SYMBOLIC CONFLICTS, DEADLY CONSEQUENCES: VIOLENCE BETWEEN ITALIANS AND BLACKS IN WESTERN SÃO PAULO, 1888-1914

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In early October, 1891, José Rodrigues de Sampaio, coffee planter in the municipality of São Carlos, in western São Paulo, gave a dinner for his colonos to celebrate the harvest. After dinner, the colonos, most of whom were Italian immigrants, asked for permission to hold a dance in the fazenda’s barn, which was granted. Several of Sampaio’s Brazilian employees also attended the dinner and the dance. Zeferino Ferreira Lima, a black camarada (wage laborer) had invited a woman to dance when, according to his later account to the São Carlos police delegate (delegado), a Calabrian colono named Antonio Lariago “insisted … that he leave the lady and go dance with him, the aforesaid Lariago, to which he the interrogated responded that he would not do that because he had already taken a lady, to which the aforesaid Lariago, pulling out a revolver, said: that the interrogated had to dance with him, to which he the interrogated replied that in that case nobody would dance any more.” Seeing the revolver, the other dancers left the barn, along with Zeferino, leaving only Antonio and the Brazilian accordionist, who had seen the entire interaction and tried to calm Antonio, without success, so he left as well. The colonos locked Antonio inside the barn and called for the fazendeiro. Sampaio, with Zeferino by his side, called out “Antonio, what is this, calm down and stop making trouble” and started opening the door. At this shots were heard from inside the barn. One of the bullets passed through the partly open door, hitting Zeferino on the side of his chest, and two others lodged in the barn door. Sampaio left Lariago in the barn under the guard of several Brazilian employees until the delegate arrived the next day and took him to the municipal jail.

1 Direct correspondence to Karl Monsma, Rua Maria M. S. Zanchetta 86, Campinas SP, CEP 13085-821, Brazil. E-mail: karlmonsma@uol.com.br. This paper is part of a broader joint research project with Oswaldo Truzzi, which receives the support of CNPQ-Conselho Nacional de Pesquisa (processo 479959/2001-3) and the Programa Brasil Latino of the Cassamarca Foundation. Earlier we received the support of FAPESP-Fundação de Apoio a Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (processo 97/10863-1). Most of the police investigations and criminal trial records discussed below were partially transcribed by Lania Stefanoni Ferreira and Virgínia Ferreira da Silva when they were undergraduate students with “scientific initiation” scholarships provided by CNPQ under the PIBIC program. I am especially grateful to Lania and Virgínia for their work on this project. A few of these records were also transcribed by Simone Medeiros (FAPESP-IC scholarship), Carolina Albuquerque da Silva (PIBIC), Andréa Vettorassi (PIBIC), and Thiago Augusto Soares (PIBIC). Sabrina Fausti helped to code and enter the quantitative data used below, with the support of a PIBIC undergraduate scholarship and a CAPES master’s fellowship. I thank the directors and the staff of the Fundação Pró-Memória de São Carlos for their patient assistance.

2 In São Paulo, colono generally referred to families working on the coffee plantations under annual contracts, paid partly by task, for weeding and taking care of coffee trees, partly for the quantity of coffee harvested, and partly by the right to use land to grow their own crops. In the early years (until about 1900), however, the term was used more loosely and could refer to any agricultural worker on the plantations.

3 Fundação Pró-Memória, São Carlos (hereinafter FPM), Processos Criminais, Caixa 291, no number, 1891, Antonio Lariago. At the time, it was common for men to dance with men, so Antonio’s request to dance with Zeferino indicates nothing about his sexual orientation and merely suggests that the two were friends.

4 Statement of Jorge Antônio da Silva.
On another São Carlos coffee plantation two years later, at an Italian wedding party, a group of black men and women from the plantation entered and began dancing. One of them, named Tachiano, began arguing with his wife and, in one version, threatened the others with a club. At this an Italian friend of his, Antonio Bartolomeu, intervened, striking Tachiano with an ax handle. Tachiano then grabbed the ax out of Antonio’s hands and hit him in the face with the blunt side of the ax head, blinding him in one eye, and fled with his wife.5

Reading police and court records regarding violent conflict between Italian immigrants, on the one hand, and black (preto or negro) or brown (moreno, pardo, mulato, caboclo) Brazilians, on the other, one repeatedly encounters situations of easy interaction and sociability that explode into violence. This was no segregationist society: Italians and people of color lived in the same neighborhoods, worked together, drank together, gambled together, danced together, visited one another’s homes, made love together, lived together, and sometimes married one another. Such interactions and relations are repeatedly mentioned in the São Carlos police and court records, and none of the many witnesses, except for the parents of young Italians who fell in love with Brazilians, expressed surprise or treated them as unusual. Yet this was no egalitarian and color-blind “racial democracy” either, and both sides, or all sides—because the experience and identities of the various “brown” categories listed above cannot be assumed to be identical to those of blacks—, were keenly aware of the hierarchies of color.

Even chance encounters could be dangerous, as when, at the end of 1906, during a festival at the central church in São Carlos, the mulatto Heitor Rodrigues da Silva and the Italian Gaspar Sabino bumped into each other at the church door. Heitor held Gaspar by the arm, apparently trying to help him regain his balance, and Gaspar was offended by the gesture. According to both Heitor and an Italian witness, Gaspar responded that he was not a cripple. According to Gaspar’s own account, his words were stronger: “compatriot [sic] I am not drunk or crazy [for you] to support me.” This started an argument between the two, which continued with an exchange of insults in the nearby public garden. Two Italian friends of Heitor’s held him so that he would not attack Gaspar. Taking advantage of Heitor’s immobility, Gaspar kicked him. At this Heitor broke free, pulled out a knife and, grabbing Sabino by his jacket, plunged the knife into his back.6

The common element in most of these explosive interactions between Italians and Brazilians of color was a struggle over who had the right to tell the other what to do and who should defer to whom. Antonio Lariago was enraged that Zeferino had the impudence to turn down his request for a dance, giving priority to the woman he, Zeferino, had chosen, who probably was not white (although we cannot know for sure). Tachiano hit Antonio Bartolomeu in the face with the ax because

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5 FPM, Criminais, C. 462, No. 2691, 1893, Francisco Miguel, Francisco Cosme, Avelino Bento de Farias. Bartolomeu later claimed that all he had done was confiscate the ax because one of the blacks wanted to use it against the fazenda’s administrator, who had admonished them for causing a disturbance. Bartolomeu also seems to have been confused about who had hit him, claiming that it was one other the other blacks.

6 FPM, Criminais, C. 194, No. 107, 1907, Heitor Rodrigues da Silva.
Bartolomeu, supposedly a friend (and equal), had intervened in Tachiano’s private quarrel, arrogantly and violently claiming authority over him. When a black or brown Brazilian assaulted an Italian, it was typically after the latter had assumed a position of superiority and authority over him (I have not yet found any cases of dark-skinned women attacking Italians; Italian women did participate in some cases of group violence against Afro-Brazilians.) Such attacks were especially likely to occur when Italians with no formal position of authority tried to boss dark-skinned Brazilians around.

When an Italian wounded or killed an Afro or indigenous Brazilian, it was typically after the latter had openly affirmed his, or, occasionally, her, equality and dignity, insisting on equal treatment or even, in some cases, having the audacity to tell an Italian what to do. The case of Heitor Rodrigues da Silva shows that even acts of courtesy by dark Brazilians could be taken as insults by Italians, because they placed the two parties on the same level. Blacks and browns asserted equality and Italians defended their superiority. These symbolic conflicts often had very real and tragic consequences for those involved, and they constitute an important, and neglected, chapter in the tragic history of race and color in post-abolition Brazil.

Dutch anthropologist Anton Blok (2001) has recently called on social scientists to study the roles and meanings of physical violence in social life rather than concentrating solely on its causes. In his study of the historical transformations of German *habitus*, Norbert Elias (1996) argued for the importance of understanding the circumstances under which people impose their will on others through intimidation, or the threat of violence. This is a study of the role and meaning of violence and intimidation in a racial hierarchy. It is important to keep in mind that, for every instance of overt physical violence, there must have been many others of successful intimidation. Beyond the individual tragedies of lives cut short, pain, incapacitation, and the suffering of survivors, much of the import of violent conflict between Italians and dark-skinned Brazilians was that it produced an atmosphere of intimidation that restricted the mobility, autonomy and boldness of the latter.

### Blacks and immigrants in post-abolition São Paulo

There is little dialogue between the literature on immigration to São Paulo and that on blacks and race relations in the first decades after abolition. Most writings on immigrants mention slavery and the black population simply as part of the context, abolition creating the need for immigrant labor on the coffee plantations and increasing the appeal of Brazil as a destination for poor European emigrants. Although it sometimes recognizes the resulting marginalization of the Brazilian poor, this literature concentrates on the experience and struggles of immigrants, especially the difficulties of plantation life and the troubled relations between immigrants and *fazendeiros* (planters) (Alvim 1986; Dean 1976; Fausto 1999; Hall 1969; Holloway 1980; Monbeig 1998; Stolcke 1988; Trento 1989; Vangelista, 1982). It also debates the opportunities for social mobility and the reasons for the economic and political success of some descendents of immigrants (Fonte 1990; Klein 1994; Truzzi e Kerbauy
2000). Reading this literature, one sometimes has the impression that *libertos* (freed slaves) and other people of color simply vanished from the paulista countryside after abolition.

