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Buffalo Soldier, Deserter, Criminal: The Remarkably Complicated Life of Charles Ringo

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Buffalo Soldier, Deserter, Criminal

*The Remarkably Complicated Life
of Charles Ringo*

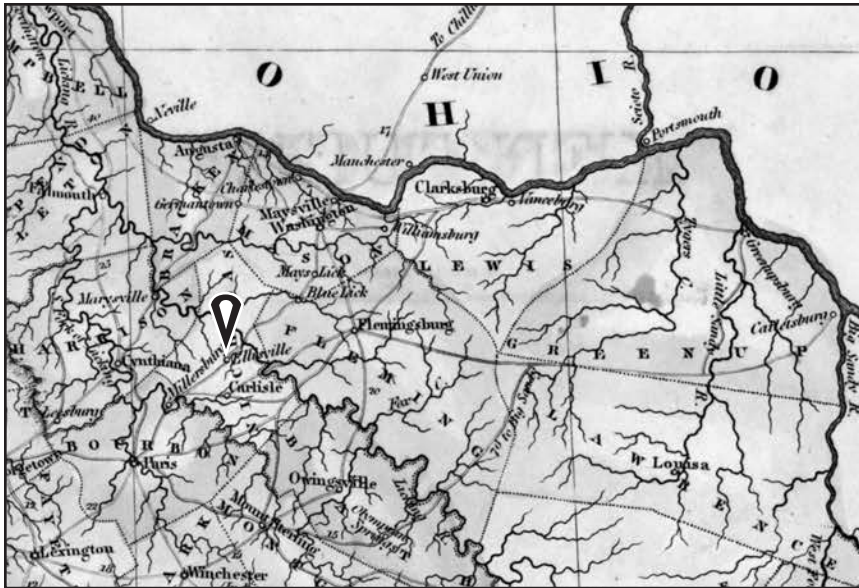
Cicero M. Fain III



Charles Ringo. *Kankakee Daily Gazette*, May 25, 1899.
COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

This case study chronicles the remarkably complicated life of Charles Ringo who served nearly two enlistments as a Buffalo Soldier before deserting and embarking on a life of petty crime. It details his military service, his nomadic occupational life, his marriage, his acquittal of two sets of murders—one of his stepsons in West Virginia, the other of a white married couple in Illinois, and the assistance of white authorities who intervened to save and protect Ringo from the predations of angry mobs and racist courts. It situates Ringo's exploits within the oppositional/alternative nature of African American working-class life, the failure of the American ideal, and its links to black criminality during the Jim Crow era. It contends that like far too many black men today, Ringo's life choices and those of countless other black men and women during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, were largely shaped and defined by proscriptions, barriers, misfortunes, and providence beyond his control. Thus, his decision to desert and eventually live on the edges of society as an itinerant laborer, part-time gambler, and criminal illustrates his desperate quest to survive in a society that was not yet prepared or willing to offer substantive opportunities to African American men and thereby created a slippery and inevitable slope between black respectability and black criminality.¹

Born in 1865, Ringo spent his formative years in the Appalachian foothills of Nicholas County, Kentucky, home to Daniel Boone's last home in the state. Situated between the Appalachian plateau and outer Bluegrass regions, Nicholas County had long been the home of a resident slave population. In 1860, the county's slave population of 1,614 (comprising 14.4 percent of the county's general population) resided among the county's 9,416 white residents and 154 free blacks. On the eve of the Civil War, the county's white population had grown by three times from 1800 to 1860, while its slave population increased five times. This population included Ringo's forebears. Thus, whether members of Ringo's family were sold or not, their status as property must have shaped their actions and responses, as well as that of every other Nicholas County slave.²



Map of the State of Kentucky (1832) with Ellisville marked.

FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Charles Ringo grew up in a new world free of the institution of slavery. The process initiated by the recruitment of black men into the Union army played a critical role in the destruction of the institution. In 1864, over the objections of white Kentuckians, the Lincoln administration approved the enlistment of slaves for military service. Slaves who enlisted became freemen and within a year the federal government had consented to emancipate their dependents as well. Black agency proved not only critical to Union victory but to the demise of slavery in the state. As one historian notes, “With nearly 60 percent of all eligible black males serving in the Union army, slavery had all but ceased to exist in the Bluegrass State well before it was officially ended by the



Camp Nelson, Kentucky was one of the largest training camps for U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War.

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY ARCHIVES

ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment.” Of the 23,000 black Kentuckians who enlisted in the U. S. Army to fight for the Union, and the 10,000 recruits that trained at Camp Nelson, Kentucky, (the third largest recruiting and training depot for African Americans in the nation), nearly 75 U. S. Colored Troops listed Nicholas County as their birthplace, Charles Ringo’s birthplace.³

At the end of the war, tens of thousands of black soldiers faced an uncertain future. Persuaded by the intelligence, valor, and sacrifice of these men, and seeking able bodies to assist their western campaigns to defeat, dispossess, and if necessary, eradicate the Great Plains Indians, the federal government made provisions to open up the regular peacetime army to the participation of black men. In 1866, Congress authorized six regiments—the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st Infantry, which were later consolidated into the 24th and 25th Infantry. Black infantry units frequently fought side-by-side with the black cavalry and until the early 1890s these regiments comprised twenty percent of all cavalry forces on the American frontier. Their adversaries included Chief Victorio, Geronimo, Sitting Bull, Lone Wolf, Billy the Kid, and Pancho Villa.⁴




Buffalo Soldiers, 25th Infantry (1890).

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

On January 6, 1887, Ringo, then a strapping twenty-two-year-old, 5' 8" tall laborer, traveled to nearby Lexington and enlisted in the U.S. Army. Later that month, in what must have been a surreal, exhausting, and exciting journey, he, along with ten other recruits, began an eight-day, 1,665-mile train ride west to Fort Apache, Arizona Territory. There, the eleven privates began their mandatory five-year commitment as members of the 10th Cavalry, Company J, of the famed Buffalo Soldiers, the segregated all-black U.S. Army unit that served during the Indian Wars on the Great Plains.⁵

PRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.




STATE OF Kentucky } ss:
 City or Town of Lexington }

I, Charles Ringo, born in Nicholas Co, in the State of Kentucky, aged Twenty two years and 4 months, and by occupation a Laborer, DO HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGE to have voluntarily enlisted, this Sixth day of January, 1888 as a SOLDIER in the ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, for the period of FIVE YEARS, unless sooner discharged by proper authority: And do also agree to accept from the United States such bounty, pay, rations, and clothing as are or may be established by law. And I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies whomsoever; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the Rules and Articles of War.

Witness
William S. Bates
Levy F. Miller

Subscribed and duly sworn to before me this 6 day of January, A. D. 1888


Charles R. Ringo 
 mark

Frank H. Guinn
 1st Lieut. 10th Cavalry
 Recruiting Officer.

I CERTIFY, ON HONOR, That I have carefully examined the above-named man agreeably to the General Regulations of the Army, and that, in my opinion, he is free from all bodily defects and mental infirmity which would, in any way, disqualify him from performing the duties of a soldier.

Frank H. Guinn
 1st Lieut. 10th Cavalry
 Examining Officer.

I CERTIFY, ON HONOR, That I have minutely inspected the above-named man, Charles Ringo, previous to his enlistment, and that he was entirely sober when enlisted; that, to the best of my judgment and belief, he is of lawful age; and that I have accepted and enlisted him into the service of the United States under this contract of enlistment as duly qualified to perform the duties of an able-bodied soldier, and, in doing so, have strictly observed the Regulations which govern the Recruiting Service. This soldier has Dark eyes, Black hair, Black complexion, is 5 feet 4 1/2 inch high.

