northern Jewish factory manager who in 1915 was pulled from a Marietta, Georgia, jail cell and lynched. “Pogrom” was only used to refer to news of anti-Jewish mob violence out of Russia, and *Národné noviny*'s one-paragraph account of Frank's murder speaks of a “lynčovaný,” of which the paper noted, “Only a slight report on this lynching is expected”).⁹

Slavs' mass emigration to America coincided with an upsurge of violence against African Americans and such matters did not go unnoticed by immigrant newspapers. As early as 1896, *Slovák v Amerike* spoke of “Judge Lynch the Destroyer,” in a California case in which three men (two blacks and a Mexican) were hung from trees by a crowd of 250 people. As would become a frequent refrain in years to come, Slovak readers were informed that the sheriff and his deputies had been holding the men as prisoners, but were unable to restrain the crowd in its search for justice, and that members of the crowd “shot them through and through, and then lynched them.”¹⁰ In 1906 *Slovák v Amerike* reported that in Chattanooga “more than 4,000 whites had attacked the municipal jail for more than three hours” to get at two black men jailed for “violating” white women. As in the California case, “the heroic efforts of municipal police and members of the state police” proved ineffectual in repulsing the mob.¹¹ In the coming years, such accounts were so frequent that a standard headline—“Judge Lynch”—was employed.

Often it was a supposed black crime, or resistance to white authority figures, that led to the lynching. On February 5, 1914, readers of *Národné noviny* learned of “People's Justice.” “Black man Ben Dickerson was on the 29th of January in Oklahoma City shot dead by a crowd of citizens,” the paper matter of factly reported. “A few days before that Chaffin, the business manager of the Kellogg Corn Flake Company, had been robbed, and out of anger, over a matter of \$4, the unfortunate man Dickerson was shot dead. The mob of citizens arrived at the jail, seized the Negro, and murdered him.”¹² This, in full, is the text of a story that by 1914 was a regular feature in the Slovak press. One effect of such routine reports was perhaps to normalize the reign of terror against African Americans, even for those newcomers who were mostly living far from the scene of these

crimes. But whether Dickerson had actually robbed the white manager or merely had an argument with him over back wages, which Philip Dray and Waldrep argue was often the black "crime" that led to a lynching, immigrants were learning just what minimal rights were afforded blacks in their new country. In such instances blacks resisting third-class treatment by white authority figures were subject to evisceration by "a mob of citizens" that rejected courts as inadequate protectors of the racial status quo. The "people's justice" was a folkway immigrants had to learn.¹³

Not all reports were this cut and dry, but even more vivid depictions often offered little sense of outrage or shock on the part of the translators. In 1904 *Amerikansky russky viestnik* reported, "In Cartersville, Georgia, a Negro was burned alive after a mob of 200 grabbed him from the hands of the sheriff." He had been accused of committing violence against a white girl. The reporter added, "While he was burning alive in the evening, he was hit by more than 500 shots."¹⁴ And *Národné noviny* reported on a 1914 case unusual only in that this time it was a black woman who had been lynched. "The crowd summoned from the city murdered her and then hung her from a tree" after her "confession" to killing a 12-year-old girl. "The corpse hanging from the tree," said the paper, "was used as a rifle target by the crowd. At the scene of the lynching were some thirty blacks, who were, however, prevented from interfering with the enraged people's justice."¹⁵ "The people," with their enraged sense of justice, were set in opposition to helpless black onlookers.

Hundreds of formulaic lynching accounts appeared week after week in Slovak papers. By the time of this "black lady's lynching" the naturalization of ritualized violence against blacks, as well as suspect immigrants, had been an ongoing feature in immigrant papers for 20 years.¹⁶ Accounts of lynchings followed a predictable format: a few brief paragraphs on Negro crimes, white outrage, and mob justice. The thousands of lynchings of black Americans that occurred between 1890 and 1930 were faithfully reported issue after issue in the major immigrant weeklies and dailies; often several lynching accounts appeared in the same edition.¹⁷

In 1896, *Amerikansky russky viestnik* reported, "Not far from New Orleans, there were two murders, the burning at the stake of Irishman Patrick Morris and his Negro wife. The enraged local citizens quickly judged him to have grossly exceeded the law and carried out the dreadful sentence on the terrified Morris." Another account related the case of Charles Mallpast, a white man lynched with his black wife and mulatto children in Arkansas after he tried to defend his family from an enraged mob of citizens. While the headline referred to Mallpast as "an innocent old man," as in the case of Morris the article noted a crowd of "citizens" had "competently and speedily" shot and strung him up to a tree; no further condemnation of the Arkansas citizens was added. The moral transmitted by such reports may have consisted in learning the social component of whiteness, of behaving in a manner that placed one on the correct end of the racial divide.¹⁸

As in many English-language lynching accounts, the report of Mallpast's lynching in *Slovák v Amerike* stressed the calm and deliberate fashion with which the disciplined white people set about their business. Depictions of lynchers as "citizens" who "competently" and "speedily" or "determinedly" engaged in restoring racialized justice, and then retired peacefully, abound in Slovak newspapers' lynching accounts. Amy Louise Wood has noted that the early twentieth-century reports of lynchings highlighted the discipline of white lynchers who supposedly behaved in an orderly fashion, even as they burned a man alive. Depictions of white self-control were balanced against assertions of innate black brutality, irrationality, and licentiousness. Unlike wild and animalistic nonwhites, even lynchers were said to be orderly and self-possessed; as Wood notes, a "good" lynching was one allegedly free of irrationality or unneeded exuberance. Lynch leaders from Dewitt, Arkansas, near the immigrant colony of Slovaktown, could even assert to a reporter in 1916 that their lynching of a black man had been "humane." (These same accounts, speaking of white self-control, determined and orderly action, nevertheless often detailed the torture and dismemberment of the victim by souvenir seekers. Evidently this activity did not disrupt the binary between civilized whites and savage blacks in newspaper readers', or reporters', eyes.)¹⁹

Moreover, Mallpast's defense of his family, and murder by the mob, indicates that the real crime here was a consensual crossing of the color line—that it wasn't black criminal sexuality, but the fact that at least some people would voluntarily ignore Jim Crow when choosing a marriage partner, which had to be suppressed violently. Neither Slovak editors nor their readers commented on this, nor did they object to such handling of the miscegenation "problem."²⁰

Most such lynching accounts didn't even go into as much detail as the articles on Morris and Mallpast, noting with little skepticism a lynching had followed some horrible black crime. In 1913, *Národné noviny* decided the important fact in the double lynching in Mississippi of two black brothers was not their hanging and shotgun execution, but the alleged murderous rampage by the teens that left "Eight People Dead." After drinking alcohol, "The two youths, it was reported, were walking along the street with loaded revolvers, when they began firing on the people." A troop train was dispatched from Natchez to try to restore order, but before it could arrive, the citizens of Mississippi had taken matters into their own hands.²¹

The likelihood of two black brothers actually going on a shooting rampage in 1913 Mississippi is slim. Rumors and white phobias/outrages at insolent or even undeferential blacks probably fueled the lynch mob, rather than any actual violence by blacks. In any case, newcomers were learning something of the racialized sense of justice in America. Ritual evisceration of offending black bodies into souvenir pieces, with the commemoration of such occasions via souvenir postcards, was, as Litwack put it, a "response to growing doubts that this new generation (of blacks) could be trusted to stay in its place without legal and extra-legal force." East Europeans, too, were regarded by many "old stock"

Americans as usurpers of the prerogatives of real white people. Reading of the 500 rifle shots fired into the "Cartersville Negro," liminal immigrants likely felt simultaneous horror at the crime, contempt for the victims, and sober awareness of their own tenuous place in America's racialized justice system.²²

Stories invariably characterized black self-defense itself as illegitimate, as did accounts of "*plemenný boj*"—race wars—that broke out in the North and South when blacks objected to subjugation. Even cases in which white gangs terrorized black communities were so characterized, with any black attempts to organize resistance to lynch mobs portrayed in tropes of black violence. In 1903 a "*plemenný boj*" broke out in Lake Village, Arkansas, with an "enraged battle between blacks and whites," headlines and subheads informed Slovak readers. The "war," however, was the enraged reaction of a white mob when a black victim-to-be pulled a revolver and attempted to defend himself. It is this very act of self-defense on the part of blacks that often proved most provocative, in that such black men rejected the imposed role of perpetual victim and sought to behave like free people with full rights, including gun ownership and self-defense. None of this made it into the Slovak account, however, which noted that the offending black was quickly lynched. Likewise, in a case from Aurora, Missouri, "Race war is feared" after a Negro who had fatally wounded a white worker was lynched. Whether "Negro Frank Smith" had fatally wounded the "white worker" in self-defense was immaterial or perhaps further cause for white outrage, and immigrant readers learned that "the whole community dragged him to a tree and decreed his fate. After three days the body of the Negro was taken down. . . ." The "race war" that the headline writer "feared" may have been a result of blacks objecting to Smith's hanging in Aurora for three days. As in later accounts of Northern cities in which "*plemenný boj*" broke out, the "race war" often turned out to be blacks resisting the terrorist violence of whites.²³

Two items on page four of the March 29, 1904 edition of *Slovák v Amerike* told of a "race war" in the area of Dewitt and Saint Charles, Arkansas. "Thirteen Negroes have been lynched in a week" in Saint Charles, one story recounted, while the other told of "war with the Negroes." "During the war between the Negroes and whites in Saint Charles three whites have been shot to death," the second article noted. "A squad (*oddiel*) led by the deputy sheriff surveyed the countryside and visited the homes of the blacks, who were a danger to the embattled whites afraid to walk in Saint Charles. When the sheriff went to a small forest, he surprised the cabal of blacks and immediately they started shooting at him. Whites responded by also shooting and in the town three Negroes were shot dead. The whole region subsequently saw a large agitation (outbreak) and there is expected to be further unrest." That the black deaths came from lynchings and the white ones when some blacks organized to resist this fate is unremarked upon in these dispatches.²⁴