Some studies of the post-abolition black condition compare it with that of immigrants. The classic work of Florestan Fernandes (1978) shaped much of the debate on the transition from slavery to free labor in São Paulo. Later researchers contest Fernandes’s argument that slavery, in addition to leaving a legacy of racism, left the *libertos* anomic, with deficient family and community ties, and made them irresponsible, lacking self discipline, and hence incapable of competing with immigrants in the labor market. Historians have demonstrated the resilience of the slave family (Slenes 1999) and the collective capacity of slave communities to negotiate and resist (Reis & Silva 1989). Celia Azevedo (1987) argues that *fazendeiros* and other paulista elites wanted to replace slaves with immigrants not so much because of labor shortage but because they feared slave rebellion and violence, which suggests that the preference for immigrants, at least in the early years, was largely due to elite, especially planter, fear and racism, not the deficiencies of *libertos* as workers. George Reid Andrews (1991) presents evidence that blacks could compete with immigrants, but lost ground largely because they were more demanding in negotiations with planters and other employers, especially in their resistance to female and child labor.

Even authors who compare the experience of Afro-Brazilians and immigrants in western São Paulo rarely study everyday relations between them (see also Beiguelman 1978; Slenes, 1997; Vangelista 1982), probably due to a the belief that blacks and browns abandoned the plantations en masse and moved to the cities, which would have limited the opportunities for interaction with immigrants, at least on the plantations. Rural-urban migration by Afro-Brazilians was obvious to contemporary observers, but this does not mean that all former plantation slaves and other rural blacks moved to the cities. The police and court records studied here provide evidence that many Afro-Brazilians and some indigenous people (principally *caboclos*, descendents of indigenes who did not have a traditionally “Indian” way of life) remained in the countryside of São Carlos after abolition. On the coffee frontier, which included São Carlos for roughly the first decade after 1988, there was high labor demand, probably greater than in areas with older plantations, due to plantation expansion and the construction of branch lines for the railway network. In this situation, employers could not be too picky about the color of those they hired.

In 1899, according to a survey conducted by the Clube da Lavoura of São Carlos, which apparently did not distinguish black and brown workers, there were still 1,242 “black” agricultural laborers in the municipality (Truzzi 1986, pp.63-64). The great majority of these workers were undoubtedly men. Including women and children and those in other occupations, the number of black

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7 On the eve of abolition, there were 3726 slaves registered in São Carlos (Truzzi 1986, p. 40). This figure certainly includes women and probably includes children as well. Although children born after 1871 were not officially slaves, they were to be treated as such until they reached majority.

8 Women rarely worked as wage laborers on the plantations; entire families worked as *colonos*, but blacks rarely had *colonato* contracts.
rural residents must have been considerably higher. The rapid expansion of coffee production also made São Carlos one of the principal destinations of immigrants to the paulista west during the first decade after abolition. By 1899, the 13,418 immigrants on the plantations of São Carlos greatly outnumbered the black and brown workers, but the latter still constituted roughly eight percent of the municipality’s agricultural labor force, enough to mean that interracial contact was frequent. The proportion of blacks in the city of São Carlos was undoubtedly higher, due to black migration to the city and the fact that most immigrants went to the plantations.

The futures of both immigrants and people of color depended not only on the prejudices of elites and market competition with unknown strangers but also on the nature of face to face interaction between members of the two groups, which could heighten or limit opportunities, ambitions, solidarities, tensions and fears. Immigrants and poor Brazilians of all colors interacted in the teams of camaradas who felled the forest and planted new coffee groves, in railroad construction crews, in rural vendas (general stores and taverns), where they gathered to drink and gamble after work and on Sundays, and at country dances and horse races. On the plantations, black and brown Brazilians worked in a variety of auxiliary occupations, especially as carters, brick makers, herdsmen, pages, capangas (hired thugs and bodyguards), and general agricultural laborers (trabalhadores de roça), that brought them into contact with immigrants. The colônias (immigrant settlements on the plantations) constituted another important context of interracial contact, for Brazilian families of all colors often lived there alongside immigrants, and a fair number of black or brown women lived with European men. In the city of São Carlos, interracial association and contact was even more frequent. Although there was some degree of ethnic or racial clustering in certain neighborhoods, Immigrants and Brazilians of all colors frequently lived in the same neighborhoods, and they often encountered one another on the streets, in their houses or yards, at work, in the market, at the train station, and in vendas, boarding houses and restaurants.

Close contact between unequals does not necessarily generate overt conflict or violence, as long as social hierarchies are settled and difficult to challenge. Resistance to domination always exists, but when hierarchies seem solid, it tends to take the disguised, and safer, forms of foot-dragging, sabotage and deception that James C. Scott (1985) has characterized as the “weapons of the weak,” and the dominant parties in such interactions typically assume paternalistic or solicitous attitudes, often believing that members of the subaltern group are grateful to them.  

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9 Despite the planter preference for families, the number of adult male immigrants greatly exceeded the number of adult females, especially, it seems, in frontier zones, where all-male crews did the heavy work of clearing the forest and railroad building.

10 Eugene Genovese’s (1972) portrayal of slavery in the antebellum US South is still one of the best analyses of paternalistic domination and everyday resistance. For a penetrating depiction of personalized domination on sugar plantations in northeastern Brazil, and its erosion in the second half of the twentieth century, due especially to opportunities for migration to the industrial centers of southeastern Brazil, see Garcia 1989. For a critical evaluation of James Scott’s work, see Monsma 2000.
In post-abolition São Paulo, however, the significance of ethnic and color differences among the poor was not fixed and enduring. Everything was up for negotiation and redefinition. Those freed from slavery and their children clearly wanted genuine freedom, in which they would not be subordinated, humiliated or abused because of their color or prior condition. European immigrants, most of them peasants or agricultural laborers, who arrived to work as camaradas or colonos on the coffee plantations, or as artisans, peddlers, or laborers in the towns, faced fazendeiros and other local elites who saw them above all as cheap labor and tended to treat them like slaves, but, at the same time, generally believed the predominant racial ideology, which asserted the superiority of Europeans over dark-skinned Brazilians. Certainly immigrants—substitutes for slaves, but at the same time members of the superior race—perceived the contradictory attitudes of local elites, could see for themselves how white Brazilians treated their black and brown countrymen, and soon learned the importance of maintaining clear distinctions between themselves and colored Brazilians.

In some cases, friendship, love, or kinship across racial lines undoubtedly inhibited overt expressions of racism. The high ratio of men to women among Italian immigrants, in particular, meant that, if they stayed in Brazil, the only marriage partners available for many Italian men were Brazilians, many, if not most, of whom had dark skin. But it is important not to exaggerate the incidence and significance of interracial love and friendship. It is reasonable to assume that Italian men tended to prefer morenas and pardas over mulatas and pretas, so, like many Brazilians today, they could maintain their prejudices against pretos even while living with brown-skinned women and fathering brown-skinned children. Although enduring friendships between immigrants and blacks certainly did exist, the easy contact between Italians and people of color in vendas, at dances and on neighborhood streets often had a rather superficial quality and did not necessarily mean egalitarian relations of mutual respect and understanding. There is much evidence to the contrary in the nature of interactions preceding violent conflict.

Those in the intermediate color categories faced their own unique set of pressures and contradictions. Many, but not all, had never been enslaved. Abolition raised the hope of full citizenship for all dark skinned Brazilians, but it also presented the threat of downward leveling, in which all of them would be equally stigmatized. If immigrants were in a contradictory position between local elites and the colored poor, the brown population was in a similar position between blacks and whites, both native and immigrant. One could further multiply the distinctions: then as now, the discrimination faced by those considered morenos was milder than that experienced by mulattos, and surely it is foolish to equate the experience of caboclos with that of people of mixed African and European descent. Unfortunately, however, the present study does not include enough cases of conflict involving the various “brown” categories of people to be able to properly study their relations with others, let alone the relations among them. In most of what follows the primary emphasis will be on relations between immigrants and blacks. As is the case in far too many studies of race in Brazil, the brown population will often be folded into the black for purposes of analytical
convenience and statistical significance, but it is important to remember that these were, and are, socially meaningful distinctions.

**Police and court records as sources for the study of violence in everyday life**

Sidney Chalhoub (1986), one of the few researchers to address everyday relations between blacks and immigrants, has used criminal court records to study blacks and Portuguese in Rio de Janeiro. With similar sources, this study focuses on everyday tension and conflict in a municipality of western São Paulo, where immigrants represented a much greater proportion of the population, and where most of the population lived and worked in rural areas. Here I will concentrate on the relations of just one European group, Italians, with nonwhite Brazilians. Italians constituted by far the largest immigrant group in western São Paulo, and they were the first to arrive in massive numbers. At the time of abolition in 1888, there were already a substantial number of Italians in São Carlos and other coffee growing regions of the paulista west, and many more arrived in the following years. Much more than other immigrant groups that arrived later (principally Spaniards and Portuguese, in the case of São Carlos), Italians interacted with blacks soon after abolition and it was Italian-black interaction that set the tone for relations between immigrants and the population of color.

A violent conflict stimulates diverse, and often divergent, perceptions and interpretations among participants and witnesses. The legal professionals of late 19th and early 20th century Brazil — police delegates, clerks, prosecutors, lawyers and judges—used the declarations of accused and victims and the depositions of witnesses to construct their own versions of violent events. In the process, categories of the law, social and professional values, and strategies for winning cases (in the case of prosecutors and lawyers) filtered, classified and arranged the declarations and depositions into new narratives affirming the guilt or innocence of the accused. For purposes of this research, the accounts of accused, victim and witnesses are more important than the second order accounts constructed by legal professionals, but it is important to keep in mind the institutional context in which these declarations and depositions were produced.\footnote{Mariza Corrêa (1983) and Boris Fausto (1984) both provide useful discussions of the nature of Brazilian}

Statements before the police delegate have generally proven more useful for analysis than those given in court, both because they were taken soon after the events and because they did not suffer the interference of lawyers, who often seem to have coached witnesses and the accused on what to say in court. On the other hand, some confessions to the police are of dubious value because there are indications that they were extracted through beating.