Frank H. Guinn 
 1st Lieut. 10th Cavalry
 Recruiting Officer.

(A. G. O. No. 21) ELECTROTYPE

Note.—Scars and Marks found upon the person of a Recruit will be here noted:

Adam Baldwin Nicholas Co Ky

Charles Ringo's enlistment papers, 1887.
 COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

The importance of Ringo's contribution as a Buffalo Soldier should not be underestimated. Comprising twenty percent of the U. S. Cavalry, the troopers of the Ninth and Tenth Regiments achieved an outstanding record on the frontier. Paradoxically helping to bring the white man's law to the frontier in an age of mounting anti-black hostility and violence, they patrolled from the Mississippi to the Rockies, and from Canada to the Rio Grande, sometimes pursuing criminals and Indians into Mexico. Their exploits garnered respect from military foe and friend alike, so much so that their Indian adversaries, intrigued by their short curly hair, and color, referred to them as "Buffalo Soldiers," in homage to the buffalo, a sacred animal. Military service also instilled self-respect. As historian William Loren Katz writes, "In an age in which black men were

viewed as comic or dangerous, and the decent jobs open to them steadily reduced, army life offered more dignity than almost any civilian job available. In the army, they could live surrounded by a lifestyle which cushioned an otherwise lowly status—pride in country, decent clothes, discipline, skill development and loyalty to others.⁶

But life in the remote West and isolated forts was also primitive and harsh. Far from their homes and families, soldiers endured spartan living conditions, the monotony of garrison duty, an oppressive climate, and the ever present danger of military action and campaigns. Moreover, military service was a microcosm of prevailing social conditions. The fact that the Buffalo Soldiers existed as segregated regiments attested to the paternalism and racial prejudice of the U.S. Army, and black soldiers suffered under the *de facto* and *de jure* discrimination present. Yet black soldiers, through their duty, diligence, bravery, and honor, were able to prove their worth and ameliorate, sometimes to a great extent, racial conditions and attitudes on the frontier. Certainly, not every soldier enlisted for noble reasons. In an era in which African Americans faced limited or non-existent employment options, some simply joined because the military offered a steady meal and regular pay.⁷

Whatever the reasons for Ringo's enlistment it is clear that his service exposed him to an exacting environment. In January 1888, Ringo's one-year anniversary at Fort Apache coincided with a debilitating bout of chilblains (also known as *pernio* or *perniosis*), a painful condition of the extremities caused by exposure to cold weather and humidity. Ringo received medical treatment on both feet for twelve days before being released. Although this incident illuminates the environment and inferior material circumstances Ringo operated under, the greater significance of Ringo's affliction lies in the potential latent nature of chilblains. For certain predisposed individuals, chilblains could be a manifestation of more serious medical conditions including autoimmune connective tissue diseases. This possibility is suggestive of larger concerns given Ringo's post-service health issues. In January 1892, at the end of his five-year term of service, Ringo was treated for acute tonsillitis just days before he was honorably discharged.⁸

In October, ten months after his discharge, Ringo reenlisted, and was assigned to Company A of the 10th Cavalry. Now twenty-seven, Ringo's second term of service was marked by more serious medical illnesses and personal developments. In June 1893, he was transferred 1,300 miles north to Fort Assinniboine, Montana. Evidence indicates that Ringo was ill-prepared for his new station, which was



Buffalo Soldier, 25th Infantry
(1884-1890).

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

located approximately forty miles south of the Canadian border. In short order, he confronted the bone-chilling, unforgiving winter weather of northern Montana. In late December, frostbite on both feet incapacitated him for five days. On March 29, 1894, he was hospitalized for what must have been a frequently excruciating 114 days due to snow blindness. On July 20, Ringo deserted.⁹

Given that no service records exist for Regular Army enlisted men prior to World War I, we can only speculate with regard to the physical environment, general deportment, specific causes, and racialized circumstances of Ringo's service at Fort Assinnisboine. Whatever the compelling factors, it is clear that the conditions encountered and endured at the fort dramatically shifted his life trajectory. It is noteworthy that in April 1887, four months after his arrival at Fort Apache, Ringo's commanding officer assessed his character as "good." Thus, his decision to desert takes on added resonance. In the aftermath of his decision, the order, sense of purpose, and camaraderie that had characterized his military duty vanished. Gone also was the status, educational opportunities, and pay attendant to that service. Now he was just another fugitive. For the next several months, whether purposeful or nomadic (or a combination of both), he traveled the rails east. Sometime in late 1894 or early 1895, he arrived in Huntington, West Virginia, as one of the thousands of black migrants who moved into the city and the state during the decade.¹⁰

Founded in 1871 as a trans-shipment station for the embryonic Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, and situated adjacent to the Ohio River in the southwestern corner of the state, Huntington was a rapidly growing urban-industrial city by the time Ringo arrived. In 1890, it was the state's second largest city after Wheeling, and possessed the state's second largest black population, behind Charleston, the state capital. That year, reflecting the general influx of migrants, Huntington's total population was 10,108, representing a 218.5 percent growth rate between 1880 and 1890, but the city's black population increased nearly threefold to 1,231. Sizable black populations could also be found in the urban-industrial towns of Ashland, Kentucky, and Ironton, Ohio, located downriver from Huntington. Huntington and the surrounding area offered these itinerant laborers ample opportunities for day or long-term employment, socialization and recreation with other working-class blacks, a growing black residential population, and a fairly agreeable racial climate. It also offered opportunities for vice and criminality.¹¹

Whether Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, or smaller cities like Huntington or Charleston, most American cities of the era confronted the exigencies of black migrant influx and crime. Cities like Huntington also confronted the creation and expansion of red light districts. A number of black-owned businesses could be found in Huntington's commercial core, including black-owned saloons, frequently to the consternation of city officials. These haunts, found in the

tenderloin district, catered to and employed blacks and whites, including women of both races, a circumstance that inflamed the ire of some city council members and white merchants intent upon elevating the positive attributes of the city as well as reining in “negro saloons” and “crap joints.” The local press portrayed these black-owned saloons, such as the “Loop de Loop,” the “Muddy Duck,” and the “Honky Tonk,” as “notorious” and “infamous” homes to crime, vice, and prostitution. Patrons undoubtedly included many black laborers and those categorized as vagrants, loiterers, and transients by city authorities.¹²

Like many, their lives principally revolved around the hub of what historian Nikki Taylor, in her book on black Cincinnati’s riverfront community, labels “the black shadow community,” which existed in the streets and neighborhoods of industrial towns and cities of the era. This subeconomy existed within a black working class social matrix that sharply contrasted with middle-class life. Frequented by black and white, the respectable and disreputable, these communities offered a socio-cultural alternative to life under Jim Crow era proscriptions and middle-class models. Life within these communities differed from the organized and institutional forms of resistance and self-determination employed by the larger black community of the era. Here lived, as Taylor asserts, “Many of the same people who occupied the lowest economic and social rungs of society who also occupied the lowest moral rungs because of their involvement in illegal, illicit, or otherwise unsanctioned activity. And because many of them persisted in such activities, they were considered ‘Pariahs, Sudras, outcasts’ that inhabited the shadows of Cincinnati society.” The clientele of these establishments occupied the lowest economic rungs of the occupational ladder, no matter the race or gender.¹³