These accounts may have been of more than passing interest to some readers, for as early as 1894 Slovaks were living in the South, in an agricultural colony in

the vicinity of Dewitt. Slovaktown was the brainchild (or swindle, depending on one's outlook) of P. V. Rovnianek, president of the National Slovak Society. In 1894 Rovnianek established the "Slovak Colonization Society," an organization ostensibly aimed at improving the lot of the thousands of destitute Slovaks thrown out of work during the Panic of 1893. Historian M. Mark Stolarik relates that Rovnianek and his partners

claimed to have bought 50,000 acres of fertile land when in reality they had purchased only a few hundred acres and an option on a few thousand more. They then sold the non-existent acreage to credulous countrymen. . . . When the victims arrived in Arkansas and found much of the "good" land to be little better than a wilderness, they demanded their money back but received only about 5 percent of their average \$600 investment. . . . The community of "Slovaktown" which remained at the Arkansas site consisted of only about 200 families.²⁵

Slovaktown was alternately praised as a utopia and denounced as a "swindle" in the pages of the Slovak press. A writer to *Slovák v Amerike* in 1895 decried the falsehood that sent folks down to Arkansas, where they were starving. The writer, C. L. Orbach, a Lutheran minister who was a foe of Rovnianek's, said that the NSS president couldn't possibly know the true situation in Arkansas, as he and his partners were comfortably ensconced in Pennsylvania. A letter signed simply "Worker" said the only thing plentiful in the Arkansas colony were "the dusty sheep," before denouncing "the swindlers." "Only the dusty sheep have remained in Slovaktown," he repeated, "while all the residents are victims of sharp double dealing." A report "From Blissful Arkansas!" on February 20, 1896, was countered the following August by a letter from Racine, Wisconsin, detailing the woes of buying a nonexistent piece of Arkansas land.²⁶ The colony persisted, however, with a Slovak Catholic church that is still celebrating Mass and an NSS lodge enduring until at least 1969.²⁷

Around the same time that Slovaktown was being boosted, a group of Slovaks from Nitra established a colony in western Georgia near Tallapoosa. In April 1895 a Georgia Slovak wrote, "The community currently consists of more than 50 families. In Nitra 15 buildings have been erected, and three are currently going up. . . . The land is the most beautiful, with beautiful trees. We have a church community, with Rev. Janušek, to the delight of our farmers." In September 1894 readers of *Slovák v Amerike* learned of "the successful christening of the Slovak vineyard community, founded by the members of the Slovak King Svatopluk society—Nitrans. . . . They have built homes and vineyards to emulate a Slovak community. . . . May God grant that Nitra in America may bloom!"²⁸ The community did put down some roots, for as early as 1908, nearby Buchanan, Georgia, supported a Catholic *Jednota* lodge.²⁹ Some enterprising Slovak and Rusyn businessmen later established farming communities in the Petersburg,

Virginia, area. "New colony," Nikolaj Zajacz wrote in a letter to *Amerikansky russky vjestnik* in February 1919, describing the "new colony" he and other Rusyn farmers were building. "It's the best security and freedom to have an American farmstead," he continued.³⁰ Zajacz again wrote the paper two months later, boosting the "Ruthenian farmers' colony" in Claremont.³¹ It is unclear how Slavic immigrants were received in the South during an era of intense anti-immigrant, Nordic xenophobia. Italians and Sicilians had, as we'll see, already been lynched in New Orleans and rural Louisiana when they had been judged to have transgressed communal boundaries of acceptable behavior.³² Whether Georgians or Arkansans welcomed Slovak and Rusyn newcomers to the white community, or Slovaktown farmers were interested in being so received, there are no letters in *Slovák v Amerike* denouncing the terrorist assaults by whites on Saint Charles's blacks, from Slovaktown or elsewhere. Coverage of "race wars" between blacks and whites in a place where at least some kinsmen lived may have caused immigrants to think about with which group they should ally.

Some accounts of "race wars" were presented as lurid scenarios that might have given even George Romero nightmares. "Black beasts," a headline in April 1912 in *Slovák v Amerike* screamed. The report breathlessly informed readers that

Clementine Barnabet, a 22-year-old "half-blooded black" admitted that he had by his own hand killed 17 people. He confessed to being a member of a "Voodoo" sect that had recently expanded throughout all of Louisiana. Police say that in their opinion 37 people have been sacrificial victims of that cult. . . . The members of this sect are all blacks of the lowest sort, almost half-savage.

A Slovak reading this article among the other quotidian accounts of floods, robberies, strikes and wars may have learned to naturalize the trope of "black beasts."³³ As Rebecca Hill has noted, a long history exists in America of characterizing black self-defense as illegitimate and senseless violence, in opposition to "manly," legitimate white exercise of Second Amendment rights. Even white bandits such as Jesse James became rugged individualist folk heroes, while gun-wielding blacks, for Slovaks, became "loathsome bandits."³⁴ Such dichotomies went back to the years just before the Civil War, with the differential characterization of John Brown and black abolitionists as madmen or liberators, depending if one were a defender or opponent of slavery. In the Jim Crow and lynch-law era of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, too, the immigrant press fostered a narrative that saw black self-defense against white mobs as aberrant.³⁵

In this era, every moment of rising black expectations for full civil equality was met by an upsurge in white attacks on "insolent" blacks. Such attacks were faithfully reported in Slavic immigrant papers, but, as in the mainstream (white) press, the events were framed as allegedly lawless and violent blacks in need of the firm hand of "civilized" white "citizens." White mobs even assaulted blacks serving in the armed forces, for in the eyes of white Southerners, the stationing

of black soldiers—some of whom had participated in America's wars in Cuba and the Philippines—in the segregated South sent a dangerous message of the possibility of civil equality to civilian blacks. The most widely publicized such incident was a 1906 "riot" in Brownsville, Texas, when black soldiers were attacked by a white mob, but, rather than accepting their fate, fought back, shooting whites. "The citizens of Brownsville are violently agitating against the stationing of black soldiers in their city," *Slovák v Amerike* reported. "Armed citizens are defending the city day and night and demanding that the black soldiers leave. . . . All of Texas is agitated over the shooting of two whites by soldiers." President Theodore Roosevelt refused to intervene when the soldiers of the Twenty-fifth Regiment, some veterans of the Spanish-American War, were court-martialed, and subsequently senators proposed bills permitting white communities to veto the stationing of black soldiers in their midst. *Jednota*, too, reported that in the aftermath of Brownsville, Secretary of War William Howard Taft was rethinking the stationing of black soldiers in the Philippines, where they evidently developed ideas that they were American citizens. Further alleged violent attacks by black soldiers against their white officers were reported from El Reno, Oklahoma.³⁶

In the aftermath of World War I, black hopes that the "New Negro" would be afforded equal rights by a nation that had just fought to "make the world safe for democracy" were again quickly and violently crushed. Another suppression of allegedly dangerous black troops stationed in Texas occurred, after they objected to the fine points of Jim Crow.³⁷ Sharecroppers organizing for economic advancement in Arkansas were not portrayed as engaged in efforts at collective self-help, but rather alarmingly regarded as plotting a murderous race war against whites. (Sigmund Freud's notion of transference is useful here.) *New Yorkský denník* reported from Elaine on a "race war in Arkansas," where "this evening a race rebellion was renewed." Three days later readers of that paper learned that "a band of blacks in southern Phillips County is waging war against whites, who[m] they want to murder." Whenever blacks fought back, it was characterized as a "race war." Black self-defense or attempts at economic advancement, it is suggested in these Slovak rewrites from American wire services, are *prima facie* illegitimate and regarded as violent, and thus a justification for *white* self-defense.³⁸

As Amy Louise Wood has noted, and Ray Stannard Baker reported as early as 1908, often whites were convinced even after they had lynched blacks they had only scratched the surface of a wide-ranging, secretive black army bent on slaughtering all whites. Thus after a mob burned alive Will. Cato and Paul Reed in Statesboro, fears of a murderous black "Before Day Club" still permeated the Georgia countryside. Similar fears caused whites to drive all blacks out of Phillips County in the lynchings' aftermath. Again, in the 1919 incidents the farmers of nearby Slovaktown were silent on papers' characterization of black organization as a war against all whites. By 1919 the items of the violent suppression in Elaine and Phillips County fit into a long-established narrative of savage blacks engaged in a "*plemenný boj*."³⁹

Perhaps even more sobering than these graphic longer pieces, though, is that many lynching accounts in Slovak papers were only a paragraph long and even omitted the name of the victim. The ritual evisceration of a black person's body had become so prosaic, that even for immigrant readers the specific details of a victim's identity or the alleged crime were regarded as unworthy of being recorded. Hale has argued that lynching participants had as their aim the erasure of black identity as moral or political agents. In this respect, editors who omitted a victim's identity achieved what lynch mobs had set out to do—the negation of black personhood (see Figures 2-1, 2-2, and 2-3.)⁴⁰

In 1919, a single sentence sufficed to tell the story of a lynching in Mineral Wells, Mississippi. "A Negro was lynched because he accosted a woman." Again, the victim's name is unimportant to the trope of black criminality and enraged people's justice, and his "crime" is given as fact. Moreover, this brief item on the quotidian mob murder of an offending black man appeared directly beneath a Slovak-language editorial extolling the American holiday "Decoration Day." Likewise, on July 4, 1922, in an issue otherwise devoted to coverage of celebrations of America's Independence Day, *New Yorkský denník* reported the lynching of two "Negroes" in Georgia. June Granatir Alexander has correctly noted that Slovak newspapers were important facilitators of a developing dual "ethnic pride and American patriotism." But what is regrettable is the rapidity with which she dismisses the salience of race in these immigrants' construction of their patriotic American identities, and her avoidance of any consideration of race's voluminous coverage in the Slavic press. Stories teaching immigrants the joys of baseball, too, appeared on the same page as a report from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, that "A black in jail was lynched." The visceral shock of this normalized quotidian flow of the news cycle—stories of Ty Cobb, Hugh Jennings, and the Detroit Tigers, as well as reports of Slovak league teams in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and elsewhere, appearing alongside routinized lynching accounts—is the kind of naturalization of the justness of lynching via the press that Walter White would later denounce. And, in the midst of World War I, a brief report of the lynching of Ben Harper in Courtney, Texas, ran in *New Yorkský denník* just above another item, reporting on a meeting of the American Defense Society, which held an America First night, sponsored by the Foreign National Citizens at New York's Cooper Union. There Czech and Slovak representatives, among others, made patriotic speeches; citizenship evidently extended only so far during the War to Make the World Safe for Democracy. Appreciation of the new world's holidays and institutions developed in tandem, not apart, from the creation of a racialized identity.⁴¹

Of those accounts that did go into greater detail, most noted, with little skepticism, the lynching invariably followed a conviction of the black victim for some horrible crime (rape, robbery, or murder) that justified the atrocity that followed. This was the case on February 15, 1906, when *Amerikanský ruský vjestník* reported that a "*Lynčovanie Nigra*" had occurred in Gadsden, Alabama, after a

FIGURE 2-1: "Black in Mississippi is lynched." This single-sentence-long lynching story from Mineral wells, Mississippi, fails to give the victim's name. *New Yorkský denník*, May 30, 1919, 1.