Because Brazilian police and judicial clerks did not simply transcribe the words of the accused, victims and witnesses, but wrote them down in the third person (“He replied that ….”) and often summarized parts (“They proceeded to a mutual exchange of insults.”), a layer of representation separates us from the representations and interpretations of violent interactions produced by the various participants in police investigations and criminal trials. With the increasing professionalization of the justice system in the twentieth century, the obfuscating effect of the clerks’ formalism, indirect
discourse, and summaries becomes somewhat more pronounced. We perceive the spoken statements and depositions as through a partially dirty window, with some parts of the view perfectly visible, others blurry, but still perceptible, and still others completely blocked. Unfortunately, clerks often summarized accounts of what people said to one another in the interactions preceding violence, especially the insults they used. For many of the earlier records, however, the amateurism characteristic of 19th century Brazilian justice is the researcher’s ally, because clerks tended to write down statements and depositions more or less as they heard them, sometimes lapsing into the first person.

Most statements by accused, victim and witnesses during police investigations and trials took the form of accounts, or narratives that justify an act or a situation (Garfinkel 1967; Orbuch 1997). Although one can almost always identify points of agreement about what happened, different observers and participants often selected and emphasized different aspects of events. Systematic variation in accounts provides valuable clues regarding variation in perceptions and interpretations, including variation by color and ethnicity of the person providing the account. Witnesses perceived and made sense of conflicts from specific vantage points defined principally by social position, ethnic or racial identity, and their personal relationships with the individuals in conflict. Accused and victims of course told highly self-interested stories, but the manner in which they constructed these narratives and their ethnic and racial content can help us understand interracial violence. In the great majority of the crimes studied here, nobody claimed that the accused had not done the act of violence for which he, or occasionally she, was accused; what was disputed in the justice system was whether the act was justified or not. The accused generally asserted that victims had provoked them in some way and victims, if they survived, claimed they had done nothing to deserve the attacks or had simply responded to prior insults by attackers. Witnesses also highlighted insults and provocations in their narratives of the series of events leading to violence, although different witnesses often emphasized different provocations. In the varying stories about who provoked whom, it is possible to identify Italian notions of outrageous black or brown behavior and Afro-Brazilian (or, at times, indigenous) notions of what constituted intolerable offenses by Italians.

Relative frequencies of violent aggression

A brief comparison of the relative frequencies with which members of the principal ethnic and color groups killed or attacked one another is useful for clarifying the nature and importance of violence between Italian immigrants and people of color. Table 1 presents what I will call “aggression ratios” for cases of violent crime recorded in police investigations and criminal trial records in São Carlos during the period from abolition to the beginning of World War I, which caused a steep drop in criminal court records as sources for social research.

12 For a discussion of methods for systematic comparison of the varying stories told in police investigations and in court, see Monsma forthcoming.
These are the ratios of violent interactions in which 1) a member of the first group was the aggressor and a member of the second group was the victim to 2) those in which the color or ethnicity of aggressor and victim were reversed. If all of the violent events involved only one aggressor and one victim, a ratio $a/b$ of, for example, 3.0 would mean that members of group $a$ attacked members of group $b$ three times as often as members of group $b$ attacked members of group $a$. This method of interpretation is only roughly accurate for table 1, however, because the ratios are calculated with the number of accused-victim pairs for each color/ethnicity combination, which can be greater than the number of aggressors or the number of victims in cases with more than one aggressor or more than one victim. For example, if three Italians beat up two blacks, this would count as six accused-victim pairs and add six to the numerator of the Italian/black ratio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Ratios</th>
<th>Accused-victim pairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italian/white Brazilian</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian/&quot;brown&quot;</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian/black</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian/other immigrant</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white Brazilian/&quot;brown&quot;</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white Brazilian/black</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white Braz./other immigrant</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other immigrant/&quot;brown&quot;</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other immigrant/black</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“brown”/black</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=935 (including accused-victim pairs of the same color or ethnicity)

Source: São Carlos police investigations and criminal trial records, Fundação Pró-Memória, São Carlos.

Notes: “Brown” category includes moreno, pardo, mulato and caboclo. Black includes preto and negro. Aggression ratio $a/b$ is defined as the ratio of the number of accused-victim pairs in which the accused is of group $a$ and the victim is of group $b$ divided by the number of pairs in which the accused is of group $b$ and the victim is of group $a$. Table includes only cases in which the name of the accused is known; includes unsuccessful attempted violence (due to poor marksmanship and the like) and verbal or written threats of violence; excludes crimes attributed to Mangano bandit gang.

Although few of the documents seem to have been lost, it is important to remember that these data include only cases of violence that came to the attention of the police. Undoubtedly many other cases of minor injuries and threats of violence were never reported. It is clearly possible that the

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13 These data were coded by Sabrina Fausti, with the help of the author, and used in her undergraduate
tendency to report violence was associated with color and ethnicity, with members of subordinate groups less likely to report violence and threats that they suffered, either because they distrusted authorities or because they feared retaliation by their aggressors, so table 1 likely understates the tendency for violence against the colored population. Another source of conservative bias is the inclusion of only interactions in which the aggressors are identified by name, in part because it is often difficult to estimate the numbers of people involved in violence by large groups, in part because the multiplying numbers of accused-victim pairs in cases of collective violence tend to swamp the rest of the data for certain accused-victim combinations. The two most notable forms of group violence were collective violence by Italians against people of color in rural areas (discussed below) and collective police violence against Italians in the town of São Carlos. If these were included in the table, the Italian/“brown”, Italian/black and white Brazilian/Italian ratios would all be greatly increased. This table also excludes events attributed to a Calabrian bandit gang active in São Carlos in the late 1890’s because the deaths and injuries they caused were due to predatory crime, not everyday conflicts—although the activities of this gang did much to consolidate the fearsome reputation of Italians in the municipality (Monsma, Truzzi & Conceição 2002).

Despite these sources of conservative bias, table 1 shows a clear tendency for victimization of nonwhite Brazilians by other groups. This is particularly evident in the case of blacks, those identified by authorities or witnesses as pretos or, occasionally, as negros. All three of the white groups were considerably more likely to attack blacks than to be attacked by them: aggression ratios for white Brazilians, Italians and other immigrants in relation to blacks are all above three. Indeed the ratios are quite similar, which is consistent with the idea that Italians learned to use violence and intimidation against blacks from the example of white Brazilians, and that other immigrants, most of whom arrived later, learned this from white Brazilians and Italians. Treating Afro-Brazilians the same way that white Brazilians treated them was one way for immigrants to assert a clear distinction between themselves and blacks.

Table 1 also provides evidence that the situation of those in the intermediate color categories—here classified together, as a matter of statistical convenience, in the artificial (invented by the author) category “brown”—was different from that of blacks. The aggression ratios for all three monograph (1999) and master’s thesis (2002).

14 Although the great majority of blacks were born in Brazil, a few older individuals were Africans, and one was a North American (beat up by the Portuguese owner of the restaurant where he was a cook). They are all classified as black rather than as immigrants here, because forced immigration placed Africans in the same social category as enslaved Brazilians and because there is no indication that the nationality of the North American made a difference to his treatment. In other words black skin overrode immigrant status as a source of social identity. Another possible complication is suggested by a case in which the doctors who examined a Spanish crime victim classified him as a ”moreno.” Some immigrants from southern Europe and even more “turcos” (mostly Lebanese or Syrians) were dark enough to be considered morenos or even pardos. Immigrants from Europe and the Middle East are all classified here by their country of origin because it is clear in the sources that their ethnicity was much more important than their complexion in the definition of their social identities. Witnesses and the parties involved in the conflicts studied to date never even mentioned the color of immigrants, with the exception of the black from the United States.
white groups were lower in relation to browns than in relation to blacks. In the case of Italians, this ratio was actually lower than the Italian ratio in relation to white Brazilians, although it is not a very precise estimate because it is based on only fifteen violent interactions between Italians and browns. Browns were also somewhat more likely to injure or kill blacks than vice versa. This set of aggression ratios supports the notion that the experience of the intermediate color categories was somewhere between that of blacks and whites, although one would have to consider a variety of other forms of evidence to be able to say anything conclusive about their status during the first few decades after abolition.

Finally, it is worth noting that, even if we exclude banditry-related events, Italians were more likely to be aggressors than victims in violent interactions with all other groups. This is consistent with the violent reputation that Italians—especially southern Italians—rapidly acquired in São Paulo, and may have been of some value to individual Italians in efforts to intimidate people of other colors or ethnicities.

**Table 2. Aggression Ratios by Type of Crime, São Carlos, 1888-1914**

(Number of accused-victim pairs in parentheses.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>homicides</th>
<th>injuries</th>
<th>property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italian/white Brazilian</td>
<td>7.50 (17)</td>
<td>1.33 (77)</td>
<td>1.53 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian/nonwhite</td>
<td>6.33 (22)</td>
<td>2.26 (62)</td>
<td>0.07 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian/other immigrant</td>
<td>6/0* (6)</td>
<td>1.14 (45)</td>
<td>4.00 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white Brazilian/nonwhite</td>
<td>4.80 (29)</td>
<td>2.63 (87)</td>
<td>0.13 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white Braz./other immigrant</td>
<td>5/0* (5)</td>
<td>1.09 (46)</td>
<td>0.85 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other immigrant/nonwhite</td>
<td>4.00 (10)</td>
<td>2.73 (41)</td>
<td>0.25 (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=1139 (including accused-victim pairs of the same color or ethnicity)

Source: São Carlos police investigations and criminal trial records, Fundação Pró-Memória, São Carlos.

*Ratio cannot be calculated because denominator is zero.

Notes: Nonwhite includes all categories classified as black or brown in table 1. “Injuries” include unsuccessful attempted violence and verbal or written threats of violence. Data includes only cases in which the name of the accused is known; excludes crimes attributed to Mangano bandit gang. Aggression ratio a/b is defined as the ratio of the number of accused-victim pairs in which the accused is of group a and the victim is of group b divided by the number of pairs in which the accused is of group b and the victim is of group a.