Like Cincinnati, Huntington’s shadow community offered opportunities for black working people to carve out “social space free from the watchful eye of white authority or, in a few cases, the moralizing of the black middle class.” As one authority notes about Atlanta, “Domestic laborers and others escaped from their workaday worries through dance in ‘jook joints’ and settings also referred to as ‘dives.’ These were among the most (re)creative sites of black working-class amusements at the turn of century, where old and new cultural forms, exhibiting both African and European influences, were syncretized.” These social spaces, historian Robin D. G. Kelley asserts, “constituted a partial refuge from the humiliations and indignities of racism, class pretensions, and wage work, and in many cases they housed an alternative culture that placed more emphasis on collective values, mutuality, and fellowship.” Patrons undoubtedly included many black laborers who, trapped at the bottom of the city’s and region’s racialized occupational structure, shifted between periods of employment and unemployment. While most survived by taking jobs as day laborers or enduring the menial tasks of long-term employment in the city’s burgeoning

urban-industrial workplaces, others engaged in a subeconomy that included gambling, prostitution and petty theft. This characterization of black working-class life accurately embodied Ringo's lifestyle.¹⁴

When and where Ringo met his wife, Effie Finley, is unknown, but they likely met within the "hidden spaces" of Huntington's tenderloin district. In 1895, Ringo, then employed as a porter, roomed with laborer Tommy Epps in a boarding house at 638 Third Avenue. Located a short walk from the city's commercial core and tenderloin district, the house afforded the men ample opportunity to frequent the establishments as well as walk the neighborhoods, alleys, and sidewalks in the pursuit of recreation, adventure, vice, and romance. Ringo's employment as a porter afforded regular opportunities for him to travel throughout the city's commercial district. Like the web of relations that linked Ringo to those engaging in nocturnal exploits and entertainment, his work in the streets alongside other porters, hod carriers, draymen, hostlers, and teamsters, linked him to many of these same people as well as a variety of known and unfamiliar individuals within a daytime occupational web of relations. Thus, Ringo would have been well positioned to utilize and exploit his social contacts from both cultural milieus to improve his financial, romantic, and criminal prospects in "The Streets." In fact, though speculative, it is not inconceivable that Ringo, or others linked to him, might have operated as a "go-between" for the city's prostitutes and their customers. In his study of the black and white sex districts in Chicago and New York during the early twentieth century, historian Kevin J. Mumford identifies "the go between[s] of vice" as "taxi drivers, doormen, and porters who earned money on the side for connecting prospective customers with prostitutes." Whether they attended church on Sundays or not, by Friday, like single men with money in their pockets everywhere, the nighttime lives of black laborers would have operated around a fluid web of social relations cultivated during both their nighttime and daytime exploits and activities.¹⁵

On February 26, 1895, Ringo's aspirations reached fruition with his marriage to recently widowed Effie Finley in Huntington. Born Effie Jones to Garrison Jones and Sallie Ferguson, the then thirty-two-year-old Ironton born homemaker of Canadian descent was a single mother of three boys—Lewis, 16, William, 14, and Charles, 9. The death of Finley's hostler husband, Samuel, earlier that year was merely the first in a series of tragedies to befall the family that year. Married since the age of sixteen, his death left her and her three sons without a father and provider, exacerbating the formidable challenges and constraints before her.¹⁶

Ringo's and Finley's wedding represented the historical importance of the black church to black cultural development, the moral and religious framework that the pair embraced and aspired to operate within, and a refutation of the assumption of the black middle class that they lacked proper values. Importantly, given his recent travails and choices, the marriage also signaled and solemnized

Ringo's transition into "manhood." This, historian Carter G. Woodson argued, was characterized by "The indisposition to labor... overcome in a healthy nature by instinct and motives of superior forces, such as love of life, the desire to be clothed and fed, the sense of security derived from provision for the future, the feeling of self respect, the love of family and children and the convictions of duty." If Ringo sought to emulate and embody these qualities through his pledge, perhaps unsurprisingly, he failed miserably.¹⁷

Whether a marriage of convenience, love, or something in-between, evidence indicates the union was replete with animosities, grievances, and complications from their previous and contemporary circumstances. Yet, it is impossible to ascribe sole blame to either party for this development. In truth, like untold thousands of black people across Jim Crow America, Ringo and Finley, each in their own way, were locked in an existential straightjacket of race, class, and occupational restraints. This reality does not remove their choices from the record, but it does humanize them.

If records are difficult to find for black working-class men during the Jim Crow era, they are nearly impossible to find for black working-class women, especially those who engaged in criminal behavior. Thus, like that of black working-class women nationally, we lack the transcripts to the "interior" of Finley's life, yet we can ascribe certain truths. As historian Kali Gross notes, "Not only would she have been barred from the opportunities presented by expanding industries, but also, even in areas of employment she found most degrading, she would have faced competition and marginalization. Furthermore, domestic service played a central role in their poverty and alienation and fundamentally influenced their crime." What is known beyond the facts stated above is that, whether a long-term issue or a recent coping mechanism, Finley possessed a drinking problem, a predilection for petty crime, and a tangled relationship with petty criminal and Afro-Huntingtonian, Beverly Blake. While the exact nature of their personal relationship is unclear, what is known is that she was Blake's housekeeper and that this provided the fuel that fed a combustible rivalry between Blake and her husband.¹⁸

Within weeks of the marriage, both Ringo and Finley were accused of various misdemeanor crimes. Moreover, Ringo's arrest for the robbing of a post office in Proctorville, Ohio, a federal offense, generated considerable notoriety. Most serious, however, was Ringo's arrest, one month after his marriage, for the shocking crime of drowning Finley's two youngest sons shortly after the post office theft. Reported missing since March 8, mere days after Ringo's and Finley's marriage, the bodies of both boys were retrieved from the Ohio River two months after their disappearance, with one reportedly found "buried in the sand." In short order, Ringo was quickly convicted in the court of public opinion, targeted as the prime suspect by authorities, and arrested.¹⁹

Not surprisingly, at the preliminary hearing held on March 27, Ringo maintained his innocence. Before its postponement, Effie's appearance at the trial and the naming of her husband as the perpetrator of the murders prompted an emotional outburst from Ringo. As one newspaper noted, "Ringo fell at her feet, wept bitterly and pleaded with her to not forsake him during his trouble." Whether Ringo convinced his wife or not, the writer concluded, "The scene was very touching."²⁰

At the formal trial held ten days later, in what one newspaper described as "an all-night session," Ringo was acquitted of the kidnapping and murder of his two stepsons. Benefiting from the introduction of "some sensational evidence... produced at the last moment," he walked out of the courtroom a free man. In the space of a few days, the newspaper continued, he had successfully implicated "several other parties in the crime." So much so, a newspaper assured that "other arrests will now follow."²¹

That proclamation proved to be false, however, and Ringo was rearrested in mid-May for the crimes. Incredibly, he escaped the officers and somehow avoided apprehension in the city. He was eventually apprehended on a train in Point Pleasant, West Virginia, some forty-five miles west of Huntington, just as a "white tramp was cutting the handcuffs off the negro's wrists." His attempted escape and capture reignited the public's outrage and anger over the crime. Only a "detail of half a dozen police officers" and the quick thinking of the police and constables saved him from a lynch mob of two thousand people that had gathered at the railroad station upon his return to Huntington. Though the paper fails to mention the presence of any blacks in the crowd, given the nature of the crime and Ringo's working class and itinerant status, their presence cannot be ruled out. In truth, if guilty, Ringo had committed an unspeakable crime, one that crossed racial lines and one no black could countenance. This last fact left him truly vulnerable and alone. Perhaps this helps explain his attempted escape.²²