Negro named Richardson was only given life for the murder of a white woman during a train robbery.⁴²

In this instance, as in many others, immigrant readers learned that it was the supposed leniency of the courts that led to the actions of the lynch mob. A lynching

ide Pennsylvania s počtom 19,610, tak New York s 68,270; Illinois c-56,482, Indiana ich má 49,987, Missouri 39,490, Michigan 34,298 a Massachusetts 34,124. V ostatných štátoch je len nepatrnejší počet ľudí, ktorí požívajú penzie od Spoj. Štátov.

Lynčovali černocho.

Monroe, La., 25. okt. — Jedného černocho, ktorý bol urážil jedno belošské dievča v utorok, dnes nad ranom 25 mužov vydošlo z väzenia a obesili ho na telegrafický stĺp. Mužovia vodrali sa do budovy a černocho a strážiacich dvoch dozorcov s revolvermi v rukách prinútili ku vydaniu ho. Všetci boli maskovaní, takže nevie sa, kto lynčovanie previeďol.

Milwaukee, Wis.

Mrs. VIOLET povie vám minulosť a predpovie budúcnosť. Prijíma každý deň, i v nedeľu 7. večer. Obráťte sa na ňu, dajte vám v každej záležitosti 245-247 East 13th St., grand New York City.

Vkládání pro zisk zda

na šest měsíců. Má cenu \$10 číslo pro ho, kdo zamýšlí uložit nějaké peníze, i když malý obnos, kdo uložil peníze bez toho, kdo může ušetřit \$5.00 aťeb více, kdo však se ne naučil umění pro zisk. Číslo to ukazuje tu pravdu v svou sílu peněz: znalost finančníku, která ukrývá před masami lidí. Oč onen ohromný list, jaký bankéři čelí kazuje jak docíliti toho samého zisku, třeba jak taková hloupost, která se dříve se věděla, jak říci v zisku na zisk. Váš módl ukázat maj magazin nyní. Záměrem ho na 6 měsíců přije 2 H. L. BARNER, Editor, 245-247 E. 13th St., Chicago, Ill.

FIGURE 2-2: "Lynching of a black." This story from Monroe, Louisiana, omits the victim's name. *Slovák v Amerike*, October 28, 1913, 7.

account out of Belair, Maryland, began by noting Lewis Harris's arrest for "violating" a white woman.⁴³ When 4,000 whites broke into Chattanooga's jail and seized two black suspects and lynched them, *Slovák v Amerike's* readers were informed that, "The authorities at this place have declined to condemn several Negroes to death, so that the unrest has broken out again, with hostility against imprisoned Negroes being particularly extreme."⁴⁴ As Wood and Hill argue, lynching accounts in English-language papers likewise often condoned a higher people's justice that stepped in when courts proved too permissive or ineffective to rein in black crime; immigrant newspapers disseminated this message to newcomers as well.⁴⁵

Slovaks toiling in coal fields or steel towns may not have faced lynch mobs, but they were familiar with the violence of the New World. In 1912 *Národné noviny* dismissed "[t]hat American freedom" by charging "the offenses of the capitalists are more excessive in their barbarism than those of the Persian tyrants in darkest

<p>t a Kat- ie. — 3. dra. P. ešte". — eč. — 7.</p> <p>Bednár.</p> <p>ára. Cte- nerike.— ie tohoto ľúbenom V mene P. Rossie s výstra- om a vö- níkom v a prácou edajte sa m lapa- vyslala Príčina ost požá- ktorú ne- la si sem úza, aby tkat. Za ostatných bolo do- ov by bo- ste raz ť- y sa sem iaľ štrajk</p>	<p>stia, jaké si sám každý praje. Ostá- vam s pozdravom na všetkých či- tateľov a čitateľky tohoto pravdu- mluvného a poučného časopisu.</p> <p>Michal Babuchna, preds. lístka 38. I. S. V. S. O.</p> <p>—o—</p> <p>Lynčovali černocho.</p> <p>Cooper, Tex., 17. jan. — Asi 500 hláv počítajúci zástup dnes po- obede zmocnil sa šeriffa Fraziaera a jeho deputov a vytrhnutý bol z ích rúk Henry Mouson, 20-ročný černocho. Zástup potom černocho vývesil na telegrafický stĺp na ná- mestí, blízko okresného súdu, a lynčovali ho. Čerpocho modlikal o milosť, ale jej nedostal, ba na ten najsurovší spôsob narábali s ním. Čerpocho Mouson, asi pred týžd- ňom zastrelil bol jedno biele die- vča a ranil jej brata. Pred vyše- trovaním hovoril, že strelba stala sa náhodou. Dnes malo sa začiat súdiť pokračovanie proti černo- chovi.</p> <p>—o—</p> <p>Do Passaic, N. J. a na okolie!</p> <p>Drahí bratia a sestry! Vo stre- du dňa 22. t. m., o 8. hod. večer, v Slov. Sokolovni vydržiavať sa bude hlavná schôdza v záležitosti privítania a prednášky nášho vzácneho hosta dr. Pavla Blahu! Pamätajte na tú schôdzu bratia a sestry Prednáškového Výboru a</p>	<p>ODKAZY REDAKCIE</p> <p>P. Ján Ruman, Detroit, M. Také ohlasy stoja po dollár to jestli chcete ich mať uve- ne, pošlite nám ešte chybu \$2.25.</p> <p>P. Michal Rozemberk, (ville, Pa. — Žiadne ohov- nemôžeme uverejniť, tedy a- še, tým menej, že o prave- vecí nie sme presvedčení. ste, že čo si žiadate za de- ných 50c.</p> <p>P. Anton Palkovič, New N. Y. — Vaše vyzvanie pos- nám pozde do minulého čis- tomto čísle nemalo by už si O veci tak vážne treba sa záväzku postarať. Ináč s r by sme Vám ho uverejnili.</p> <p>P. Peter Lukáč, Port C O — Ano, r. 1866. Prusiaci zili nad Rakúšanmi. Dejiny nej zrady nepochybne Prusiaci výhode na toľko, že mali de- veliteľov a modernú zbraň; Rakúšanmi mali za veliteľov stých a nafúkaných prince- predku nabíjacie flinty.</p> <p>P. Ján Sadlón, Danbury, Rieka Poprad vyteká z vy- Tatier. Cez Kežmarok ti Poprad tečie; pri kasárňach dve rieky, ale len Poprad na dve ramená rozdelený, zdá sa, akoby kasárne na</p>
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FIGURE 2-3: "Lynching of a black." This one-paragraph story of the lynching of 20-year-old Henry Mouson from a telegraph pole not far from the courthouse in Cooper, Texas, appears right above an invitation to a Slovak celebration in Passaic, New Jersey. Lynching accounts became merely another part of the daily news cycle in immigrant newspapers. *Slovák v Amerike*, January 21, 1913, 2.

Asia," citing West Virginia's coal country as a particularly benighted realm. This editorial indicates race-thinking among *Národné noviny*'s editors had already proceeded to the point where insidious assumptions of Asiatic despotism had become part of their cognitive atlases. But the slur word "capitalists"—more despotic, another editorial claimed, "than anything since the time of Nero"—suggests it wasn't *Negrov lynčovanie* that caused Slovaks to recoil at American brutality, but rather scabs or hireling state police ("the Cossacks," as depicted in *Slovák v Amerike* during a 1906 coal strike and the socialist paper *Rovnosť ľudu* during the 1920s.)⁴⁶

Indeed, massacres of striking "Hunky" miners had been known to occur, as at Lattimer in 1897, when striking Slavs who had dared rise up and defy the wishes and economic interests of "real white folks" were laid low by machine-gun fire.⁴⁷ Even in *Národné noviny*, organ of the National Slovak Society, which required members to become U.S. citizens, there appeared approving reports of Slovak celebrations on the First of May at which "the workers of Ohio declared they were waging war against capitalist exploitation" before singing "La Marsellaise."⁴⁸ Into the 1930s *Národné noviny*'s editors were not averse to criticizing those features of the land of freedom they found particularly brutal or unjust. Readers were well versed in distinguishing between American ideal and real.⁴⁹

On race, however, received wisdom from mainstream America was less often contested. And Slovak readers frequently provided letters to the editor that quickly reflected their own racialized sensibilities, even when railing at the brutality of the Cossacks. A letter writer from the steel town of Munhall, Pennsylvania, argued in 1918 in *Jednota* that "Lincoln freed the slaves, but the Slovaks in their slavery have it worse!" Similarly, by 1915, some complaining of oppression in Europe compared Slovak "slavery" to the supposed ease with which pampered blacks in America lived. "Indeed if you really look at it, we have it worse than the Negroes," Andrej Bugoš of Los Angeles wrote to *Národné noviny*. "Indeed these days in California Negroes are enslaved to luxury, and you see what 'tents' they have!" Stereotypes of sybaritic blacks seem to have already been gestating. And when a letter writer to *New Yorkský denník* denounced a hated McKeesport, Pennsylvania, priest, he could think of no greater slur than that Father Liščinský "is defending the blacks, who treacherously worked against the Slovak people," presumably as strikebreakers.⁵⁰

Still, immigrants' fashioning of a self-conception as part of the "Caucasian race" was something of a collaboration between native-born actors and ethnic elite. Dispatches reprinted in *Amerikanský ruský vjestník*, *Národné noviny*, *Jednota*, and other Slovak newspapers were almost always rewrites from English-language wire services. As Gunther Barth has demonstrated, the metropolitan press of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was instrumental in homogenizing and modernizing a polyglot and diverse urban population, instructing citizens of mass society on the proper behavior necessary for negotiating in an increasingly anonymous, complex society. Slovaks might know something about mine strikes

or the oppression of the Habsburgs, but had a lot to learn about New World race relations. Immigrant papers often ran rewrites of the mass press's homogenizing, "received wisdom," and thus played their part, too, in instructing their readers in how to behave as responsible Americans.⁵¹