Table 2 presents aggression ratios by type of crime. This table lumps blacks and “browns” together in the same “nonwhite” category for statistical convenience. This procedure risks concealing some important differences, but it is necessary here because the relatively small number of “browns” in the data does not permit reliable estimates of aggression ratios involving them by type of crime. People of color were more likely to be victims than aggressors in both homicides and other incidents of violence (or threatened violence) against persons, and this is true in relation to all three white groups. Aggression ratios for all white groups, in relation to the nonwhite, were substantially higher.
for homicides than for less serious violence. In other words, white violence against blacks and “browns” was considerably more likely to be deadly than nonwhite violence against whites. For property crimes, the ratios (the term “aggression ratio” is not entirely appropriate here) are reversed. This is largely due to the very small number of black or brown victims of such crimes (only 5 of those included in this table), presumably because they had little to take, although they are well represented among the accused as well, especially in cases of horse theft. The highest aggression ratios in this table are those for Italians in relation to all other groups in cases of homicide. Although Italians were more likely to be aggressors than victims in violent interactions with members of all other groups, they were much more likely to kill others than to be killed by them. Italian violence was more deadly than that of other groups, perhaps because of greater experience with and access to weapons, especially firearms.

**Symbolic wounds and provocations**

At the end of May 1895, Anastácio Cosme, a 21-year-old preto stonemason working for an Italian contractor, was building a sidewalk in the city of São Carlos when two Italian peddlers tried to walk over the freshly laid stones, provoking a conflict that resulted in the death of one of the peddlers. The investigation and trial records are especially interesting because they relate the words exchanged between the two parties. According to Anastácio’s declaration to the police, seeing that [the peddlers] wanted to go through the place [of his] work, he said to the first one, who he now knows is named Jorge Muzzi, that he should not pass there because the stones were not firmly settled and could shift, thus causing them harm. The Italian went out to the middle of the street, turned to him, the interrogated, and asked him if he was a district judge [juiz de direito]. The interrogated responded that he was not a district judge, but that [the Italian] should not pass because he would ruin the work. The Italian then stated that the interrogated was not a Christian but just a stupid black [negro burro] and that he would walk through that place, not being afraid of a hundred men like the interrogated. Then he threatened the interrogated with a measuring stick that he had in his hand and started to put down the trunks he was carrying. When he had finished unloading himself, the interrogated gave him a blow with the straightedge he used [at work], the Italian fell, turned over a little and stayed in a seated position and did not come out of that position. The Italian, struck in the temple, died instantly and his companion fled.

This sidewalk tragedy is emblematic of the contradictory tensions and pressures that poor blacks and Italians felt as they faced one another in the years after abolition. The Italian peddler, so poor that he could not afford a donkey and had to carry his wares around on his back, was too proud to accept even the most reasonable orders from a black man and claimed distinction by asserting that blacks could not be Christians (thus honorable and worthy of respect) and were stupid as mules (burro meaning both stupid and mule). The young black stonemason, trying to do a good job and insisting on being treated with decency was, it seems, enraged by the demeaning insults and denial of his basic human dignity. On the Italian side, this conflict was entirely symbolic. The peddlers had nothing to lose but their pride by walking around Anastácio’s sidewalk. As for the latter, he was protecting the
sidewalk, it is true, but everything indicates that he hit the Italian on the head not to avoid re-laying some stones but in reaction to symbolic wounds.

In this case and many others, elites manifested little inclination toward automatic racial solidarity with poor Italians who fought with black or brown Brazilians. Aside from Anastácio’s unconvincing assertion that he tried to dissuade the peddlers from walking on the sidewalk for their own protection, his story was corroborated in essential aspects not only by his black assistant, who was also his brother in law, but also by two white Brazilian witnesses, a merchant and a coffee planter. The planter emphasized the obstinacy of the Italian peddlers:

> Anastácio was asking them not to pass [on the sidewalk] because it would ruin his work, but the peddlers refused to listen to him, insulting him and calling him negro, stupid and other names that the deponent cannot remember, to which Anastácio responded that they were the stupid ones because when others wanted to pass he asked them [not to] and was immediately heeded and only they stubbornly insisted in going through and ruining his work.  

Anastácio’s Italian employer also showed little sympathy for the peddlers and little interest in condemning him or disparaging his character. The jury, drawn exclusively from local elites, convicted him, but he was sentenced to only eleven months in jail. On appeal, a second jury acquitted him.

The criminal records suggest that, in everyday interactions, Italians and people of color were often engaged in classification struggles (Bourdieu 1987). Nonwhites, although still identifying individuals by color, tended to deny its hierarchical significance and insisted that they belonged in the same categories as the Italians in most important respects—as workers, Christians, men or women, parents or children, or simply human beings—, never, at least in the records I have seen, claiming superiority over immigrants on the basis of Brazilian birth. Italians, on the other hand, tended to see color as a kind of master categorization scheme, prevailing over all others, and to emphasize the its hierarchical associations by associating dark skin with negative characteristics such as stupid, pagan, lazy and drunken. Alternative principals of social classification, such as occupation, age, education or citizenship, might favor individual blacks over individual Italians, so Italians, particularly, one suspects, poor and illiterate Italians, insisted on the fundamental importance of color.

A few years after Anastácio killed the Italian peddler, Vicenzo Maggiorino, a 40 year old carter and agricultural laborer from Campania, stabbed a 39 year old black carpenter several times in the middle of a São Carlos street because the carpenter, João Damaceno, refused to sell him various things for the price he offered. The objects, three used beds, a carpenter’s bench and the roof tiles from an old henhouse, actually belonged to João’s brother, and he claimed that he could not sell his brother’s things, especially for the miserable ten mil-réis that Vicenzo offered. The interaction occurred at the residence of the pardn Manuela Maria da Conceição, where the objects were stored.

15 FPM, Criminais, C. 286, No. 37, 1895, Anastácio Cosme.
16 Statement of Jesuíno de Oliveira Barboza, taken by police delegate.
17 The short penalty suggests that he was not convicted on the initial charge of homicide, with a minimum sentence of six years, but was convicted of a lesser charge, such as injuries or negligent homicide.
18 FPM, Criminais, C. 271, No. 1562, 1898, Vicenzo Maggiorino.
Manuela, who was Vicenzo’s *comadre* and rented the house from João Damaceno, witnessed the events along with João’s wife Margarida. Vicenzo later claimed that João owed him money and that, after offering ten mil-réis and being refused, he overheard João commenting to Manuela: “This son of a ….[censored in original] this Italian refused to pay more that ten mil-réis.” According to Vicenzo, João then grabbed him and knocked him down twice before he used his knife in self-defense. Both of the women backed up João’s affirmation that Vicenzo attacked him first. In Manuela’s version, João Damaceno refusing to carry out the sale because the objects in question were not his and also because of the insignificance of Vicente’s offer, the latter called João Damaceno stupid [*burro*]. That João Damaceno [then] told him that he was not stupid and that he too knew how to bargain, that Vicente on hearing this response from João Damaceno grabbed him by the throat and João also grabbed Vicente to defend himself; that the deponent tried to part the disputants, separating her *compadre* Vicente from João Damaceno.²¹

According to both of the women and João, Vicenzo left and soon returned with a knife in his hand. João ran away, but Vicenzo pursued him down the street and plunged the knife into his back. João tripped over a hole in the street and fell face down. Vicenzo stabbed him in the back several more times, seven altogether, before João managed to turn over and kick Vicenzo in the stomach, causing him to fall and drop the knife. Vicenzo then got up, picked up the knife and left, “going away very calmly,” according to Manuela, “as if nothing had happened.”

João complained about the aggression to both the police and a Portuguese merchant he knew, and the merchant helped the police arrest Vicenzo a few days later. João recovered from his wounds and Vicenzo, charged with bodily injuries rather than attempted murder, was sentenced to three and a half months in jail.

Once again, the Italian in this story attempts to associate blackness with stupidity and the black refuses to accept this categorization, affirming that he has equal mental powers (and business sense). Vicenzo did not fly into a murderous rage over some used furniture and roof tiles; what so irritated him was that a black man did not defer to his wishes and presumed to bargain with him as an equal.

The demand for deference and obedience from the dark skinned could unite immigrants across ethnic boundaries. On a December afternoon in 1900, a nineteen-year-old Syrian peddler and a Calabrian barber a year older beat up Cláudio Cherubino de Sousa, a 38 year old black laborer, for refusing to rebuild a fence between their houses. ²¹ On the order of his employer, who apparently owned the houses, Cláudio, with the aid of an Italian carter, had filled in a well of fetid water in the yard between the houses, and, it seems, had taken down part of the fence to do the work.

According to the carter, the Syrian arrived shouting “black shit [*negro de merda*], now [that] the job is finished you build the fence again.” When Cláudio replied said that he could only take orders from his employer, the Syrian

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²⁰ Declaration to Judge Miguel José de Brito Bastos.
²¹ Deposition to Police Delegate Manoel Thiago Correia Masagão.
²¹ FPM, Criminais, C. 279, No. 260, 1900, Thomaz Rizzo and Pedro Alexandre.
came up to the *preto* punching him in the face and insulting him with very harmful words and continuing to slap him, the *preto* shouted and he the deponent, fearing the wrath of the *turco*, did not help him. ...[Then] Thomaz the barber appeared and took a whip that was on the ground by his, the deponent's, cart and with its handle struck the *preto* causing him the wounds he exhibits. ...[T]he *turco* was holding one of the *preto*’s arms and punching him ... while Thomaz the barber gave him blows with the whip handle. ... [T]he *preto* tortured by so many blows managed to break free from his aggressors’ clutches thus being able to flee out into the street, he the deponent also saw in the street the *turco* Pedro Alexandre and Thomaz the barber pursuing him throwing stones.  