The attempted lynching of Ringo merits deeper examination. While the size of the assemblage gathered in Huntington was probably an exaggeration, the fact that a mob of significant size (and perhaps interracial composition) gathered to lynch a black man for alleged crimes committed against black children complicates the prevalence of historically sanctioned extrajudicial white-on-black violence. Because the overwhelming majority of lynchings claimed black victims who died at the hands of whites, scholars have generally constructed lynching as a phenomenon based on the social division of race and caste, or economic causes. Most studies of lynching have identified certain characteristics that victims of mob violence shared. Historian Edward Ayers noted that lynching affected mostly "strange niggers," blacks who lacked even other blacks to defend them. Ringo's status as an itinerant laborer and relative stranger in the town positioned

him as such an “outsider,” unprotected by friends or relations who could vouch for his character or physically intercede on his behalf. His isolation was especially important given that although lynchings required, as Philip Dray notes in his study, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*, “tremendous organization,” most “were spontaneous events.” W. Fitzhugh Brundage’s study of white-on-white violence in Virginia and Georgia also confirms the vulnerability of outsiders to mob violence. By way of contrast to the black experience, Brundage characterizes whites who faced lynching as men who had “earned the enmity of their neighbors by being bullies, incorrigible adulterers, criminals, drunks, or opium addicts.” In other words, “people the community viewed not only as criminals but also as incurable deviants”—individuals with a history of disruptive behavior.²³

After forty-five days in jail, Ringo was acquitted of the murder of William. After another six-month jail stay awaiting the outcome of the second trial for the murder of Charles, he was again set free when, remarkably, one of the twelve jurors voted for acquittal. Interestingly, Effie’s testimony on his behalf also helped exonerate Ringo of the murders, but her testimony against him would play a key role in his conviction for the post office robbery. Perhaps that is why her misdemeanor charges were dismissed. This is a fascinating development given that Ringo, “unable to keep her secret any longer,” had testified during the second trial that he had seen his wife murdering the boys. That no killer was ever convicted for the murders of the two boys speaks as much to the nature of the deaths and the limits of forensic science of the era as to the shadowy world Ringo, Finley, and Blake inhabited.²⁴

The deaths of the Finley boys produced an existential chasm from which Effie and her oldest son Lewis could not escape. By the fall of 1895, the all-encompassing trauma unleashed by the tragic events began to take its toll. To cope, Effie found increasing solace in the bottle while Lewis turned to crime. In September he was arrested for striking L. Thompson over the head with a club during a crap game and taking \$5 from him during a brawl. While the other participants were fined and released, Lewis garnered his first felony charge. To what extent this episode proved defining or innocuous is speculative, for what is known is that by Christmas of the next year Lewis had become a petty criminal. Within one weekend, he was arrested for the assault and robbing of Sam D. Hayslip as well as the attempted theft of a fifty-pound keg of lard from a packing house on Third Avenue. Not unlike the staggering and disproportionate number of black males in “the era of mass incarceration” today, Lewis confronted the criminal justice system. His confession to the Hayslip robbery failed to stem the tide and he was indicted for both crimes. Six months later, he boarded a “special coach for prisoners” to the gothic, forbidding gates of the West Virginia State Penitentiary in Moundsville.²⁵

Concurrent with Lewis's sojourn, Ringo served two years in the Ohio Penitentiary in Columbus, Ohio, for the post office burglary. A model prisoner whose habits were "moderate" and education "common," Ringo was even allowed to leave and enter the prison while discharging various duties for the warden. Released without incident in February 1898, Ringo was promptly rearrested on the old charge of the murder of the children and returned to Charleston, West Virginia, where he faced not murder charges but one for a burglary in the city prior to the murder of the stepchildren. It is noteworthy that the prison records describe Ringo's left arm as "deformed," with his left hand "badly deformed."²⁶



Ohio Penitentiary
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Fortune once again smiled on Ringo though. While awaiting the decision of the grand jury in the Charleston jail, nine prisoners escaped during a delivery. Perhaps confident in his innocence, perhaps assuming a soldier's posture, Ringo stayed rather than join the jailbreakers. Shortly afterwards, convinced that Ringo was a victim of a conspiracy, the state's attorney provided a \$500 straw bond, thus securing his freedom. By this time, Effie had been granted a divorce. Ringo returned to Huntington for two months before being advised to leave for the West "as the Finley woman again had him under her influence" and would eventually get him in trouble.²⁷

Following that advice, Ringo once again took to the rails, making his way to Indianapolis, Chicago, and Milwaukee, before securing employment thirty-five miles west of the city at a summer hotel in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. After it closed for the season, he headed back to Indianapolis, where he hoped to acquire employment at a winter hotel. Instead, he landed a job with a carnival passing

through St. Anne, Illinois, during the summer and fall of 1898. Whether Ringo's travels were compelled by a desire to start over, the search for gainful employment, or constituted an attempt to locate fertile ground for his criminal activities, another reason is suggested by the presence of vagrancy codes that many municipalities, including Huntington, Chicago, and Milwaukee, enforced. Primarily used to restrict or eject the indigent, homeless, unwanted, or potential offenders, these "ugly laws" also attached stipulations to rid the streets of the "unsightly and/or deformed." Such laws also frequently applied to railroad travel, in which the conductor's discretion determined one's eligibility and legitimacy for travel. Thus, not only was Ringo potentially subject to *de facto* and *de jure* discrimination based on his race, gender, itinerant status, and criminal background, but he also was forced to confront the reality that his physical deformity regularly identified him as an undesirable and a threat. In effect, Ringo lived in a world in which social relations were defined by a racial and aesthetically encoded social hierarchy. Ringo's deformity compelled a continual and heightened evaluation of his environment and place because it defined him beyond race and class. There is little doubt then that his deformity also impacted his psychological well-being, self-esteem, and sense of manhood. In effect, Ringo's deformity complicates W.E.B. DuBois' seminal concept of a "double consciousness" in which African Americans possessed a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." In the end, Ringo's status begs the question of whether he actually possessed a triple consciousness--one American, one black, and one deformed Other?²⁸

While employed at the county fair, Ringo became acquainted with a white stable hand who worked for Carrie Watson, a wealthy Chicago woman who lived on a farm in the adjacent town of Kankakee. He directed Ringo to contact her and provided the name of Watson's "nigger" to facilitate matters. Ringo served as her hostler for several days before moving on. We can only conjecture at his nighttime activities. However, his travels stimulated interest from the locals. In late October he was arrested for robbery in a nearby town and jailed from October 31 to January 16, before being acquitted. Ultimately, a stint in one local jail would save his life.²⁹

On the morning of October 19, 1898, forty-five-year-old Emile Chiniquy and forty-three-year-old Victorine, his wife of twenty-three years, were found slain in the ground floor bedroom of their St. Anne, Illinois, home. Referred to as the "Most Brutal Slaughter in The History of Kankakee County," the murder stunned the sleepy village. French Canadians by birth, the Chiniquys, were prominent white citizens of St. Anne, who possessed one of the finest houses, if not the finest house in town. Located five blocks west of the train station, their two-story frame house stood on some of the most important land in the village: the

southeast corner of Station and Sixth streets was the site of the town's first Catholic church, a two-story log structure erected in 1852 by Emile's uncle, Charles. Mrs. Eliza Marcotte, who lived on the Chiniquy farm, discovered the bodies of the Chiniquys in the couple's bedroom on the ground floor of their house. They were probably killed the night before while their three sons—Rudolph (Duffy), 20, Oscar, 12, and Emile, 9, and Marcotte's twelve-year-old daughter, who was spending the night—slept upstairs. By all accounts, it was a ghastly scene. The skulls of the Chiniquys were chopped and crushed by repeated blows from an axe, hatchet, or cleaver. Mr. Chiniquy was a very muscular man, but there were no traces of a struggle. Evidence indicated that the murderer or murderers had entered by a window, where a knee print was found in the ground below.³⁰