Benedict Anderson has noted, too, that the press created the illusion of a common national identity among members of a newspaper-reading public that may never have met one another but nevertheless began to conceive of themselves as sharing bonds of nationhood or ethnicity. Although Anderson concentrated on this process among colonial elites in East Asia, as well as an interesting discussion of Magyars chafing at their perceived subservient position within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, something of the same "imagined community" formation was occurring within the United States.⁵²

Among Slovak immigrants, creating an imagined community was first a matter of conceptualizing a common Slovak nationhood, and second fitting that identity within a "Caucasian" polity. *Národné noviny* and other Slovak papers melded together a national identity for immigrants who may have had at best only a regional conception of themselves as residents of Zemplín or Trenčín province, not as Slovaks, when they first emigrated. When Juraj Kracha first emigrates to America in Thomas Bell's autobiographical novel, *Out of this Furnace*, the first "outsider" he makes fun of is not a *Čierny* but an immigrant from Zemplín, who Kracha thinks is pronouncing his own language incorrectly.⁵³ Likewise, early immigrants established separate Roman Catholic parishes based on region of origin, not Slovak identity per se. In Philadelphia "they didn't really regard themselves as the same people," an immigrant informant recalled, so a separate parish was established in 1907 for immigrants from Trenčín "who didn't want to sit with these easterners here," who had a second, Zemplín-based parish. Similar patterns developed in Pittsburgh.⁵⁴ Some of these regional frictions may have eroded in the face of generic discrimination against Hunkies, but M. Mark Stolarik notes, too, newspapers' use of central Slovak dialect broke down some of the regional frictions.⁵⁵

But such identity formation didn't occur in a void, rather in a society in which blackness remained the mark of the outsider. By reading reprinted lurid accounts of the ritualized evisceration of the ultimate American outcasts, East European immigrants could potentially join in the American construct of whiteness.

Slovak immigrants fashioned identities out of an admixture of "assignment" and self-proclaimed identity, a process they had known even in Austria-Hungary, where "racial" differences certainly were known. Caricatures disseminated in *fin de siècle* Austria mocked Czech, Moravian, and Slovak day laborers in Vienna, indicating Slavs were often on the receiving end of racial slights.⁵⁶ But Slovaks, too, made fun of those who didn't make the grade. Initially, Kracha mocks these foreigners, immigrants from Zemplín, for not speaking their language correctly. After 15 years in America, he and his friends in Braddock still use "*Čierna*" not to refer to African Americans but to dark "Gypsy-like" characters. His mistress,

Čierna Zuska (Black Susan), earns the condemnation of Braddock for her free and easy ways, but there is also a racialized condemnation of her Gypsy looks. Fast forward 40 years, and the Slovaks now use “nigger” to denounce blacks they charge with ruining their neighborhood.⁵⁷

What had changed in the intervening decades were Slovak readings in black and white. New distinctions, which became most salient in the context of Braddock, were picked up through items in the Slovak press. Should Kracha or any other Slovak have opened *Jednota* on October 15, 1902, he would have read yet again on page one of a “*Lynčovala nigrov*”: “In the town of Newbern, Tenn., it is reported that a mob of nearly 500 people hung two Negroes from a telephone pole. . . . The marauding rabble arrived at the jail and seized the struggling Negroes, pronouncing justice at once that very day, condemning them, tearing the Negroes from jail and lynching them.” This paragraph-long account is thus far typical of the rewrites found in the Slovak press. In this instance, however, the editors tacked on a concluding sentence: “We are incapable of doing justice to these rabble judgments by the most unadorned Americans.” The condemnation is unusual, for most stories of lynchings, no matter how graphic the detail provided on the victims’ torture, omit even such a cursory editorial remark, and often instead link mob actions to the achievement, not miscarriage, of justice. (Here as well, the lynch mob achieves justice, even if the word is repeated as an expression of the reporter’s inability to capture that “justice’s” brutality.) These few atypical, isolated words of condemnation likely didn’t leave as lasting an impression on immigrants as the steady repetition of stories of black criminality and victimization. After reading hundreds of lynching accounts, year after year, differences between Zemplín and Trenčín became less important than the line between black and white.⁵⁸

Often even the most implausible portrayals of black licentiousness were presented as just-so stories, and passed with little or no comment or dissenting view from editor or reader on the brutality or injustice of lynching. *Slovák v Amerike* in 1895 reported as a simple matter of fact, “80-year-old William Henderson was lynched by upstanding citizens of Jackson, Mo., after he had been caught dallying with 14-year-old Minnie Rust, the daughter of a respectable white family.” The paragraph account concluded, “It is likely that the lynching will go unpunished.” As another lynching account, out of Hopkinsville, Kentucky, noted, “The enraged people are many.”⁵⁹

As in the English-language press, so, too, Slovak immigrant papers accepted as a given the fact of black criminality, and many lynching accounts foregrounded the crimes for which the victim suffered, often almost giving more details on the victim’s misdeeds than the tortures inflicted on him by the white mob. Just as the story of George White’s slow and torturous roasting alive in Wilmington began with a long account of his horrible crimes—thereby perhaps negating any revulsion at the account of the macabre execution that followed, or at least estab-

lishing an equivalency between black crime and white reaction—the Jackson account juxtaposed “upstanding citizens” with black sexual predations.

It’s not surprising then that by the 1910s papers such as *New Yorkský denník* and *Slovák v Amerike* also frequently ran short crime stories giving prominent play to black burglars and stickup men. Indeed, as early as 1901, *Slovák v Amerike* warned readers “Watch out for this gang,” and wrote of a “loathsome, murderous band of Negroes in the coal region.” The article alarmingly spoke of a gang of black robbers that had allegedly been terrorizing the coal fields around Connellsville, Pennsylvania, an area where many Slovak immigrants lived and worked. “A large indignant body of citizens” captured the murderous robbers, and the article concluded that the angry citizens expected that the blacks would be lynched. *New Yorkský denník* in August 1921 likewise reported in a single paragraph that an unnamed black man had been lynched in Hot Springs, Arkansas, after robbing a small store. (This news appeared in a single paragraph that lumped two separate lynchings—the other occurred in Macon, Georgia—into one filler item.) One *Jednota* story even implausibly portrayed a black crime wave that in 1909 had Pittsburgh authorities helpless. As in lynching accounts, lurid accounts of “loathsome” (*ohavný*) black criminals established a binary for newcomers of who was acceptable and who permanently alien to the national community.⁶⁰

The frequency of lynching accounts and other articles foregrounding race suggests the status of blacks and other racial outsiders was a matter of morbid curiosity to new immigrants. Coverage of race was fraught with conflicting layers of condescension, belittlement, and repugnance at the brutality delivered to transgressors against white supremacy. As in English-language newspapers, the immigrant press sometimes documented lynchings in excruciating, macabre detail, and there is evidence that initially newcomers were horrified by these lynchings. The report from Wilmington noted, “At the end of this horrible process everyone made sure to cut off a piece of his body to take for themselves as a souvenir!”⁶¹ A similar account in 1901 from Balltown, Louisiana, noted that before dousing a hanging victim with gasoline, “All the pieces of his body were cut off and distributed to the crowd. Before they were done he cried and begged for mercy.”⁶²

Gruesome headlines were sometimes matched by lurid copy and editorial comments that hint initially some Slovaks reacted with revulsion to lynchings. “Determinedly use knife to rip out his tongue and tear off his skin and hide,” a subhead to a West Virginia lynching story announced. “In Bluefield, it is reported that there was a bestial lynching of a black,” the story began. “Near Devon in Mingo County this disgraceful deed was staged.” While he was being hanged from a tree by chains, the victim didn’t cry out, but the report then went into gorier detail:

In a second moment, though, there began a penetrating roaring and with the authorities’ whole hearted support, they cut into pieces the body of the living Negro, cut him into pieces and distributed the various pieces to the participants in the cruel lynching. With a glance on the girl, the unfortunate Negro’s

sinful soul departed his body. The enraged people then cut his tortured body and took out his heart. It wasn't enough for them yet, they had to have a souvenir! Then they poured gasoline on the deceased and set him on fire. Such terrible, vengeful methods are beyond even committed criminals! Whether or not the people's feelings of outrage were assuaged, let each reader judge.⁶³

Still, the victim's humanity is denied him in several ways. In the entire lengthy story the victim is never named—he is subject of the mob's action, an anonymous burning, tortured body for the Slovak readers. In this lengthy item of the West Virginia lynching, every detail of the case is provided: the victim's alleged crime, the enraged citizenry's determination to restore justice after a lax judicial system is found wanting, the elaborate torture that ends in the victim's graphic dismemberment at the hands of souvenir hunters, his burning alive. The one detail that is omitted is the victim's name.

And while "the people's feeling of outrage" takes a form that seemingly spurred *Slovák v Amerike's* appalled editor to affix at least some atypical critique of mob justice, the story begins by foregrounding his alleged crime (not alleged in the story, by the way, rather taken for granted). The black criminal's deviance leads the report, which only several paragraphs in details the lynch mob's actions. The black rapist was said to have chained his white female victim to a tree, thereby setting up a moral equivalency between the black man's crime and the later, overawing decree of bloody justice by the lynch mob. While he suffers, his soul is presented as unequivocally sinful.

"Shaming the Cannibals"

Another story related a 1911 Kentucky lynching in which the white ringleaders erected a stage and charged three dollars admission to those townspeople wanting to shoot at the torture victim. In this case, the story condemned the barbarity, saying "an opera was performed that was brutally plotted and would have shamed even the strangest of cannibals." The story noted,

The "committee" immediately announced that those who had bought a ticket would have the right to shoot at the Negro. The opera in a short time came true as a crowd of citizens of that town avidly witnessed and guffawed at the murder of the anguished Negro. When a bell was rung, the curtain was raised. Boys and women then rose up, and began shooting with fury at the tied-up Negro. . . . No one in the town in any way prevented this performance.⁶⁴

The savagery of American assaults on blacks was likely not lost on Slovaks, and in these few cases editors affixed some condemnation of the brutalities these longer stories related.