The two aggressors simply ignored the Italian carter and did not consider taking up the matter with their landlord, who had sent Cláudio and the carter to fill in the well. Without stopping to contemplate the situation, both Italian and Syrian ignored the two whites implicated in the destruction of their fence, immediately and instinctively targeting the black worker as suitable for bossing around and deserving violent punishment if he did not obey.

Cláudio’s employer, Francisco de Arruda Campos, provides yet another example of a member of the local elite disinclined to sympathize with immigrants who violently put blacks in their place, backing up Cláudio’s story with the statement that “the *preto* is a good employee of good character, he the deponent not having any information that the aforesaid *preto* is given to the vice of drunkenness” (which also implies that he, or the police delegate questioning him, believed a good many other *pretos* were given to this vice).

Relations among Italians could also be explosive, but the nature of interactions leading to violence was generally different. A fight between Italian men could start for a variety of reasons, often similar to those that sparked conflict between Italians and Brazilians of color, such as work relations, wandering livestock that destroyed vegetable gardens, debts (especially gambling debts), or sexual jealousy, but the escalation to violence in disagreements between Italians typically involved the exchange of insults and aggressions between equals, not the attempt of one party to place himself in a position of authority over the other. Police and trial records also suggest that, even in the absence of a specific reason for conflict, everyday interactions between Italians and colored Brazilians could be dangerous, more so than those between Italians.

*The danger of small insults*

In interactions between Italians and dark-skinned Brazilians, even small slights or insults, real or imagined, could be dangerous. To understand the explosive potential of everyday interactions, we must examine the symbolic meaning of small affronts. Heitor Rodrigues da Silva and Gaspar Sabino, in their conflict described above, did not fight simply because they bumped into one another in the church door. The situation in itself involved no pain or humiliation for either side. They fought because an Italian refused to accept a simple courtesy from a mulatto, which publicly asserted the latter’s inferiority. For blacks and browns, small insults from Italians connoted a life of subordination.

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22 All immigrants from the Turkish empire were referred to (by others) as *turcos* (Turks).
23 Statement of Pasquale Maritelli during police investigation.
and everyday humiliations; for Italians, disrespect from nonwhites symbolized the danger that they
would be reduced to the level of pretos.

June 24, 1906 was payday at the Fazenda Santa Eudoxia, and workers crowded into the
plantation’s venda to drink part of their earnings. José Vieira, a young moreno from Bahia wanted to
have a glass of wine, but there was no room at the venda’s counter and the others, mostly Italians, did
not make room for him. According to the Brazilian administrator, he said he wanted to have a drink
but was impeded by the men at the counter. In the version of the Italians, he tried to force his way
through. One of them stated that “José Vieira tried to approach the counter by pushing.” Another
said that

the Bahian José Vieira suddenly entered and ordered the deponent and others to get back from
the counter because he also wanted to kill the critter [have a drink] thus speaking he pulled
the knife in his belt around to the front thus showing that he was armed, and immediately a
son of the accused [Giuseppe] Marfetano, whose name is Antonio, jumped in front of José and
in one swoop disarmed him, yanking the knife out of its sheath and out of José Vieira’s belt,
and ran out of the store followed by José Vieira.

Outside the venda Giuseppe Marfetano intervened on behalf of his son, who apparently ran
away after throwing a stone at José. In the ensuing fight, José hit Giuseppe on the head with a cane
and Giuseppe stabbed him in the shoulder with a knife, although versions differ on who struck first.
Both were accused and both were acquitted.

Although he did not say so during the investigation or the trial, because he wanted to convince
authorities and jurors that Antonio had provoked him for no reason, it is not difficult to imagine that
José Vieira felt slighted by the failure, or refusal, of the drinkers to make room for him and that he felt
this rudeness had something to do with his color. This minor affront provoked threatening behavior
because, one suspects, it evoked a long experience of similar insults. The Italians at the counter, in
turn, could not ignore this offense from a brown man, and Antonio Marfetano, playing the hero for his
friends, humiliated the cheeky moreno. Outside the store, Giuseppe intervened to protect his son, and
perhaps his family honor, from a possible drubbing by the raging Vieira.

Early in the evening in May, 1911, the pardo carter Manoel Antonio encountered an
individual on horseback and another walking on a dark road on the outskirts of São Carlos and
complained that they did not greet him. According to Domenico Virgilio, an Italian “agriculturalist”
lavrador] who was returning to the city with a Portuguese acquaintance, Manoel Antonio said “Not
even a good evening [do you say to me].” Domenico replied, in his version of events, that he had
already said good evening, whereupon “the individual started to insult him with names like son of a
whore, and others less offensive, even saying wait a little and soon we will exchange bullets.” Manoel
Antonio claimed that he “asked them who goes there, to which one responded ‘none of your business,
you son of a whore’; that the declarant then retorted ‘You’re the son of a whore,’ that at that point the declarant recognized that [the person] talking was Domingos, Italian.” Domenico got down from his horse, took out his pistol and shot at Manoel Antonio, who fell down, hit above the left eye.29

This did not start as a pardo-Italian interaction because neither party could see the other well enough to know the color or ethnicity of the other. Manoel Antonio complained about the lack of a greeting, and the disrespect it implied, from an unknown person, but this case does suggest pardo sensitivity to impolite treatment from any quarter. Once the exchange of insults started, the fight took on its own, escalating logic. Things do seem to have gotten nastier once the two parties recognized one another—for it is reasonable to assume that if Manoel Antonio recognized Domenico, the reverse was also the case and Domenico knew who he was shooting at.

Several months later, a preto day laborer named Roque Ferreira hacked at the head of an Italian three times with a sickle on a São Carlos street, calling him impolite, according to a witness, because, he later said, the Italian would not let him pass and insulted him.30 The gashed Italian, who survived, never mentioned what he said to Roque, but because the two did not know one another and had no reason to fight other than the interaction on the street, it is likely that the rather drunk Italian was taunting the black man. According to the witness cited above, Roque, as he walked away, “turned and asked the Italian if he wanted to end [his days] once and for all, that he would kill him, that the preto, [seeing that] the Italian remained silent, went away, [continuing] to call the Italian impolite [malcriado].” Roque did silence the ill-mannered Italian, although he would have to serve a year in jail for it.

Italians could also react with extreme violence to small provocations from Afro or indigenous Brazilians. Although Italians did kill one another over verbal affronts, the insults in question were strong, typically “son of a whore,” generally considered the worst possible insult at the time and quite often acceptable to juries as an excuse for murder.31 It is difficult to imagine, however, that Italians would have assaulted or killed other Italians for some of the offenses that prompted attacks on blacks or browns.

In one of the most shocking cases of murder in this study—shocking for us today, that is—two Italian adolescents killed a preto (or pardo, this being one of the few cases in which the same person was identified by more than one color category) because they were annoyed by a bit of rough play. The adolescents involved, 17 year old Cuneo Albachiara and 13 year old Domenico Albachiara, were not brothers, but were apparently cousins, for they were both from the same town (or village) in the region of Campania, and they were both children of colonos on the same plantation in the district of Babylônia. Early in the morning on a day in June, 1897, the two boys set out to hunt armed with

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29 Manoel Antonio recovered and the jury acquitted Domenico.
30 FPM, Criminais, C. 275, No. 5891, 1911, Roque Ferreira. The witness mentioned here was Maria Vieira.
31 Other common insults among whites were “thief” and “dog,” but no other insult evoked such strong reactions as “son of a whore.”
shotguns. In the fazenda’s pasture, they encountered Leopoldino de Campos, a preto (or pardo) of about 25 who had been out all night at a party and was walking home, still drunk, accompanied by an older black man, Manoel Adão Felizardo. According to Manoel’s deposition, Leopoldino gave Cuneo a playful slap on the head, which knocked off his hat and made him drop the ramrod of his shotgun. On seeing this, Manoel, ran over to Leopoldino and grabbed him, asking him not to fight with the boys; that the boys backed off a few steps—stayed there with their shotguns cocked and, he the deponent thinking that nothing more would happen, on Leopoldino’s request let him go; that then Leopoldino, seeing the attitude of the boys, opened the front of his shirt and said: “You want to shoot, shoot here”; in response the older boy …fired a shot at his leg and when Leopoldino was falling the younger one …fired a second shot at his neck which killed him on the spot. …[The boys] could easily have left the place when he the deponent was holding Leopoldino and asked them for the love of God to go away [because] Leopoldino was very drunk.

In their defense the boys claimed that they were overcome by fear, portraying Leopoldino as a kind of furious black monster who started beating them for no reason and then escaped from the hands of Manoel to continue the aggression. Manoel’s version of the story (roughly corroborated by two other Brazilians, who saw the event from a distance), suggests a quite different interpretation: Cuneo Albachiara was embarrassed and irritated by the presumptuous black man who played with him as if he were a child, knocking off his hat. When the boys threatened him with their shotguns, Leopoldino refused to back down and put on a show of defiance, daring them to shoot him. To let Leopoldino walk away at that point would have been to recognize the superior courage—and thus the superior manliness and honor—of a black man, an unbearable prospect, so the boys shot him. Perhaps an older, more experienced Italian would have tried to frighten and humiliate rather than to kill—and here it is suggestive that the older Albachiara shot at Leopoldino’s legs, whereas the younger one fired the mortal shot—but the underlying logic of this deadly game of chicken would have been the same.

Why symbolic conflict?