Initially, it was supposed the perpetrator(s) were discovered by the Chiniquys while robbing the house. Emile, who after migrating with his father to St. Anne in 1867, and subsequently marrying the former Victorine Bourgeoise, was a wealthy, retired butcher and farmer who might have been expected to have a considerable sum of money at home. In fact, one evening a few months earlier a thief wandered through the house while the family was at church, taking Mrs. Chiniquy's watch, some silver teaspoons her grandmother had brought from Canada, and two of her ruby hatpins. That both the Kankakee jail and the Illinois Eastern Hospital for the Insane were built in the late 1800s in Kankakee undoubtedly exacerbated Mrs. Chiniquy's concerns over her and her children's safety. In fact, that fear had compelled Emile to close his meat market in Kankakee and move back to St. Anne in July of 1898. Tragically, Mrs. Chiniquy's fears were realized that dark, cold, and rainy autumn night.³¹

Evidence indicates authorities bungled the case. By the time the bloodhounds were brought in from Darlington and Chalmers, Indiana, so many people had tramped around the house and yard that no discernable scent could be obtained. Given the heinous nature of the crime and the stature of the victims, apprehending the murderer or murderers became the top priority for the police and local authorities. The testimony of carpenter and detective Alfred Poltras, Emile's "intimate friend," added additional impetus when he stated that the footprints of the thief of the watch and the murderer were "identical." Interestingly, two days after the crime, Tennis Beaupre, collector for the Kankakee Order of Foresters and a neighbor of the Chiniquys, testified to the police that he suspected the eldest son, twenty-year-old Rudolf Chiniquy, as the perpetrator. Beaupre explained that the couple carried a \$3,000 insurance policy between them, with the husband's worth \$1,000 and the wife's \$2,000, and that was the reason for the murders. Certainly, the fact that their adult son failed to hear his parents being savagely murdered downstairs defies logic.³²

Yet, three months after the crime, no suspect had been captured, and local citizens were increasingly agitated by the lack of progress. Certainly, Marcotte, who spoke little English, hampered investigators. Stymied in their investigation,

the police offered initially a \$700 reward and then a \$1,000 reward in February of 1899 for any information leading to the arrest and conviction of the individual or individuals found guilty of committing the murders. The police department also enlisted the services of a detective agency out of Chicago. Referred to as a “Jewish Detective Agency,” and subsequently dubbed the “Goldfon Gang” (after its leader, Louis Goldfon) by the press, the group of five Russian Jewish immigrants—four men and one woman—was not so much an agency as a cadre of opportunists looking to collect the reward.³³

Five months following the discovery of the murders, after an exhaustive search in which authorities reported to have “traced to Mississippi, from there to Old Mexico, back again to the state, and to Chicago,” a suspect was apprehended. On March 23, 1899, African American Charles Sidney Ringo, “alias Sidney Johnson, alias Chicago,” described in the local newspaper, “as a cripple-armed negro...who was a gambler and thug and known to carry a weapon which he had no compunction to use,” was captured in Mattoon, Illinois, located 125 miles south of Kankakee. Although no direct evidence linked Ringo to the crime, nor could any established motive be ascribed, the circumstantial evidence was strong: Ringo had been in the vicinity of the house on the night of the murders, he had a criminal record, including the acquittal of the murder of his two stepchildren, he was a transient in the town, and he was a solitary black man in a white community. These facts were incontrovertible and enough to convict Ringo in the court of public opinion.³⁴

On Friday, March 24, 1899, a crowd of 1,000 awaiting the arrival of the train into the Kankakee depot wanted Ringo’s head, one way or another. This was no idle threat. Mindful of the keen public interest in the case and the potential for extra-legal justice, authorities employed additional men to ensure Ringo’s safe arrival to the city jail. Irrespective of the flimsy evidence against him from that point on, Ringo awaited, like hundreds, perhaps thousands of black men throughout American history who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, the conviction he surely knew was coming.³⁵

The next day, the foreman of the coroner jury read the following statement: “We, the jury find that Emil Chiniquy came to his death by means of certain wounds inflicted on said Emil Chiniquy on the 17th day of October, 1898, by one Sidney Ringo, and other persons to the jury unknown. And we recommend and order that the said Sidney Ringo be held to the grand jury of Kankakee County without bail...” After being returned to his cell, Ringo awaited the inevitable ruling of the grand jury.³⁶

Although portrayed as ill-tempered, violent, devious, and imprudent by witnesses and the press, one Huntington newspaper challenged this depiction of Ringo, noting, “With all his reputation as a bad man Ringo was admired for possessing an education far in advance of that of most of his race. He wrote a beautiful hand, was accurate at figures, read Shakespeare and discussed the

political economy.” While one cannot rule out journalistic embellishment and even fabrication in this description, it portrays a man of education, refinement, and worldliness, totally at odds with the brutish and slavish stereotypes that haunted and denigrated black men of the era. Further, one could ask why a newspaper would describe a hardened criminal and indicted murderer in such a sympathetic manner, if it were not the case. In effect, though it mattered little to the current proceedings, Ringo seemed to be much more than what met the eye.³⁷

Ringo’s exceptionality mattered little to area residents. No one cared to consider what would compel a small time, petty criminal to suddenly and savagely commit murder. “Witnesses” to Ringo’s complicity began to appear. In early May, the “sensational evidence of the day was given” when two Chicago men swore to overhearing Ringo tell a black man and a white man that he committed the crime, was paid for it, but was still owed \$180 “for the job.” It is not known whether any discussion of

THE KANKAKEE DAILY GAZETTE, THURSDAY, MAY 25, 1899.

THE RINGO TRIAL.

Investigating the Double Murder.

Sensational Evidence. Men Heard Ringo Say He Did It.

The sensational evidence of the day was given this afternoon when two Chicago men swore to having heard Ringo tell another colored man and a white man that he committed the murder and got paid for it, but that \$180 was still due him for the job.

GASPER MARCEAU.
Direct Examination: Son-in-law of Chiniquy; saloon keeper in St. Anne; live next to Chiniquy; went home about 11 o'clock; did not notice any lights at Chiniquy's; heard no noises; saw nothing unusual; went directly to bed, and went to sleep soon; went to the saloon at 5 o'clock the next morning; went to the house when I heard of the murder; opened the safe; nothing was wrong there; Ringo came into saloon day of the murder about 11 o'clock in the forenoon; he came back about 2:30, and took a glass of

went through his room; the two smaller boys were in bed; Emil slept on a cot which projected out so as to prevent my door from closing; my daughter slept with me; went to bed toward 10 o'clock; Duffy was still awake; did not hear any noise during the night; woke about 5 o'clock; train woke me; went to sleep again; the 6 o'clock bell next woke me; heard no noise in the house; went down stairs at 7:15; had to go through Duffy's room; Duffy and the small boys were there in bed; they did not wake; found the kitchen door unlocked; when I came back into the house knocked on Chiniquy's bedroom door; knocked twice, then prepared for church; knocked again, then called Duffy; I said, "Duffy, get up!" called once only; I said "Get up, I cannot wake your folk;" do

ons; Chiniquy did not have much money on hand; examined the kitchen window, one pane of glass was gone; saw it on the grass; saw a flower pot near the window, inside; it had the impression of a man's knee; it was made from the inside.