Yet for every such elaborate torture account, there were dozens of one-sentence or one-paragraph items merely stating a lynching had occurred. Many only noted “a Negro” had been eviscerated, not even bothering to provide a name or other detail. If the intention of lynch mobs, as Hale argues, was to destroy the very personhood of victims, the brevity of such lynching fillers suggests how little such victims’ plight registered with readers.⁶⁵

As Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People argued in *Rope and Faggot* (1929), the repetitive lynching accounts that ran week after week alongside other prosaic news largely served to numb white Americans to the practice, with even the most lurid accounts merely another feature of the “if it bleeds it leads” sensationalist press and a “naturalized” part of America’s landscape. White argued, “An uncomfortably large percentage of American citizens can read in their newspapers of the slow roasting alive of a human being in Mississippi and turn, promptly and with little thought, to the comic strip or sporting page. Thus has lynching become an almost integral part of our national folkways.”⁶⁶ These lynchings, Hale argues, were fashioned by middle-class Southern whites alarmed by both the intrusion of market forces to their region and the presence of a small but persistent black professional class during the 1890s. Lynchings, she writes, “eased white fears of a raceless consumer society even as they helped structure segregation, the policy that would regulate this new southern world.”⁶⁷

But it wasn’t only unambiguously white “old stock” Southerners who consumed these vivid accounts, or felt their whiteness reconfirmed by the victimization of outcast others. Through their readings in *Negrov lynčovanie*, even working-class immigrants (who might have raised Southern horror of a “raceless society” almost as much as visions of “Negro misrule”) vicariously participated in these national folkways, too. It is no special condemnation of Slovaks to say in this regard they were typical of other white Americans. Slovaks learned of the permanent pariah status of blacks as they adjusted to their new homes in many ways, not least through the lynching stories that dotted nearly every Slovak newspaper.

As David Roediger stresses, a level of analysis positing working-class struggle as occurring merely between capitalists and exploited workers fails to address the central question of why the white working class settled for being white. The “wages of whiteness” could be redeemed by Slavic newcomers reconfirming (or perhaps discovering for the very first time) their whiteness in large measure through their readings of these newspaper rewrites. Slavs knew of the dangerous conditions they faced in industrial America. But as Roediger reminds us, no less a social critic than W. E. B. Du Bois recognized white men low on the totem pole were compensated for their low-wage, miserable work at least in part by a “public and psychological wage.”⁶⁸ Dominic Pacyga likewise argues that for new immigrants, part of Americanization was to develop a white frame of reference. Slovak papers’ voluminous coverage of lynchings and anti-black riots provided a running commentary on the degree to which blacks were a vulnerable people apart.⁶⁹

Most accounts were brief and offered no outcry over mob actions, as when *Slovák v Amerike* reported in 1894 that a black man in Atchison, Kansas, was “hung from a tree, in a word, suffered at the hands of judge lynch,” after he was said to have raped a white woman.⁷⁰ After around 1910 editorial comments on the horrors of lynching became rarer, and more typical is a similarly brief notice in 1924 of a triple lynching in Illinois, printed in *Amerikanský ruský věstník*. The article is devoid of all but the barest facts.⁷¹

Only when Robert Prager, a white man, was lynched for expressing pro-German sentiments in the middle of World War I, did a lengthy editorial appear, unequivocally denouncing lynching. Prager was lynched in Collinsville, Illinois, at the height of anti-German hysteria. And while Slovak newspapers, as we’ll see, had many unflattering things to say about the alleged atrocities of Magyars (Hungarians) and Germans, in this instance *Národné noviny* reached a level of journalistic indignation that was never matched when lynching victims were black. “Clearly these are ugly and deplorable values,” the paper’s editorial writer declared (at least in this case, the lynching of a white man), “and each civilized man must deplore the (mob’s) decision. . . .” The paper continued, “Civilized laws must be followed, customs must be followed, and the municipal authorities must be determined to prohibit this practice. . . .” For all the outrage at Prager’s lynching, the editorial nevertheless concluded by warning those “people with pro-German thoughts to beware and to watch their tongue!” It was only the lynching of a white man that spurred *Národné noviny* to editorialize on the need for “a civilized people to end this savage practice,” “the practice of wild, savage anarchists.”⁷²

Likewise, a sexual assault on a white Englishwoman who had moved to New York ran under a story headlined “Bestiality.” The assault spurred *Jednota* to thunder, “Judge Lynch is said to be the scourge of American civilization. Humanity, under the government that we have today, is something stunted. Lynching therefore not only condemns its victims, but you and me as well.” But it was not collective mob violence against a murder victim that raised the editor’s ire. Rather, here lynching seems to have been rather broadly defined as any assault on a victim, and was used discursively to make a point about a crime against a white woman. Scores of lynchings of African Americans had already been reported in this and other immigrant papers, and more would follow; never, outside of the socialist immigrant press, would such a lengthy article or lead editorial denounce the lynching of blacks. And, sadly, by the end of this brief article the Slavic writer was endorsing collective mob violence against presumed sexual criminals: “These are horrific crimes, but quite ordinary. In many American cities it’s dangerous for women to be out on the streets in the evening. I am a law-abiding man, but if I caught the beast responsible for such abominable crimes, I’d help with joy to string him up to the nearest tree or lamp post.”⁷³

As noted, the easy acceptance of collective violence when an alleged sexual crime had occurred was even more frequently asserted when the offender was

black, and in all cases such condemnations of “Judge Lynch” were missing when blacks were lynched. Rather, even longer accounts of black lynchings, too, sent messages of black illegitimacy. *Jednota* reported that “in the town of Berkley, Va., . . . the black man George W. Blount . . . was released by the police and before their very eyes strung up from a lamppost and burned alive.” Before this, though, “masked men had seized Blount and taken him to a field, where he was beaten and then shot into pieces.” This occurred even though “Blount was said to be the political leader” of blacks in the region.⁷⁴ Whether editors explicitly intended it or not, immigrant readers may have drawn the conclusion even successful blacks were vulnerable.

As Hale notes, rhetoric on black depravity and criminality aside, blacks who succeeded were often regarded by whites as the real threats and thus often targeted by lynch mobs. Disparities between images of black criminality and the respectability of many victims such as Blount, however, are not elaborated on by Slavic immigrants. Rather they reflected the fears of mainstream America, where, as early as 1908, journalist Ray Stannard Baker noted white Southerners admitted blacks who fit stereotypes of laziness and unintelligence were no threat to the Jim Crow order. Rather, in spite of the self-justifying arguments of lynchers that this punishment was only meted out to the most brutal of criminals, especially rapists, such crimes were merely a minority of the proximate causes of lynchings. Often victims were respectable black businessmen or landowners, followers of Booker T. Washington’s message of racial uplift. As with Blount, black achievement became in these lynching stories the impermissible threat to the racialized status quo. Such messages were conveyed also to liminal (provisional) white newcomers such as Slovaks; as we shall see, when blacks migrated to the North in search of industrial jobs they were quickly denounced as threats to immigrants’ natural rights to first call at jobs in factories, mines, and mills. The template for blacks as illegitimate competitors in the marketplace was arguably forged in such lynching accounts of successful blacks.⁷⁵

Even if editors ran stories at least partly for their shock value, we are left to ponder the readings immigrants themselves drew from weekly lynching stories. Far more numerous than *Pán Redaktori* (big-shot editors) were the average Slovaks and second-generation Slovak Americans who continued reading these papers for decades. Their responses to stories of black victims were more salient factors in building a “white” polity than any editor’s purpose in running a story.

A Slovak in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, reading that in a hamlet in neighboring Indiana County “blacks had been expelled,” may have drawn his own conclusions on the victims’ fate, and his own precariousness as a suspect white person, regardless of editors’ intentions. In this case, after “a black man had killed a white boy,” “the whites in a body took care of the matter themselves, despite the black man’s prattling that he was innocent.” The mob “in the second place told all those blacks of his fellow race who lived in that place that in another day they had to entirely clear out of the place.” When “the blacks didn’t heed them, the

whites as a body returned and destroyed the homes of all the blacks and expelled them from the place." Whatever editors intended, those reading that, "The (whites) have established a strict new form of order, that no one can come back to the place, so long as some living there don't want them," learned something of blacks' pariah status.⁷⁶

Nor need these readings have been univocal. As Eric Lott has argued regarding the antebellum patrons of minstrel shows, desire for the freedom of "care-free" plantation life and lust for the black body coexisted with harsh mockery of the black underclass. Notes of pity also crept in, at least when minstrelsy merged with "Uncle Tom" shows. Likewise, an immigrant may have simultaneously experienced terror at the atrocities of lynching, contempt for the victim exhibiting a lack of manhood or condemned as a brute, and a sober awareness a similar fate might await Slovaks if they weren't careful. All these emotions and more may have contended, until repetition and years of residence in the racialized new land taught the reader which sentiments were truly American.⁷⁷

Occasionally stories offered more than a straightforward report of noose and flaming torch. *Amerikansky ruský viestník* twice in 1903 reported "the President is against lynching" after Roosevelt denounced the practice, and added that the editors were, too.⁷⁸ Articles on the violent suppression of strikes appeared alongside accounts of even more violent evisceration of the bodies of distant Southern black men. "In the states of Georgia, Alabama and Louisiana there lately has actually been a noticeable uprising, a war of the white people against the blacks of those places," a front-page item in *Jednota* reported in August 1904. "Whites have hunted blacks down like rabbits, and even flogged them to death. The indignation of whites has been greatly roused against blacks in all regions of the southern states." Directly beneath this report was a short item from Statesboro, Georgia. Near there "the rabble seized two Negro men, Paul Reed and Will. Cato, tied them together with chains, poured gasoline on them and burned them alive. The Negroes were quickly baked. . . . Neither the American authorities nor the unfortunate Negroes have been able to stop these terrible deaths."⁷⁹

For all the foregrounding of Cato and Reed's criminality, a difference between the fate of white transgressors and black transgressors is clear from the end that befell the two. Burning alive is a verdict that only awaited black perpetrators, not members of other groups. It's perhaps understandable, then, that some sympathy for the victims arises at least in some Slovak articles such as this *Jednota* account.