It is important to ask why most of the violent racial conflict recorded in police investigations and criminal trial records concerns symbolic issues. Even incidents that appear to originate in disagreements over material issues such as debts, crops or the quality of work turn out, on closer inspection, to escalate into violence because Italians insisted on precedence and dark skinned Brazilians refused to defer. What was the meaning of all this conflict over who had the right to be treated with respect and who had the right to give orders to whom? And how were these spontaneous and largely individual conflicts linked to wider tensions between collectivities defined by ethnicity and color? Considering first the point of view of blacks and other nonwhite Brazilians, we can start with James Scott’s (1990) observation that the most deeply felt injuries of domination and exploitation, for those subject to them, are generally not so much material deprivation per se but the shame of

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32 FPM, Criminais, C. 256, No. 27, 1897, Domenico Albachiara and Cuneo Albachiara.
33 The jury acquitted both boys, on the grounds that they were minors and did not fully understand what they were doing.
involuntary subjection and the humiliation of having to accept abuse without responding (openly). Barrington Moore Jr. (1978) makes a similar point when he argues that people rebel not because of absolute material deprivation but because of moral indignation. For Moore, when material deprivation does lead to rebellion, it generally occurs not because of pain in the belly or the discomfort of exposure to the elements but because people do not have the resources necessary to lead a decent and dignified life, and to properly fulfill their social role, all of which is relative to the cultural standards of particular times and places. For people recently liberated from slavery—and who had in large measure freed themselves through increasingly open resistance and mass flight—attempts to place them in an inferior position and boss them around, whether made by Italians or anybody else, must have symbolized and concentrated the symbolic wounds of their former condition, with an important difference: now they could speak up and respond.

There was thus a quite direct connection between collective position and individual pain among ex-slaves. For other people of color, the connection was perhaps less direct, but it was there nonetheless. After abolition the destiny of dark skinned people who had never been enslaved was inextricably intertwined with that of former slaves, because the white population did not distinguish the two groups. Distinction, instead, was based on color. In the hundreds of testimonies, police reports and prosecutors summations read for this study, no white referred to Fulano, ex-slave, or Beltrano, never a slave, but they very often did refer to João, preto, or Maria, parda. The degree to which those with lighter skins managed to distinguish themselves from those with darker, and consequently obtain better treatment, is a matter of considerable importance that can find only a partial answer here. Oracy Nogueira (1998) found, in a study of a paulista town in the 1940’s, that “racial” distinction and discrimination was based not on a descent rule, but on the degree to which African ancestry was evident in the physical characteristics of an individual. There were strong incentives for upwardly mobile individuals to marry people lighter than themselves, producing children of more “acceptable” color and resulting in a process of intergenerational color mobility that systematically drained off potential black leaders through absorption into the lighter color categories.

The aggression ratios in table 1 and the high degree of agreement among witnesses and authorities of all colors in sorting individuals by color suggest that those with lighter skin were indeed in a better position than those with darker skin. But the broad distinction between whites and everyone else seems to have been deeper and more powerful as a principal of social classification. It is reasonable to suspect that it remained such a powerful source of discrimination (in both senses of the word) partly because the immigrant population struggled to protect the value of whiteness.

The Italian immigrants studied here objected to any suggestion that black and brown Brazilians were their equals. To the extent that whites in general—and especially immigrants, who rapidly became the majority of the white population in the coffee growing west—succeeded in bullying and intimidating dark-skinned Brazilians into resignation, they ensured that the latter would remain second class citizens. To the extent that they succeeded in establishing clear racial distinctions
and defending the superiority of all whites, immigrants ensured that they would not suffer the same fate as Brazilians of color. It is rather far-fetched, however, to imagine that individual Italians were thinking about the future success of their ethnic group when they lashed out at impudent blacks claiming equality and asserting the right to be treated with dignity. We should not confuse consequences with causes, and it is worth contemplating how mostly illiterate Italian peasants, who had never even seen black people before arriving in Brazil, came to internalize notions of racial superiority so powerful that they defended them with knives and pistols.

The existing literature, which focuses largely, if not exclusively, on intellectual and political debates among elites and representations published in newspapers, implicitly asserts a kind of “racial indoctrination” thesis, whereby the racial ideas of intellectuals, politicians and journalists somehow—and by exactly what process is not made clear—were absorbed by other whites, including the immigrant masses. Some immigrants, although it is not clear what proportion of them, had been exposed to negative stereotypes of Brazilian blacks in Italy, due to efforts to counter the propaganda of immigrant recruitment agents (Trento 1989). In the first decade after abolition, most fazendas did not have schools for the children of immigrants, who were expected to spend most of their time working in any case, so the children of immigrants probably had even higher rates of illiteracy than their parents, but this does not mean that they were totally cut off from the printed word. There were always some immigrants who could read and communicate what they had read to others, and it was common practice in the past, especially in bars, to read newspapers aloud for others to hear. The reproduction of Brazilian racial stereotypes in the Italian-language press shows that the elite of the colony, at least, rapidly assimilated the racial ideology of the Brazilian elite, which is not very surprising, as this ideology favored European immigrants (Dean 1976, p. 183; Holloway 1980, p. 106).

But the scientific racism of the day remained rather distant for most immigrant workers, especially those employed on coffee plantations, whose everyday experience was limited to the coffee groves, the colônias where they lived, the central plantation installations, and a couple of vendas (general stores and taverns) in the vicinity, supplemented by weekend visits to other plantations, occasional trips to the nearest town, and attendance at country dances and horse races. It is to this everyday experience that we must look to understand the condescending and, in some cases, spiteful attitudes toward dark-skinned Brazilians internalized by Italians, who could observe for themselves how white Brazilians, especially plantation administrators and foremen (diretores de colonos) treated, and talked about, blacks and browns.

Although it was clear to all that white Brazilians, especially the fazendeiros and their administrators, considered Italians more reliable workers, more civilized and more honorable than Afro-Brazilians, the treatment meted out to immigrants was often disturbingly reminiscent of that endured by slaves. Plantation administrators carried whips and used violence and intimidation to quell rebellious tendencies. The despotic tendencies of some administrators extended to the sexual harassment of Italian women and girls (although sexual harassment of black and brown women and
girls seems to have been more common\(^{34}\). In the towns, Italians faced similar treatment by the police, bands of thugs in uniform who routinely beat and robbed immigrant workers.\(^{35}\) Although there was much friendly contact between Italians and people of color in both town and countryside, and conflicts between *fazendeiros* (or administrators) and workers sometimes did produce real manifestations of interracial solidarity, this unity seems to have been limited by Italian fears of equality with nonwhites and what this would mean for their respectability and their treatment at the hands of local elites.

Affirmation of difference and reinforcement of the frontier between whites and nonwhites became implicit strategies for social mobility and defense of collective dignity. In a classic article on racial prejudice, Harold Blumer (1958) argued that hostility toward a subordinate group stems neither from difference nor from inequality in themselves but from a feeling among members of the dominant group that their position is threatened by the subalterns. The menace generally takes the form of encroachment on the privileges, monopolies or spaces of dominants by subordinates who “don’t know their place.” In post-abolition São Carlos, most such encroachments took the symbolic form of claims to the symbolic capital of honor, respect and dignity rather than infringement on job monopolies or segregated spaces, but Italians felt them as very real and threatening. The most evident result, in the police and criminal court records, was Italian sensitivity to any suggestion by blacks or browns that they were equal. Whatever their affections for black friends, or their love for dark women, Italians could not help but see dark skin as a symbol of subjection, degradation and dishonor. Precisely because their own situation was often perilously close to that of *pretos*, many Italians experienced black and brown demands for respect and equal treatment as profoundly irritating threats to their sense of identity and honor, and sometimes they lashed out in murderous rage.

**Group attacks by Italians**

Demographic preponderance favored group violence by immigrants, especially Italians, against nonwhite Brazilians, but the gratuitous viciousness of some of these attacks suggests more than an effect of superior numbers.

In early February, 1894, a *preto* of about 30 named Narciso faced the fury of four to six Italians (versions differ) because he dared to deny them a drink.\(^{36}\) The Italians, three Leme brothers, two Paiaroni brothers and Domenico de Credico, had been celebrating carnival for most of that afternoon. The all male group had started by dancing to the sound of Credico’s accordion on the coffee drying court [*terreiro*] of the plantation where they were *colonos*, all but one dressed in skirts, with their faces painted and decorative paper stuck to the rest of their bodies. After receiving a bottle of

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\(^{34}\) Simone Medeiros, personal communication. Despite the frequent stress on the sexual abuse of Italian women in the literature on immigration, many *fazendeiros* and administrators apparently felt greater respect for the “honor” of white women than for that of black.

\(^{35}\) In the correspondence received by the São Paulo state police chief, complaints by foreign consuls regarding police mistreatment of their nationals rival complaints about plantation abuses (Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo, Polícia).

\(^{36}\) FPM, Criminais, C. 262, no number, 1894, Luiz Leme, José Leme, Fernando Leme, Domingos de Credico, Domingos Paiaroni, Giuseppe Paiaroni.
wine as a present from the plantation administrator, they went off to the rural Ararahy train station, where they continued drinking and dancing in front of the venda of Guilherme Luiz Hopp, a white Brazilian, grabbing at passers by and inviting them to dance. Narciso, who worked as a porter at the station, was keeping Guilherme company inside the venda. At about six o’clock, Guilherme, with Narciso’s help, began closing the venda because, as he later said, “it was [his] custom to close the door of his business at that hour on hallowed days.” Then the Italians asked for more wine. Narciso conveyed the request to Guilherme, who said he could not sell more wine because the store was already closed (although it is quite possible that he was also fed up with the Italians’ rambunctious behavior). When Narciso went outside and told the Italians this, at least four of them attacked him. According to Antonio Augusto de Oliveira, a young white Brazilian traveler who was drinking coffee with a small group inside the venda,

At this reply they grabbed Narcizo, pulled him out of the house and started to slap and kick him; at this cowardly [illegible] by four men against one he the deponent pulled Narcizo into the house and closed the door. The Italians then forced open the door and again attacked Narcizo with punches, [and] three of them, who he the deponent supposes to be brothers, held Narcizo while the fourth one punched him and stabbed him three times, being that two [of the stabbings] were clearly visible, for the knife on entering twisted around, the murderer delaying in pulling it out; he the deponent at that point clubbed the murderer on the head.38

The clubbed attacker, Domenico de Credico, a married thirty year old from Abruzzo, fell down, at which the others released Narciso, allowing Antonio and the owner of a nearby hotel to pull Narciso out of the hallway and close another door behind them. Antonio told Narciso to hide outside in a cornfield and the group of coffee drinkers fled out a back window of the venda and ran to the hotel. After threatening to kill Guilherme’s female cook (of unknown color), who escaped through a window,39 the Italians went over to the hotel and tried to break down the doors. The hotelier and the others who had taken refuge there then ran out the back door to a nearby coffee grove and made their way to the plantation of Francisco de Paula Novaes, the same plantation where the Italians were employed. Some of them returned immediately with the plantation administrator “in order to protect Narcizo,” but found neither the Italians nor Narciso.40 Most of them, fearing another assault on the hotel by the Italians, spent the night as guests on the plantation. The next day, Narciso was found dead in the cornfield.