Cross Examination: The door of the bedroom was closed when we went into the house; Duffy opened the door and I went in first; remained ten or fifteen minutes; one of the little boys came down into the room and began to scream; Duffy said to him, "Don't cry, what's the use of crying?" the glass from the kitchen window was broken when I saw it; it had been held in by tacks.

Re-direct: We call it 12 miles to St. Anne, it takes from one hour and thirty minutes to two hours to drive to Kankakee.

D. E. MEYERS.
Direct: Was saloon keeper in St. Anne. Saw Ringo Oct. 17 in my saloon about 11 o'clock a. m. He drank some; called for a sheet of paper and asked me if I knew the Wilsons. Asked "Is that man up there a farmer?" (meaning Mr. Marceau). Ringo was in four or five times. He had on a pair of blue overalls with a bib. They seemed new; had on a stiff hat; coat was dark. Saw him about 2 o'clock in afternoon.

Cross-Examination: Do not know for sure whether this is the man I saw; stayed in my place but a short time. Wilsons are colored people.

JOSEPH MOMBLEAU.
Direct: Was in Marceau's saloon Oct 17, about 11 o'clock. Ringo was the man I saw.

Cross-Examination: No one else in the saloon when I went in; my boy 16 years old was with me.

FRANK MOMBLEAU.
Direct: Went into Marceau's saloon with father; saw a colored man there; saw him twice; when I saw the colored man second time it was in front of our house, he was going west; asked for Marceau's house; directed him to seventh house, which was Chiniquy's; he then went on west; Chiniquy's house was west; he walked slowly; he had on a pair of blue overalls with a bib and a stiff black hat.

for a horse for Carrie. V asked where Gasper stayed.

Cross-Examination: Do Ringo was the man; testified before coroner's jury that killed the man.

EDWARD CONY.
Direct: Live 1/2 mile west Anne depot near the road; rigs passing house swiftly west at 2 o'clock in the n exactly. This road runs up west line of the vacant lot Chiniquy's.

Cross-Examination: Her clock strike 2 as rigs passed were two rigs probably three rods apart; not unusual rigs to go by at that time. T it some one going after doct

HENRY STUART.
Direct: Work in Kankakee Mayette. Lived with Bob Oct 17; Ringo roomed the of the time. Saw Ringo before murder, said he was go St. Anne to hunt a job. St between 9 and 10 in the m He wore a black suit, blue and bib. He left for St. A tween 9 and 10 a. m; next a on Schuyler avenue between 6 p. m. Saw him between 2 that evening, and he asked wake him between 9 and 1 night; told him I could not as I would not be there. Si next morning between 7 Bob sent for me. Ringo w shirt; Ringo remained her Friday; said he was going for two or three days.

Cross-Examination: Ri that night he had sprained k; walked lame next day; same clothes he is wearing. Ringo wanted to change clothes; he took off a black examined it closely; knew suspected; saw no blood in it; that morning Ringo's were dry, no mud on them.

ROBERT WEANS.
Direct: Ringo stopped place evening of Oct. 17 night he left the house about never saw him with overalls got up that morning at 5 doors were locked.

Cross-Examination: W



beer; said he had come after a col not remember whether I called loud Carrie Watson had sent him to buy, or softly; Duffy said, "I shall go,"

Newspaper account of Ringo’s murder trial in Illinois (1899).

COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

consequence or formal cross-examination was held on the central question of how a deformed man, whose left arm was nearly incapacitated, could have committed a crime of such physicality, or what motive might have compelled him to commit two murders of such brutality. Yet, unsurprisingly, Ringo was indicted for the crime.

Extraordinarily, on May 25, the trial came to an inglorious end when, upon being challenged with irrefutable evidence proving Ringo's innocence, the state's attorney admitted to being deceived by the Jewish detectives, the infamous Goldfon Gang, the state's key witnesses. Remarkably, at the eleventh hour, the sheriff of Danville, Illinois, appeared before the court, and presenting a ledger to substantiate his claim, testified that on the night of the crime Ringo was in his jail, having been arrested on a burglary charge. On that astounding note, the detectives, save for the woman, who escaped out a back window of the courthouse, were arrested on charges of perjury. The remaining four were sentenced to serve time in the Illinois State Prison in Joliet. Upon his release, Ringo was extradited back to West Virginia to face his burglary trial. To this day, like the Finley murders, the Chiniquy murders remain unsolved.³⁸

Although adopted by their married sister, the former Laura Chiniquy and her husband, Gasper Marceau, who lived next door to the family home, the Chiniquys' children would endure further hardship. Instead of naming their children as beneficiaries, both Emile and Victorine possessed insurance policies payable to each other. After a short time, Rudolph's start-up automobile manufacturing business failed. Two months after the murders, the Chiniquy household goods were auctioned off and the house closed up. Tragically, in an eerie coincidence, a year after Ringo's acquittal, Emile Jr., the youngest son of the Chiniquys, drowned in a pond not far from the family home. Unable to endure the memories and pain any longer, Rudolph left St. Anne and moved to California to start life anew. For many years the house remained unoccupied, with the town's children afraid to walk past on their way to and from school.³⁹



Illinois State Penitentiary, Joliet.

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In July 1899, Ringo was convicted of the burglary of a Charleston, West Virginia, home and sentenced to two years in the West Virginia State Penitentiary, located in Moundsville, approximately twelve miles from Wheeling. Upon entering the facility, Ringo might have been surprised by the large number of black convicts returning his gaze as he was escorted through the South Hall, the prison's minimum-security wing. In contrast to Illinois, where blacks comprised 1.8 percent of the total population and 18.1 percent of the prison population at Joliet Correctional Facility in 1900, blacks comprised 53 percent of the penitentiary's North and South Hall population (402 of 756 inmates) at a time in which they totaled 4.7 percent of West Virginia's total population. In short order, Ringo arrived at cell 4F6, his home for the next two years, and one of the 224 cells located in the section. There, remarkably, he served his time in close proximity to his former stepson, Lewis Finley. Convicted of grand larceny in a Huntington courtroom, Effie Finley's twenty-year-old son occupied cell 3F6, perhaps also a victim of the same forces that shaped Ringo's choices. While we can only speculate on the nature of their first meeting and remaining encounters, there is little doubt that their shared histories would have dramatically impacted their exchanges.⁴⁰

Discharged in the spring of 1901, Ringo was arrested that summer in the Wheeling, West Virginia home of his former cellmate, evidently seeking revenge for some unnamed transgression. Whatever his grievance, his crime garnered an



West Virginia Penitentiary, Moundsville, West Virginia.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

additional two years in the West Virginia Penitentiary. Upon his release, Ringo once again sought communion with the rails, at some point traveling south and settling in Memphis. In 1905, Ringo, now thirty-eight, having endured a decade of tumult, much of it arguably self-inflicted, was employed as a cook in a Memphis, Tennessee restaurant. There, confined to the kitchen and separated from the customers who most likely knew little about his history or his aspirations, he performed the rudimentary tasks of his line of work. It would not be surprising, given the nature of his duties, if from time to time, he reflected on his past, and wondered what might have been. What is clear is that no matter how far he traveled, he could not escape it. Remarkably, he still faced an indictment from the Kankakee court for the Chiniquy murders, however unlikely its future use.⁴¹