Certainly in the era of yellow journalism, graphic and sensationalist accounts were par for the course in American newspapers. But the very lurid and salacious nature of these accounts may have desensitized readers. In any event, no editorial calls in Slovak newspapers went out for an end to the practice, at least outside of the socialist press. Hale argues lynching became naturalized through newspaper accounts, merely another part of the ebb and flow of daily occurrences. And in Slavic immigrant newspapers, graphic accounts of horrific

mutations of lynching victims often appeared in the very same issues with minstrel-show jokes in “humor columns.” News columns likewise spoke of “cannibal” or “barbarous” Africans or Filipinos in need of white guidance. Again, sensationalist foreign coverage was a staple of yellow journalism, but this in and of itself served to hierarchize the world into civilized Europeans and savage everyone else. Slovak papers reprinted accounts of the “*tudožrúti*” of Africa—literally “people chewers.” Qualifiers such as “savage” whenever African or Asian uprisings against European colonialism were reported were not neutral descriptors, but ideologically loaded words that suggested non-Europeans were not fully civilized beings. Even humor pages featured odd jokes on “the cannibals in darkest Africa.”⁸⁰

It is these telling juxtapositions in immigrant newspapers which indicate that even lynching accounts, over time, may have become for immigrants (as for other white Americans) merely a gruesome part of a naturalized landscape of racial hierarchies. No doubt some were repulsed to read a victim’s body was “chopped into souvenir pieces,” but as with English-language newspaper readers, immigrants were reading of black savagery in nearly every weekly paper, so that blacks over time likely became alien to Slovaks’ consciousness of being full citizens deserving of respect.⁸¹

As Perri Giovannucci has astutely noted with regard to the literature of North Africa, discourses of “modern,” “backward,” “savage,” and “civilized” are not neutral descriptors or words that merely entertain. Rather, travelogues and novels (and for immigrants, newspaper reporting) established a hierarchy of peoples, some ready for self-government, others in need of “improvement” or restraint. These hierarchies are on full display in *Slovák v Amerike*, *Jednota*, and *New Yorkský denník* no less than in travelogues from the Maghreb.⁸²

Occasionally some horror at the brutality of lynching broke through the “just the facts” reporting. *Amerikanský ruský vestník* noted, “In the United States, Negroes are murdered in every way possible, and even burned to death from time to time in a few cases on the slightest pretext.” The paper reported that when a mob of 3,000 in Evansville, Indiana, was prevented from breaking into a jail where a black suspect was housed, “the enraged white mob reversed direction in anger, and started attacking every black they could find walking in the area. They laid dynamite under the foundations of black people’s houses and their parishes in town and in the outlying area.” Even the specter of dynamited churches, though, couldn’t arouse a stronger condemnation than “Those people were greatly incited against the blacks, who obviously need some strong defensive society.”⁸³ After three white Texas farmers were lynched, the editor of *Slovák v Amerike* commented, “McKinley needs to look into this. He needs to introduce some culture here, and not in the Philippines.”⁸⁴

Jednota likewise saw fit to comment on the treatment of blacks in the South only when it wanted to critique U.S. imperial policies in the Philippines, asking

why the army was trying to “civilize” Asia when we had a war against our own black citizens in the South.⁸⁵ This was a rhetorical ploy aimed at imperialism, however, and not a denunciation of lynching. Similarly, African American newspapers sardonically commented on the sending of U.S. troops to far-flung places to bring supposed culture to Asians when lynch law persisted in the South. The *Cleveland Gazette* commented on the U.S. participation in the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion in China, “[T]here are plenty of ‘Boxers’ (Red Shirts, Ku Klux, and the like) in the South who are greatly in need of the presence of soldiers.” The *Indianapolis Recorder* suggested it was “a sinful extravagance to waste our civilizing influence upon the unappreciative Filipinos, when it is so badly needed right here in Arkansas.”⁸⁶

With or without comparisons to military expeditions abroad, condemnations of lynching figured much more prominently in black papers than in Slavic ones. Indeed, some of the only times American lynchings were criticized was when the writer wanted to make a point not about the brutality in America, but about some other topic against which he deployed lynchings discursively. This was the case in articles faulting American imperialism—a topic to which we’ll return at greater length in Chapter 5. *Jednota* likewise evoked mob violence against blacks by America’s “indignant people” in a defense of tsarist Russia (often regarded by Slovak editors and priests as the group’s pan-Slavic big brother) from American attacks following pogroms. The point the writer stressed was not that lynchings had to end in Alabama, but that President Roosevelt and other Americans had no business intervening in Russia regarding pogroms, unless they would accept Saint Petersburg’s admonition to “look after American affairs when every second black in the United States was lynched by the indignant people.” Only a defense of Russia and its alleged leniency toward her Jewish subjects spurred this mention of America’s racial sins.⁸⁷

In the case of the Texas lynching reported in *Slovák v Amerike*, perhaps it was because it had been whites who suffered at the hands of the people’s justice, or dissatisfaction with the country’s imperial adventures, that caused the editor to critique the people’s justice. Indeed, the instability of race for new Americans, and the perilous degree to which Nordic immigration restrictionists denounced Southeast Europeans as Asiatic or African, may account for an 1895 report from Denver in which Italians had been mistaken for blacks and lynched. Over time it may be that Slovaks wanted to make sure that they weren’t so disastrously “misidentified.”⁸⁸

At home, though, lynchings of blacks more often passed without editorial condemnation. To be sure, in 1897, *Slovák v Amerike* ended an account of an Arkansas lynching, “Nice granting of justice and acknowledgement of equality according to law!”⁸⁹ As late as 1913 a *Slovák v Amerike* report of a Hot Springs, Arkansas, lynching noted, “A crowd of a thousand citizens” lynched William Norman, black man. “He was hung from a telephone pole in the main business district and hung there for more than an hour. The murdered Norman was shot by more than a hundred

machine guns. This is what passes for justice in civilized America!" Sometimes, then, editorials condemned the brutality of lynching.⁹⁰

After about 1910, however, such denunciations of ritualized violence against blacks grew increasingly rare. More frequent were prosaic accounts such as an item in *New Yorkský denník* recounting the 1920 lynching of Grant Smith from a railroad bridge in Millersburg, Kentucky. "After the lynching, the crowd peacefully departed," the brief item concludes. A similar item relating a burning at the stake of a black man in 1911 in Purcell, Oklahoma, notes the 3,000 citizens involved had doused the victim, Peter Carter, with petroleum and burned him alive. The one-paragraph item concludes, "After the lynching, everything was peaceful."⁹¹ *Slovák v Amerike* likewise on November 24, 1905, featured a story of "Judge Lynch in Mississippi" which noted that in Cohama, Mississippi, "A Negro was this morning lynched by a mass of people." The story typically ended by noting, "When their work was done, the white people peacefully departed."⁹² As in the English-language press, in Slovak translations hanging or burning a black man was not breaking, but rather *restoring*, racialized "peace."

Slovak immigrants were not alone in learning that native-born whites regarded lynching as a sometimes necessary measure to rein in especially heinous crimes by blacks. The Jewish, Czech, Slovak, and other immigrant children attending "The Fellow Citizenship Association" at New York's East Side Settlement House in 1901 heard an address by J. F. Crowell, ex-President of Trinity College, North Carolina, "Is Lynching Sometimes Justifiable?" Settlement houses have long been regarded as one of the main institutions through which new immigrants' children were acculturated to America; such newcomers were tutored through a variety of institutions on the low regard in which African Americans were held in the New World.⁹³

But *Slovák v Amerike*'s Cohama lynching account indicates, too, the instantaneous nature of mass-circulation newspapers' dissemination of such stories, and suggests the complicity of authority figurers such as editors, law-enforcement officials, and town fathers. As here, often an account could state that "this morning" a lynching had occurred; a morning lynching could be arranged in time to make the afternoon paper. Indeed, lynchings had become so ubiquitous by 1905 that, in the mainstream press, they actually could be advertised ahead of time, with headlines such as "lynching to occur." Such advertised lynchings-to-come appeared in Slovak newspapers, too, suggesting for immigrants just how marginalized black Americans had become. This was the case in 1905, when *Slovák v Amerike* reported that the citizens of Gadsden, Alabama, were preparing for a lynching the following day; even in a story of a black criminal apprehended in Moorestown, New Jersey, in 1921, *New Yorkský denník* noted that "it is likely that the black man will be lynched."⁹⁴

When blacks sought to defend themselves from the onslaught of white mobs, Slovak newspapers employed another trope that lumped self-defense in with images of lawlessness and violence, and headlines screamed of "*plemenný boj*"—

"race war." This was the phrase used when Delaware blacks protested lynchings such as White's, or defended themselves in the World War I era in cities such as Chicago, East St. Louis, and Tulsa. In its coverage of the 1919 Chicago riots, *New Yorkský denník* nervously highlighted the military training and weapons stockpiling of black Army veterans, suggesting a race war was in the offing before reporting a few days later that the army had occupied the Black Belt and restored "order."⁹⁵

Within the riot stories appearing in Slovak papers, lurid tales of blacks battling whites in East St. Louis and Chicago offered a sense of blacks as permanent outsiders, illegitimate intruders in these whites-only spaces. Slovak papers had been reporting since at least 1903 on white vigilante mobs cleansing cities such as Rankin, Pennsylvania, and Morgan City, Illinois, of all blacks, perhaps establishing a binary for new immigrants of who was permissible and who unacceptable on one's block.⁹⁶ The very act of black self-defense was recast as criminality; headlines asserting a "race war" established a moral equivalence between sides, with no hint blacks were actually engaged in resistance to lynch mobs. When blacks in Lawrenceville, Illinois, attempted to attend a carnival, they were set upon by a white mob and another "race war" erupted, reported *Slovák v Amerike*. Such coverage sent a message that black use of public space was in itself an outrage whites could be expected to resist.⁹⁷