The Italians involved had all been in São Carlos, and probably in Brazil, for a year or less. In this time, and in an experience limited mostly to the plantation and its vicinity, they had absorbed enough racism to be infuriated at a black who gave them orders, even if he was just transmitting a message from someone else. In their statements to the police and to the judge, the Italians made clear that they knew it was Guilherme who did not want to sell them more wine, yet they attacked the black messenger, initially ignoring Guilherme and the other whites in the establishment. It was only after

37 Statement during police investigation.
38 Statement of Antonio Augusto de Oliveira during police investigation.
39 According to the deposition of Antonio Augusto de Oliveira.
Antonio gave Credico a strong blow on the head with a whip handle that the Italians began to threaten the others. Even then, the first person they tried to attack was the cook, who had nothing to do with the refusal to serve them wine, but, given the concentration of black and brown women in domestic service occupations at the time, probably was not white.

In the aftermath of the incident, the only white Brazilian inclined to defend the Italians was the plantation administrator, who, in his deposition before the judge, said that they were good workers, even though Luigi Leme sometimes fought with other people, whereas Narciso was a troublemaker. Although, with the exception of the young Antonio Augusto, the other (white Brazilian) witnesses had clearly been more interested in saving themselves than in saving Narciso, none of them demonstrated the slightest sympathy for the Italians. The subsequent conviction of the five Italians arrested (two were acquitted on appeal because it was not clear that they participated in the murder) and their long jail sentences also suggest that local elites were not prepared to tolerate gratuitous savagery against blacks by Italians.41

Those involved in Narciso’s murder were all involved in the conflict with him, in the sense that they all wanted more wine. In other cases of group violence against people of color by Italians, uninvolved bystanders joined in out of spite, outrage, or simply for the pleasure of pounding a preto.

In the closest event I have found to a racial lynching by Italians, with the participation of several Brazilians and other immigrants, two pretos, José Francisco do Nascimento and Avelino Bruno de Sant’Ana, were beat up outside a rural venda on a Sunday afternoon in 1904 by some 50 to 80 people, leading to the death of José Francisco later that night or early the next morning.42 In contrast to Narciso’s murder, this case evinces white racial solidarity, transcending ethnic and class divisions.

Most of those involved were Italian colonos of the Fazenda Floresta, property of the large-scale Italian planter Aurelio Civatti.43 The two blacks had spent most of the day drinking pinga44 with the others in the venda. According to the Italian owner of the establishment, Luigi Reali, and his son Ettore, the blacks began playing capoeira45 inside the store, for which the Ettore scolded them, leading to an argument, during which the blacks challenged the Italian to go outside and fight, which he did not accept. This incident apparently put the two blacks in a belligerent mood, and somewhat later in the afternoon, according to both Luigi and his son, José Francisco pulled out a knife and threatened the other drinkers. At this the other patrons went outside, followed by José Francisco and Avelino.40

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40 Statement of Antonio Augusto de Oliveira during police investigation.
41 Giuseppe Leme ran away and was never arrested. In the first trial, Domenico de Credico was sentenced to 15 years of jail with labor and the remaining four were sentenced to ten and a half years. On appeal, which meant a new jury trial, Domenico and Giuseppe Paiaroni were acquitted—due, apparently, to contradictory statements by witnesses about whether they actually participated in the murder, and the sentences of the others were increased to 15 years with labor for Fernando and Luigi Leme and 24 years with labor for Domenico de Credico.
42 FPM, Criminais, C.309, No. 3797/1310, 1904.
43 Civatti was the most important Italian planter in São Carlos at this time, and would later become the first Italian member of the city council (Abreu 2000).
44 A distilled drink, similar to rum, made from sugar cane, also called cachaça.
45 Traditional Afro-Brazilian martial art and dance.
At this moment, about four in the afternoon, a large group of people returning from some nearby horse races arrived at the venda and encountered the two angry blacks, one of whom was waving around a knife. Francisco Augusto Vayego, the Spanish administrator of Civatti’s plantation, was in this group and apparently recognized Avelino, saying later, “before reaching the venda, they encountered the preto Avelino Sant’Ana and a companion.” For reasons unexplained in the investigation—although it is possible that Avelino was a former worker on Civatti’s plantation—their relationship was not good. Both the administrator and his assistant later reported that, on seeing Vayego, Avelino loudly declared that he would end the administrator’s life. A Portuguese colono responded that Avelino would not kill Vayego, at which Avelino, according to both of these witnesses (or participants), hit the Portuguese with a club, knocking him down, jumped on top of him and began punching him. At this all of those present attacked the two blacks. In Vayego’s account, “seeing this the people present, about sixty people, became indignant and beat up Avelino Sant’Ana and the preto his companion, who had a bared knife in his hand and defied them all. That he the deponent cannot specify the names nor the persons because [those who] took part in the beating [were] the people who had been at the track, which is to say, the entire neighborhood.”

If Avelino and José Francisco had been white, their aggressive behavior could have led to their arrest, an investigation and perhaps even a trial; it would not have led to a deadly beating by a crowd of onlookers. It was understood that all men of honor, that is, all white men, might eventually come into conflict with others and that such disagreements could escalate into violence, sometimes with tragic consequences, but these were seen as essentially private conflicts, and onlookers were usually reluctant to get involved. If others intervened, they could find themselves the target of violence by both parties in the original conflict. What was at issue outside Luigi Reali’s venda was, in a sense, the right of a black man to provoke and fight with whites as equals, in the same way that whites often fought with whites. Earlier in the afternoon, José Francisco and Avelino had challenged Ettore Reali to a fight and he had refused, which, if it was not seen as cowardice, could easily be interpreted as disdain. This refusal to fight might have irritated the pretos as much as the scolding for practicing capoeira inside the store. By chance, two separate conflicts—the fresh one between the blacks and Ettore and an older one between Avelino and the administrator—came together in front of a large white audience, which saw not quarreling individuals but impudent blacks aggressively defying whites. When Avelino clubbed the Portuguese colono and started punching him, it simply confirmed that these pretos were out of control and had to be put in their place. The crowd of Italians, together with some other immigrants and white Brazilians, that attacked the two blacks and literally put them down made a collective statement: “You are beneath us; you are not worthy to be treated, and fought, like men.” The crowd also reaffirmed, over and above ethnic and class differences, the collective value of whiteness.

Nobody was arrested or charged for the crime, and the investigation was filed away by the judge for lack of information, even though at least one of the aggressors, the Portuguese colono, was
cited by name and it was relatively easy to find out who had been at the venda. It is important to understand why whites were united against blacks in this case, and why local authorities were reluctant to prosecute the attackers. In the case discussed above, only the Italians found Narciso’s behavior impudent and irritating. The Brazilian whites saw nothing exceptional in it, especially considering that he was just conveying the storeowner’s orders, whereas they did see marauding Italians as out of line. On the other hand, all whites could see José Francisco and Avelino’s erratic and menacing behavior as intolerable and all could agree that these two pretos needed to be taught a lesson and put back in their place. Local authorities were willing to ignore the law and tolerate this illegal collective violence because, on a fundamental level, they agreed with it, especially considering that the blacks were threatening a plantation administrator.

White solidarity in opposition to people of color, especially that of local elites, was highly conditional, depending on the nature of provocations by their dark skinned inferiors. Local elites only occasionally supported Italians in their struggle to keep Afro and indigenous Brazilians down because they were equally concerned about keeping Italians and other immigrants down. Abolition had removed the most compelling motive for open rebellion by blacks and had also led to increasing difficulty in organizing black collective action, as former plantation slaves scattered and were diluted among the rapidly expanding European population. As the immigrant masses swamped the black and brown Brazilians of western São Paulo, especially on the coffee plantations, the fear of black rebellion and violence that had marked the last two decades before abolition receded and was replaced, among planters and other local elites, by a fear of immigrant violence, unruliness, sabotage and strikes. After abolition, the criminal records of São Carlos suggest, local elites tended to abandon the stereotype of the treacherous and ferocious negro in favor of a more patronizing, yet bifurcated, vision of blacks as either loyal servants or drunken, degenerate vagrants.\footnote{This is broadly similar to the changes that Lilia Schwarcz (1987) found in her study of representations of blacks published in São Paulo newspapers, although her book includes limited evidence on the post-abolition period because it stops in 1890. Schwarcz also identified a distinction between the uses of preto, associated with traditional stereotypes of slaves as humble, loyal and innocent, and negro, associated with the newer white vision of blacks that emerged in the years prior to abolition, as treacherous, violent and depraved. In the São Carlos police and criminal court records studied here, which mostly come from somewhat later period, both authorities and ordinary people of all ethnicities and colors tend to use preto and negro interchangeably, sometimes mixing the two terms in the same utterance, although at times the valence of negro does seem to be more negative, as in the terms negro burro or negro de merda encountered in some trial records.}

**Italian employers and dark-skinned workers**

From the early years of mass Italian immigration in the 1880’s, there were Italian merchants and shopkeepers in São Carlos, many of them serving the needs of other immigrants with restaurants, stores, bars, hotels, or brothels (functions often combined, in varying combinations, in the same establishment), or making bricks, building houses, making clothing, and the like. Some Italians were able to buy land and become coffee planters, although they generally seem to have been small-scale planters—with the important exception of Aurelio Civatti—and others were hired as administrators by
some of the great coffee planters. These shopkeepers, artisans, planters and administrators may have preferred Italian workers, but many also hired black or brown Brazilians. I have yet to encounter any Italian employed by a black or brown Brazilian. This is no doubt due largely to the fact that most people of color were not in a position to be able to employ anyone, but the evidence discussed above also suggests that Italians were unwilling to submit to their authority. Italian-nonwhite employment and authority relationships are particularly interesting because they necessarily involved Italian control and black or brown obedience, the same symbolic elements that were at stake in most of the fights discussed above. For Afro-Brazilians, it may have been particularly grating to submit to Italians, most of whom had arrived in a state of abject poverty similar to that of *libertos*. On the other hand, Italians employers and administrators, who were not fully accepted by the local Brazilian elite, may well have felt disrespect by dark-skinned employees to be a challenge to their right to command rather then individual misconduct.