Though much of the interior of Ringo's life and circumstances remains hidden, with important aspects forever lost, his experiences, aspirations, and exploits help illuminate the ways in which some members of the black working class attempted to navigate and negotiate the shifting and dichotomous boundaries of power, class, space, and race in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America. Unquestionably, Ringo was frequently the beneficiary of the good will, professionalism, and the abiding integrity of white authorities who, at times providentially, upheld the rule of law in the midst of a racist society and judicial system. His experiences complicate the historical presentation of whites of all strata and locales as embracing the principles and mentalities of Jim Crow era America and engaging in extra-legal actions to the exclusion of following the law. In effect, Ringo's experiences show that while imperfect he was in fact afforded the protection of the law. Yet, the tension between the idealized egalitarian ethos America aspired to become and the racialized world in which he lived shaped and constrained his choices. This is not to suggest that he bears no responsibility for his criminality, yet his actions remind us of his humanity, of those whose choices are limited by their station, color, gender, or deformity. In truth, the downward trajectory of Ringo, Effie, and Lewis was a direct result of the racist society they lived in, and the failure of the American Ideal to apply to them. We cannot remove Ringo's choices from the reality of his existence and the forces compelling him, but it would be equally inaccurate to define Ringo's life by incapacity, criminality, tragedy, pathology, and loss. While not a hero, he was a survivor. Only the reader can decide whether this is sufficient to garner him sympathy.

1 Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994); Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Cecil Brown, *Stagolee Shot Billy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers*

of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802-1868 (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005); Kali Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press Books, 2006); William Oliver, "The Streets: An Alternative Black Male Social Institution," *Journal of Black Studies* 36 (July 2006), 918-37.

- 2 “Daniel Boone’s Cabin,” *Facts and History*, Nicholas County Historical Society, <http://carlisle-nicholascounty.org/history/facts/index.htm>; Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 13.
- 3 David P. Kilroy, *For Race and County: The Life and Career of Colonel Charles Young* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2003), 3; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 4; “Notable Kentucky African Americans Database,” http://nkaa.uky.edu/record.php?note_id=2495.
- 4 “Buffalo Soldiers History,” <http://www.azbuffalosoldiers.org/history/>; “A Brief History of the Buffalo Soldiers,” *Buffalo Soldiers of the American West*, <http://www.buffalosoldiers-amwest.org/historhttp://www.azbuffalosoldiers.org/history/y.htm>.
- 5 *U.S. Army Register of Enlistments, 1798-1914*, year 1885-1890, (Washington, D.C: National Archives and Record Administration), 309, Ancestry.com online database.
- 6 William Loren Katz, *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in the Westward Expansion of the United States* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 201.
- 7 Arlen L. Fowler, *The Black Infantry in the West, 1869-1891* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1971), 114-44. As one authority notes, “Racist stereotypes could only be shattered by good conduct and discipline in camp and heroics in action. They believed that the eyes of not only the black community but the white world were upon them and for the most part they acted accordingly. The Buffalo Soldiers could proudly claim the lowest desertion rates in the frontier army because most of these men wanted to make careers out of the service and, perhaps, most of all, prove a point.” See Phillip Thomas Tucker, *Cathy Williams: From Slave to Female Buffalo Soldier* (Mechanicsville, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002), 102; *U.S. Army Register of Enlistments, 1798-1914*, year 1885-1890, 309, *U.S. Army Register of Enlistments, 1798-1914*, year 1891-1892, 18.
- 8 Adjutant General Office, *Carded Medical Records Regular Army, 1894-1912, 10th Cavalry*, No. 761, Rhett, James-Scott, Robert (Washington, D.C., National Archives and Record Administration); “Chilblains,” <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/chilblains>.
- 9 *Carded Medical Records Regular Army, 1894-1912, 10th Cavalry*, No. 761.
- 10 Character scale contained six standards: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor, and Unreliable. See U.S. Buffalo Soldiers, *Returns from Regular Army Cavalry Regiments, 1866-1916* (Washington, D.C: National Archives and Records Administration); *Huntington (West Virginia) Directory, 1895-6* (Huntington, WV: W. H. Armitage, Publisher, 1895), 100.
- 11 U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States*, 1880, (Washington, D.C.: GPO), 404-05; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Vol. I., 1900 (Washington, D.C.: GPO), 552; U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Vol. III, Population (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910). For more on the black experience in Huntington during the Jim Crow era, see Cicero M. Fain, III, “Race, River, and the Railroad: Black Huntington, 1871-1929” (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2010).
- 12 From 1850 to the turn of the century, Chicago’s black population increased by nearly a hundredfold, from 323 to 30,150. Between 1860 and 1870 the black population of St. Louis expanded almost sixfold, and from 1880 to 1890 it increased by 21 percent. For Chicago, see *The Negro in Illinois: The WPA Papers*, ed. Brian Dolinar (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 56. For St. Louis, see Cecil Brown, *Stagolee Shot Billy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 41; For Huntington, see *Huntington Advertiser* (Huntington, WV), Feb. 12, 1903. For “Loop de Loop” and “Muddy Duck,” see *Ibid.*, Apr. 24, 1903; for “Honky Tonk,” see *Ibid.*, Dec. 8, 1903.
- 13 Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 187.
- 14 Tera W. Hunter, *To ’Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 171; Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 36.
- 15 *Huntington (West Virginia) Directory, 1895-6*, 100. The phrase “the streets” refers to the network of public and semi-public social settings in which primarily lower and working-class black men congregated. See Oliver, “The Streets,” 918-37; Mumford, *Interzones*, 23.
- 16 Lawrence County Birth Records, HE-K and F-HA, 1868-1938, Phyllis Hamner Room, Briggs Lawrence County Public Library, Ironton, OH.
- 17 For manhood, see Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (1918; repr., New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), 116. William H. Becker asserts “four distinguishable but interrelated aspects of manhood, as manifested in the black church tradition: 1) leadership, self-assertion, 2) independence, 3) black identity, and 4) vocation.” See William H. Becker, “The Black Church: Manhood and Mission,” *African-American Religion: Interpretative Essays in History and Culture*, ed. Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York & London: Routledge, 1997), 180.
- 18 Gross, *Colored Amazons*, 54. Gross further notes, “Because of their economic status and transient nature in the city, the women tend not to show up in customary historical records—census data, tax records, and property records