Immigrant papers, though, also offered a reassuring escape clause from urban disorder. As early as 1903, papers featured suburban real estate ads pitched to Slovaks looking for their idyllic "colony" away from the cities. Graphically illustrating the different fates of blacks and white ethnics for decades to come, one such ad trumpets the beauties of Wallington, New Jersey, a "Slovak colony"—right alongside the macabre and gory account of the torture, mutilation, and lynching of the supposed criminal, George White, in Wilmington. While reading that the crowd hacked off various souvenir body parts until White begged them to kill him and end his agony, immigrants also learned that Slovaks of Passaic (where my great-grandparents lived) could gain the comforts of home ownership. No doubt many readers were appalled by the story of White's torture death. It is likely though that the mobility available to some people and not others was apparent as well. Seeing the normal, naturalized torture of African Americans alongside normal, suburban real estate ads for Slovaks already partially on the way to becoming white Americans suggests that a race-tutoring project existed within the immigrant press. Nothing could spell out more gruesomely for newcomers just who was protected, and who was perpetually vulnerable to being tortured and burned alive (see Figures 2-4 and 2-5).⁹⁸

There was even one notorious Northern lynching in which there's some evidence Slavic immigrants participated. This lynching was related to Slovak newspapers by an eyewitness "reporter," unlike the usual rewrites from English-language wire services. In 1911 in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, a town which was then 40 percent foreign-born, and in which there were already three National Slovak Society

FIGURE 2-4: Map of the “Slovak colony” in Wallington, New Jersey. This invitation to immigrants to avail themselves of semisuburban home ownership appeared right alongside a macabre account of the lynching torture of an African American teenager, George F. White, in Wilmington, Delaware. *Slovák v Amerike*, June 26, 1903, 1.

lodge,⁹⁹ a black man was arrested after robbing a Slovak and then shooting at the police officers called to arrest him. Although the robber had been wounded during his arrest, and was lying handcuffed to a hospital bed, the mostly immigrant crowd broke into the hospital to exact their own vigilante justice. As the “reporter” for *Jednota* related,

With a roar our people on 13 August rushed toward the hospital, where the injured black man lay. . . . And so also there our nation waited, . . . until they succeeded in penetrating the hospital, rushing and taking the black man out of there, even though he was tied in his bed. They carried him out of the hospital, making for a field, where they deposited him on a pile of straw and wood, and then burned him alive. Up to 5,000 people witnessed and took part in this terrible execution. . . . The blacks in our town are afraid of the residents. It’s understandable that no one can possibly approve of the awful act of the crowd. The people don’t have the right to take into their own hands the power of justice. But on the other hand, we must also acknowledge, that the people had reason to be indignant.¹⁰⁰

NIGER LYNČOVANÝ.

Strážny súd ľudu na spáchaný zločin.

Niger odplil, zasiahlil a zavraždil dočrnuku evanj. farára E. A. Bishopa.

Bol bez milosti upálený.

Wilmington, Del., 26. júna. Strážny zločin spáchal niger menom George F. White na 17ročnej dcere pastora E. A. Bishopa. Hrozný tento zločin sám popisoval nasledovne: „Môj boss Woodward poslal ma na pole a keď som tam prišiel, videl som jeho dcéru. Hneď som mal pľúcne boty, že ju zasiahlím; keď som myslel som nemohol ukať, potom prišlo niekoľko mužov. Skoro mi to prišla dcera pastora Bishopa. Priplavil som sa k nej, vlepil ju za krk a hladať som, aby mi dala všetky peniaze, ktoré má. Dievka dala mi spolu 50 centov. Teraz som ju zase vlepil a ona ma pre Boba prepila, aby som jej dalo albu nevrátil. Aby som ju kričal, kričal som ju po hlavu, potom som ju zasiahlil. V tomto stave prešiel som svoj dymel a zasiahlil som ju. Keď prišla zase k povedaniu, pýtal som sa jej, či ma preprieť. Dievka odpovedala, že áno a tá som vytiahol nož a bodol som ju do krku. Druhý raz som sa pýtal „Či má preprieť?“ „Áno“ odpovedala dievka a zase som ju bodol poľom do krku a keď dievka prišla hľadiť nechcela, že ma nepreprieť, zasiahl som ju ešte dve rány nožom do krku, a nechal som ju mŕtvu ležať. — Nelybovali by ste ma, keby som bol bielošom.“ To hovorila bežne táto v ľudskej podobe ešte v okamihu, keď už bol v moci lynčovateľov. V okamihu, v ktorom vedel, že musí zašle hroznou smrtou bežne sa.

„Strielaj!“ a v tom už bálil na bežne dvere, ktoré chodbu od hally oddelovali. Tieto dvere úplne došli a sa 800 chlebov bolo, so dtkom do 3. poschodia, kde ich Black a správca väzenia Messer očakávali. Keď videli, že nigr zachránil nemôžu naznačili lynčovateľom celú; v ktorej sa vrah nachádzal. Mala číslo 18. Také sudy padali na dvere, ktoré ale vypáliť nemohli. Tieto mali, tatý, kompil, kovany mechanizmus, že všetko našle bolo márne. Konečne, keď správca videl, že ľad od svojho dymelu neupustil, vyavetlil im ako dvere otvoril mŕtvu. Teraz už nie neodlučovalo ľad od svojho obeta a hromovým „burá“ vnikli dnu. Všetci kričali „Nepokáľajte ho, nešablite ho, my ho chceme mať živého!“ My ho chceme vráť, odpovedal.

Keď White videl, ako veľké nebezpečenstvo mu hrozí, postavil sa na odpor a prýho, ktorý sa k tomu priblížil, pľugou uderil po hlave. Keď sa hneď svalil. Tu ho ale vtedy pravý obťor sobral do bŕachy, tak že ho tak, že sa mal kŕkať, nemohol a odskočil ho z väzenia von.

Pred väzením čakaly už neprehliadne hŕdy ľadu a všetci vyšli v nadsťuľu, že ho koberce došli v svojom mŕtve a že sa ho kom sa vŕhnuť na jeho pomstu mŕtve.

Ustrelil sa, že ho na tom samom mieste, kde phavý zločin spáchal, spálil. Popravé ale to miesto, neholo dost priestranné, vyhládali si väčšie a tam robili hranu. Sile musíme podozrieť, že ľad keď nigr mal v mŕtve, ubíal všetky svetla na silniach mesta, tak že polícia ani nevedela, kam sa ľad ubierať a kde nigr lynčovať chcel.

Na tejto ceste k popravišti prišiel sa nigr ešte raz ku svojmu zločinu. Na jednom luke postavili hradu a k tejto nigr rúrami a porrami pripúsal. Kým niektorí očakali chrástu, a slamu, pľtoma nigr bili, plivali naň a nadávali. Každý pechal sa ku popravišti. aby

FIGURE 2-5: Headline, “Negro is lynched.” The report of the lynching of George F. White was the lead story this day, and appeared alongside an advertisement offering homes in Wallington, New Jersey, in a prospective “Slovak colony.” *Slovák v Amerike*, June 26, 1903, 1.

A mob of 5,000 (out of a town of barely 10,000) avenging a Slovak immigrant's robbery in a place where 40 percent were foreign-born suggests there had to have been at least some Slovak witnesses to the lynching, if not participants. And the switches in language in *Jednota's* account suggests that in this case immigrants were more than just readers about lynching. The writer of this article from Coatesville begins by describing the perpetrators of the deed as "our people" (*ľud*), then refers to them as "our nation" (*národ*) indicating that in this instance immigrants not only sanctioned, but participated in, the harsh rituals of racialized justice. Or a Slovak affinity with other whites ("our people") is indicated. The "reporter," though, pulls back and recognizes that such lynchings might be in need of condemnation—at which point he refers to the lynchers as a "crowd" (*dravu*), but then concludes that the "people" (again *ľud*) had every reason to be indignant. In this, the accounts from Coatesville were typical, as when *New Yorkský denník* could report that after a 1920 lynching in Millersburg, Kentucky, "the crowd peacefully departed."¹⁰¹ By 1911, to many Slovak "reporters" or readers, the burning alive of a man by "our people" could be conceptualized as a matter of restoring, not breaking, communal justice.

Slovák v Amerike reassured readers that the male and female lynchers were some of Coatesville's most respectable citizens, noting that women had insisted on taking part in the people's justice. And yet as sometimes occurred, the coverage here was an ambivalent mixture of acceptance of mob members' respectability and revulsion at the lynchers' excesses. The paper further reported that "souvenirs" were taken from the black body by both men and women, and then sardonically noted, "Such special women behave this way in the wild, just like the most savage member of humankind in darkest Africa. This is a demonstration of that spreading of American education." African savagery was a common assumption in 1911, but here it was used to stigmatize female participants in a lynch mob. Nevertheless, it was only after blacks demanded the extradition of one of the alleged lynchers, Kennedy Boyd, that the paper subsequently reported fears of a coming race war. (*Amerikanský ruský vjestník* reported "Pennsylvania Permits Lynching," but the story noted of the "bestial lynching" that "three people were arrested," and "more arrests are expected.") Evidently blacks demanding protection of the law could by 1911, in the eyes of immigrants, signify racial tumult. Coatesville residents rallied to support a white man to protect him from the indignity of being tried for a lynching; they remained at best onlookers, if not participants, when a black man was burned alive.¹⁰²

The African American newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, similarly reported in 1917 that "Eight hundred oil field workers—whites, Mexicans, Germans, and Italians—employed in a Houston, Texas, suburb, seized Bert Smith, had a ten-year-old white boy castrate him with a knife, brutally hung him to a tree, riddled his body with bullets, and horribly mutilated it with sledgehammers and butcher knives after cutting it down." At least in lynch mobs, even Italians and Mexicans in Texas could occasionally take part in assertions of the country's caste

system. In this instance the victim had been accused of insulting white women; it's telling that after the lynching he is referred to as "it," again accomplishing the negation of black humanity. One wonders if this is how new immigrants—as mob participants, spectators, and newspaper readers—viewed the situation.¹⁰³

It was only the radical press that raised its voice unambiguously against lynching and other manifestations of racial oppression. *Rovnost ľudu* (*Equality for the People*) extended its calls for justice to include all Americans, and, beyond that, the colonized races of the globe. This paper was the organ of the Slovak Socialist Workers' Section, affiliated with the Workers' (Communist) Party, so this is perhaps not too surprising. In its account, "Two Negroes Lynched," *Rovnost ľudu* exhibited a degree of anger at the crime, and skepticism toward assertions of black criminality excusing lynchings, that is rare in other Slovak and Rusyn immigrant papers:

Hal Winton and an unidentified black person were with savagery grabbed by a mob from the arms of town officials and lynched. Officials reported that he had killed Willey P. Martin, manager of a plantation, but does anyone think that this was actually likely? Indeed, lynching is the worst form of barbarism. This travesty was executed with the complicity of the court, which knew of it, and yet permitted it.¹⁰⁴

Also in 1925, *Rovnost ľudu* sneered at the work of the Baptist Young People's Union. In an article headlined "Good Christians Approve of Lynching," editors sarcastically referred to "Respectable and dear Christians." "They've organized into a 'fine' body, 'the Baptist Young People's Union.' The lynchings of blacks are justifiable, under certain conditions, their 34th national convention has decreed. . . . And these are Christians?!"¹⁰⁵ Again in 1925, the editors lamented that "already as early as 1885" lynchings were known. Still, as scientific socialists, they were sure the declining number of such torture murders indicated that "although the vile business endures, one can see that it's only a matter of time before the land is entirely free of it."¹⁰⁶ The paper also asked in 1926, "How can lynching effectively be stopped?" The article lamented that "for 37 years many people have lost their lives to this bestial custom."¹⁰⁷

Elsewhere *Rovnost ľudu* wrote approvingly of Gandhi's campaign in India¹⁰⁸ and anticolonialism on the world stage. A cartoon in 1924 showed a muscular, rifle-toting man ("the Communist International") confronting a rich, top-hatted "British imperialism," dragging "Egypt" by a rope fastened round his neck. "The Fops of English Capitalism in Egypt Foiled by the Solidarity of the International Proletariat," the cartoon proclaimed. A second cartoon had workers labeled "China," "India," and "Africa" carrying hammer, pickax, and gun greeting marching workers with a red flag. In the middle, a rather oblivious "Kipling" scribbles on a pad, "The East is the East and the West is the West, and never the twain shall meet." A class-conscious cockroach tells him, "You're a liar."¹⁰⁹

Into the 1930s and 1940s, the radical Slovak press continued to denounce lynch law and other manifestations of blacks' Jim Crow subjugation. The *Robotnícky kalendár na rok 1921* (*People's Calendar for 1921*) presented a cartoon of a lynching labeled "The dictatorship of capitalism," an image that persisted into the Popular Front era. The *Robotnícky kalendár na rok 1937* ran a beautiful woodcut illustration of a lynching with the condemnatory caption, "'Democracy' in the South. Black citizens in the Southern states of the U.S.A. until now have been vulnerable to white lynchers, while they haven't united with white workers." As in the English-language publications of the Communist Party, this equation gave little consideration to the racism of white workers, which may have stood in the way of class solidarity. Still, such an unequivocal denunciation of lynch law was found only in leftist Slovak publications. The calendar also ran a feature on boxer Joe Louis and a photo of two hooded Klansmen, commenting, "The treacherous Ku Klux Klan, which secretly organizes throughout the United States against the workers. In 1936 it was revealed that they had committed the murder of many working-class people." The 1939 edition of the calendar ran an article by Richard Wright on "Joe Louis, symbol of freedom." And in 1942, *Ľudový denník*, the Slovak-language edition of the *People's Daily*, ran a cartoon of a soldier destroying a scarecrow labeled "poll tax." "The defeat of the poll tax is the triumph of democracy," ran the caption (see Figures 2-6, 2-7, 2-8, 2-9, and 2-10.)¹¹⁰

Likewise, some socialist Croatians meeting in Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s may have been sympathetic to black lynching victims, as they ordered plays from the *Rebel Arts Bulletin* series, including *Bivouac* by Paul Peters. The *Rebel Arts Bulletin* summarized the play's plot as "A Negro Threatened with Lynching is Saved Through the Militant Action of Friends and Sympathizers." Still, Chicago's Croatian-American Dramatic Society, "Nada," also performed minstrel shows, not just socialist plays of class solidarity, suggesting that developing class identities were sometimes in conflict with developing racial identities.¹¹¹

To be sure, earlier, less militant Slovak newspapers had reported on the ill-fated attempt to pass a federal antilynching bill, the Dyer Bill. But in the 1920s *New Yorkský denník* offered no endorsement of the bill, although in the midst of the debate on the effort to make lynching a federal crime, the paper noted that the country had recently achieved a record number of monthly lynchings, twelve, with ten occurring in Texas. In any case, as the paper reported, Southern Democratic congressmen quickly filibustered the bill into its grave.¹¹²

The antilynching imagery and rhetoric in the socialist press mirrored the line of *Robotnícky kalendár*'s parent organization, the CPUSA, which had spoken consistently against lynching, Jim Crow and other manifestations of white supremacy.¹¹³ Yet even at *Rovnost ľudu*, by 1925 editors were sadly becoming a little too white. An English-language cartoon told of the exploits of "Squire Edgegate." A lawyer tells his black bootlegger client, "Frogeye," "You told me you were innocent, and I was able so to convince the squire—Now what do you think my services were worth?" The stereotypical shiftless, lying bootlegger replies, "Mistah

Diktatúra kapitalistov.

FIGURE 2-6: Antilynching illustrations only appeared in radical Slovak journals. The “workers’ calendar” for 1921 ran a cartoon, “The Dictatorship of Capitalism.” This image may refer to the lynching of Industrial Workers of the World organizers such as Frank Little. *Robotnícky kalendár na rok 1921*, 101.

FIGURE 2-7: Antilynching woodcut illustration. “‘Democracy’ in the South. Black citizens of the southern states of the U.S.A. are vulnerable to lynching by whites, because they haven’t organized with the white working class.” Illustration from *Robotnícky kalendár na rok 1937*, 40. Of course, some of the same white working class—in the South as well as the Midwest—sometimes participated in lynchings, too.

FIGURE 2-8: Photo of members of the Ku Klux Klan. The Communist Party-affiliated *Robotnícky kalendár na rok 1937* said, “The treacherous Ku Klux Klan, which secretly organizes throughout the United States against the workers. In 1936 it was revealed that they had committed the murder of many working-class people.” *Robotnícky kalendár na rok 1937*, 94.

Stone, Ise broke flatter’n a pancake. But ah kin bring you a quart ob dat liquor Ise bin sellin for leben dollars.” Little racial enlightenment exists in this cartoon of black moonshiners. Rather, it fits in the American grain of *Amos ‘n’ Andy* cartoon-strip minstrelsy so prevalent in 1920s English-language dailies. To find it here among calls for an end to lynching and colonialism is lamentable.¹¹⁴

Lamentable, but not surprising. For if they backed “Negro rights,” Slovak socialists did so from afar. In Philadelphia, the Slovak Socialist Workers’ Section met from 1921 at Slovak Hall. And while they might have approved of Gandhi, they drew the line at the clubhouse door. As a social worker noted, “Slovak Hall was available for rental by all other groups, but Negroes were excluded because it was feared that their cleanliness standard would not measure up to that of other groups.” This policy stood, even though the Workers’ president, Ján Kolumbus, was also manager of the hall. Thomas Bell’s Slovak characters cursing “niggers” who had ruined their neighborhood no doubt understood the Philadelphians’ distaste.¹¹⁵

FIGURE 2-9: Photo of Joe Louis, portrayed as a working-class hero and symbol of racial egalitarianism. In *Robotnícky kalendár na rok 1937*, 45.

Slovaks had by 1921 read for years of the hazardous cost of being caught on the wrong side of the color line, and by then also had too much of a stake in behaving like whites. In this way, members of the National Slovak Society, the Greek Catholic Union, and even the Slovak Socialist Workers' Section, learned the racialized etiquette of their new homes.

Many of the men and women congregating at Slovak Hall were by 1921 American-born, naturalized citizens, or, at the very least, resident in this country for decades, and had no doubt naturalized some of the United States's racial mores. The hyper-Americanism and suspicion of all things foreign exhibited during World War I and its immediate aftermath had a chilling effect on individual Slovaks, too, spurring them to conform to American folkways wherever possible. With the Palmer Raids and deportations as fresh as yesterday's newspaper, radical Slovaks in the 1920s had two strikes against them; did they need to court a

Porážka "poll taxu" vít'azstvom demokracie

FIGURE 2-10: Anti-poll tax cartoon in the Slovak edition of the CPUSA's *Daily Worker*. The caption reads, "The defeat of the poll tax is the triumph of democracy." *Ludový denník*, September 21, 1942.

third by serving blacks? Yet the social worker's report cited above suggests that radical Slovaks weren't merely being prudent in barring blacks from their socialist fraternal hall, but acting according to generally accepted "fears" of unclean *Čierny*. Certainly not every Slovak reacted in precisely the same way to calls for 100-percent Americanism or learned the same attitudes regarding race relations all at once. But I suggest that characterizations of blacks in the Slovak press, in

tandem with other cultural productions, contributed to Jim Crow-thinking at Slovak Hall.¹¹⁶

Reading of racial atrocities, especially lynchings, immigrants learned which boundaries not to transgress and how in America one might make a plausible case to pass as white. Lynching accounts in immigrant papers, as in English-language dailies, stressed black licentiousness and brutal criminality, while positing white discipline and restraint even when stepping in to provide a “justice” lenient courts couldn’t deliver. This binary, in tandem with other race coverage, provided new immigrants with a cognitive and moral map of their new homeland coded in race. Slovaks took away from these accounts not just horror at the brutality of vengeful *Amerikansky*, but, more important for their own self-conception, new ways of thinking of who they were and how they fit into their new country.

Most lynchings occurred in places far from where Slovaks settled, although, as noted, in Coatesville there is strong indication that Slavic immigrants reacted to a black usurper in a horrifically similar manner to that of whites in Georgia or Arkansas. But by the first decade of the twentieth century, Slovak newspapers commented on blacks in their midst, first mockingly, but then with alarm and outrage, as blacks “invaded” their neighborhoods, too; ultimately white riots developed against blacks perceived as encroaching on “their” residential space.

And yet race was not an entirely new concept to East Europeans, even if the binaries of American segregation had to be learned. How had ideas of race carried with immigrants from the old country affected their perceptions of “*negrov*”? And how had these notions of race been adapted to the New World context? To begin to answer these questions, we must travel far from the United States, and consider Slavic conceptions of race premigration, back in the homeland.