- yield precious few clues about them. Moreover, because black female criminals were predominantly unskilled wage laborers and semiliterate, few found themselves in a position to leave behind memoirs or diaries." This seems an accurate characterization of Finley's life. Gross, 4.
- 19 *Jefferson News* (Jefferson, Indiana), May 24, 1895.
- 20 *Ibid.*, Mar. 27, 1895.
- 21 *Huntington Advertiser*, Apr. 23, 1896; *Columbus Daily Times* (Columbus, IN), Apr. 5, 1895.
- 22 *Jefferson News* (Jefferson, IN), May 24, 1895; *Point Pleasant Weekly Register* (Point Pleasant, WV), May 25, 1895; and *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), May 24, 1895. Though not generally regarded as a state mirroring the southern racist attitudes and extra-legal actions of the Jim Crow era, lynchings did occur within West Virginia, especially in the southern coal mining counties where black influx was largest. Ancella Bickley Livers states there were twenty-eight lynchings in the state. See Ancella Bickley Livers, "The Greenbrier Lynching: A Study of West Virginia Justice," (n.p., 1993), Special Collections, James E. Morrow Library, Marshall University, Huntington, WV, Livers' (now Bickley) acknowledges some discrepancy on exact numbers in her three sources stemming from difficulty in the definition of lynching. As she states, "while most definitions seem to agree that lynchings are the result of mob action, the definitions do not always agree on how many people constitute a mob." One source recounts, "54 lynchings between 1882 and 1927. Of these lynchings 21 had been of whites, 33 of blacks." A second states "from 1882 to 1968...48 lynchings in the state, 20 white, 28 black." A third, chronicling 1889 to 1918, provides "28 different lynchings." See Walter White, *Rope & Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 235; Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 5; *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918* (NAACP, April 1919), 102. Tim Konhaus argues that while incidents of lynching in the state were low numerically compared to southern states, they were high proportionally. See Tim Konhaus, "'I Thought Things Would Be Different There': Lynching and the Black Community in Southern West Virginia, 1880-1933," *West Virginia History* 1 (Fall 2007), 25-43.
- 23 Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: 1992), 156-57; Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), ix; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 90; Joe H. Mitchell, *The Strangest Fruit: Forgotten Black-on-Black Lynchings in America, 1835-1935* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010), 9-15. In her study of Joseph Cocking, "alleged wife murderer" and victim of one of three incidents of white-on-white lynching in southern Maryland, one scholar notes, he "had committed a crime not only against the State, but more seriously, a crime against the community's social norms and expectations, and this second crime merited the retribution his neighbors had meted out." See Christine Arnold-Lourie, "A Madman's Deed—A Maniac's Hand': Gender and Justice in Three Maryland Lynchings," *Journal of Social History* 41 (Summer 2008), 1031.
- 24 *Goshen Daily News* (Goshen, IN), June 28, 1895; *Salt Lake Herald*, July 30, 1895; Common Pleas Law Criminal Record, 2, Cabell County Circuit Court, November 4, 1895-April 21, 1898, 135. *Columbus Daily Times* (Columbus, IN), July 13, 1895; *Huntington Advertiser*, Mar. 1, 1898; *Salt Lake Herald*, July 30, 1895. Acquitted of the misdemeanor charge, fortune also shined on Blake. See Common Pleas Law Criminal Record, 2, Cabell County Circuit Court, November 4, 1895-April 21, 1898, 10, 33, 84-89, 128-9, 135, 177, 278, 305-306, 311, and Law Orders 14, Cabell County Circuit Court, March 18, 1895-Dec. 14, 1896, 7, 29. For burglary, see *Huntington Advertiser*, Apr. 25, 29, 1896. For drowning, *Ibid.*, Apr. 16, 17, 23, 1896. For Ringo's side, see *Kankakee Daily Gazette* (Kankakee, IL), May 27, 1896.
- 25 Quote references Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012); *Huntington Advertiser*, Sept. 20, 1895, Dec. 21, 1896, Dec. 24, 1896, May 27, 1897.
- 26 *Huntington Advertiser*, Mar. 1, 1898. Unfortunately, no Bertillon Card exists for Ringo at the Ohio Historical Society. Interestingly, the register lists the following Ringo family members: Father, John, residing at 317 Nine Street, Philadelphia, PA; brother, William, of Pittsburgh, PA and brother, James, of Louisville, KY. See, Institutions: Ohio Penitentiary, *Register of Prisoners, 1894-1897*, and, 1896-1898, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH, 191-2.
- 27 *Kankakee Daily Gazette*, May 27, 1896; *Huntington Advertiser*, Mar. 1, 1898.
- 28 Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (The History of Disability) (New York & London: New York University Press, 2009), 184-229. Importantly, DuBois continues, "One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unrecconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self." W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks, Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 3-4.

- 29 *Kankakee Daily Gazette*, Mar. 27, 1896.
- 30 Joan Hurling, "The Mystery of the Seventh House," *The Daily Journal* (Kankakee, IL), Oct. 29, 1974; *The New York Times*, Oct. 19, 1898.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Kankakee Daily Gazette*, Oct. 21, 1898.
- 33 *Ibid.*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904); *Kankakee Daily Gazette*, May 26, 1899.
- 34 "Incidents of the Capture," *Ibid.*, Mar. 25, 1899; "Suspect Murderer Captured," *Ibid.*, Mar. 24, 1899. Also see "Charles Alias 'Sidney' Ringo Charged with an Awful Crime," *Huntington Advertiser*, May 23, 1899.
- 35 In contrast to the prevailing notion that lynching was a southern phenomenon, Illinois was not immune from the mania. One authority notes, "Between 1891 and 1914 at least twenty-two occurred in the northern state... including eight in central Illinois between 1893 and 1908." See Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, "A Warlike Demonstration": Legalism, Armed Resistance, and Black Political Mobilization in Decatur, Illinois, 1894-1898," *Journal of Negro History* 83 (Winter, 1998), 53. Commenting on the spate of lynchings within Illinois during the era, famous anti-lynching crusader, Ida B. Wells, noted in 1910, "The record of the past ten years shows a surprising increase in lynchings and riot even in the North. No northern state has more frequently offended in this crime than Illinois, the State of Lincoln.... Since 1893 there have been sixteen lynchings within the State, including the Springfield riot. With each repetition there has been increased violence, rioting and barbarism." See "Mob law in Lincoln's state," *In Their Own Words: A History of the American Negro, 1865-1916*, ed. Milton Meltzer (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1965), 156. For additional info on lynching in Illinois, see also Stacy Pratt McDermott, "An Outrageous Proceeding: A Northern Lynching and the Enforcement of Anti-Lynching Legislation in Illinois, 1905-1910," *The Journal of Negro History* 84 (Winter, 1999), 61-78; *Kankakee Daily Gazette*, March 25, 1899.
- 36 *Ibid.*, Mar. 27, 1899.
- 37 *Huntington Advertiser*, May 23, 1899.
- 38 *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*. Particulars for Goldfon are as follows: aged 34, illiterate, Russian, married, residence, Joliet City, IL, chair maker. The other three male members of the Gang were likely Rueben Miller, aged 27, Russian, literate, married, factory shoe maker; Bennie Goldman, aged 33, Russian, literate, divorced, and William Beldel(sp), aged 35, literate, single, factory shoe maker. For acquittal see, *Kankakee Daily Gazette*, May 26, 1899.
- 39 *Kankakee County, Illinois, Marriage Index, 1889-1962*, Kankakee County Clerk, comp. Kankakee County Clerk Genealogy Records, Kankakee, IL: Kankakee County Clerk, 2008; *Kankakee Daily Gazette*, Oct. 21, 1898; "The Saga of St. Anne," *Kankakee Bicentennial Commission, 97*, "Chiniquy Axe Murders," *ILSTANNE-L Archives*, <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/ILSTANNE/2000-04/0957107212>.
- 40 *Huntington Advertiser*, July 17, 1899. Noteworthy are the physical features entered on the Inmate I. D. Card: "Bald spot top head. Scar above left eye. Large tumorous growth top left shoulder. Lower left arm atrophied. Scars:-Abov[e] right knee." Inmate I.D. Cards, 1899-1901, West Virginia State Penitentiary, Moundsville, West Virginia, Records Vault, Mount Olive Correctional Complex, Mount Olive, West Virginia. See "West Virginia Penitentiary," <http://www.graveaddiction.com/wvpen.html>; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Negroes in the United States: 1920-1932* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935), 9.
- 41 *The Weekly Democrat* (Kankakee, IL), Apr. 26, 1905.