Italian employers were especially likely to be enraged by disobedience or disrespect from dark skinned employees. In May of 1892, Giuseppe Mirabelli, a 31-year-old “cultivator” from Calabria, stabbed his black cook, Maria Josepha da Conceição, because she had not made food and his coffee was cold.  

In another kind of employment conflict, which also illustrates the convoluted forms that racism could (and can) assume in Brazil, two Italian pimps, in late 1897, beat a prostitute from Alagoas named Rosa de Oliveira, who apparently had brown skin, because she refused service to a black customer, preferring a white one for half the price, and, on another occasion, wanted to sleep with a man for free. Whatever we may think of Rosa’s preferences, she was asserting her right to choose her own clients, and to have sex for free if she liked a man. The two pimps clearly found such independence outrageous, and we may doubt whether they would have been so quick to hit an Italian “employee”. The Italian prostitutes who appear with some regularity in criminal records—typically accused of theft—generally worked either independently or in brothels run by other Italian women and do not seem to have been subject to the same degree of exploitation and abuse, although they did sometimes suffer violence from clients.

In mid 1904, Joaquim de la Persia, a middle aged Italian carpenter employed on the Fazenda Paineira, and his eighteen year old son killed a black ex-employee. Francisco—whose surname is

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47 FPM, Criminais, C. 214, No. 138, 1892, Giuseppe Mirabelli. Although it is clear from the statements of witnesses that they were arguing about food and coffee, his anger may have been intensified by another attitude of Maria’s. She claimed that he attacked her because she had chided him for flirting with a married woman, whose (black) husband was walking home from a *venda* with them at the time Mirabelli attacked her. The jury acquitted Mirabelli.

48 FPM, Criminais, C. 334, No. 2624, 1897, Domingos Manfredo and Francisco Romano. This police “investigation,” consisting only of Rosa’s complaint, contains no mention of her color, although her birthplace strongly suggests that she was not white. She was unable to carry out her intentions with the man she liked because Manfredo interrupted their encounter and beat her up.

49 São Carlos had many of the characteristics typical of frontier areas, including a high ratio of men to women, due in large part to the many single, or married but unaccompanied, Italian men, who presumably constituted the principal clientele for what seem to have been a fairly large number of Italian prostitutes.

50 FPM, Criminais, C. 227, No. 176, 1904.
never mentioned in the trial records and who is referred to throughout as “the preto Francisco” or “Francisco de Tal” (Francisco something or other)—had been hired by Joaquim on the condition that he would be paid at the end of the year. A few months later Francisco had quit his job and Joaquim had never paid him for the months worked. The details of the interaction leading to Francisco’s murder are rather obscure, largely because he did not live to tell his side of the story and there were no eyewitnesses. According to the two de la Persias, Francisco attacked them with a club and a razor. Joaquim then shot him with a pistol and, seeing that he did not fall down, the younger de la Persia shot him at point blank range with a shotgun, killing him instantly. In not paying Francisco, Joaquim de la Persia was probably imitating the practice of coffee planters, who commonly refused all payment to workers who quit before the end of their contracts, but this also suggests that Joaquim felt he could lord it over his black assistant in the same way that the great planters ruled their workers. The shoot to kill viciousness of the de la Persias’ counterattack (if, indeed, Francisco attacked them first, which we can never know) also suggests hatred and contempt.

In October, 1901, Savério Guzzi, the Italian administrator of the Fazenda Morro Redondo, encountered a 36 year old preto and former slave named Mateus—whose surname is never mentioned in the subsequent investigation—arguing with another (apparently white) plantation worker, Manoel Novaes, over Mateus’s attempts to visit Manoel’s fifteen year old daughter Luiza. According to a young Brazilian witness, Guzzi said to Mateus: “Shut your mouth, or else you will get a beating. Mateus then said: you are unfit [baixo] to order me to shut my mouth. Guzzi hearing this left [and] went to the fazenda to get a whip and went looking for Mateus” Finding Mateus by the coffee drying court, Savério began whipping him. Mateus then said--according to Luiza, who heard it from another woman, “Don’t strike me any more, Savério” and gave Savério a blow on the arm with a piece of wood. At this Guzzi pulled out a pistol and shot him, killing him instantly. Savério Guzzi fled on one of the plantation’s horses and was never located by authorities.

The meaning of the whip to an ex-slave does not require commentary, and Guzzi’s easy resort to the whip suggests that he despised Mateus and wanted to teach him a lesson. According to Luiza, Guzzi was constantly scolding Mateus and had hit him before. Killing Mateus was a natural and unthinking reaction when Mateus raised the stakes in this dangerous physical and symbolic contest by refusing to submit to the whipping.

In November of 1912, Giovanni de Rienzo, a 50 year old Italian with a small coffee plantation clubbed a black worker of the same age for his impudence, breaking his arm and injuring his ribs. The conflict apparently started the day before. According to Rienzo, “his camarada [salaried laborer] José Martins, during the entire day, instead of working argued and tried [to start] quarrels with him, the declarant, who, due to his great patience with him, did not fight”. A Brazilian colono reported that

51 FPM, Criminais, C. 464, no number, 1901, Savério Guzzi.
52 FPM, Criminais, C. 310, No. 435, 1912, João de Rienzo. One witness, Alfredo Alves Capoeira, described the plantation as a sitio, a word typically used for small farms.
that Rienzo argued with José about his work and that José then abandoned his work, going back to his home in the workers’ settlement [colônia] on the plantation and started cursing Rienzo.\footnote{Statement of Sebastião Sabino during police investigation.} According to Italian, Brazilian and Portuguese workers who witnessed events the next day, Martins had brought some pinga with him to the coffee field where he was working. When Rienzo told José that he should not bring pinga to work, José talked back to him. In most versions, he said “Stop bothering me.” In one version, he also called Rienzo a thief and, in another, challenged him to a fight before Rienzo hit him two or three times with board. Rienzo claimed during the investigation that “after being much insulted by José, he lost his patience and with a piece of wood gave him, José, two blows.” When questioned by the police delegate, José displayed no regret for his defiance. When Rienzo admonished him about the pinga, he replied “that [pinga] did no harm and then João de Rienzo got mad and said many rude things to him and he, the declarant, in his turn responded the same way.”

According to the prosecutor, Rienzo tried to hide his crime, denying José medical treatment and prevented him from complaining to the police. It was only three days later that he sent José to see a doctor in the village of Água Vermelha. In his declaration before the judge about a month later, Rienzo was unusually candid about his desire to put José in his place: “Martins who for some time was going around making mischief [reinando] started to not work and because of this he had the need to correct him.” It took about a month for José to heal; then he returned to work for Rienzo, who was acquitted by the jury.

_Fazendeiros_ and their administrators and _capangas_ (hired thugs) often used violence against workers of all colors and ethnicities with impunity, as an entire literature on the immigrant experience makes clear. In beating José, Rienzo was not necessarily treating him differently than _fazendeiros_ treated immigrant or white Brazilian workers, but his felt need to violently “correct” José, and the degree of his ire at José’s insolence, do seem to distinguish this interaction. Immigrants did suffer violence and intimidation, but they were typically fined, not clubbed or whipped, when they showed disrespect for _fazendeiros_ or their administrators. Although the process of escalation toward physical violence between immigrants and _fazendeiros_ (or administrators) almost always involved insults and other forms of symbolic violence, such conflicts were more likely to stem from material issues, such as immigrant desires to quit their jobs, fines considered arbitrary or excessive, delays in payment, disagreements over debts owed to plantation stores, or attempts to organize strikes, or immigrant refusal to do unpleasant tasks or to work at night.\footnote{Monsma & Medeiros 2002 examine the role of violence in relations between coffee planters and immigrant workers.} Violence between Italian planters and black workers seems to have occurred for more purely symbolic reasons. The lack of sympathy for José among Rienzo’s immigrant and white Brazilian workers—whose counterparts on other plantations could at times manifest a certain degree of interethnic and interracial solidarity in the face of planter violence—also suggests that this interaction was different. An Italian _colono_ stated to the police...
delegate that “Rienzo tolerated José with much patience and after some time as José called out to Rienzo like he was defying him, Rienzo took the wooden support of a coffee tree and gave José two blows with it.”

In February of 1913, Luigi Calegari, an Italian coffee planter, clubbed a 67 year old black former worker of his several times outside a venda (general store and bar) in the rural settlement of Babylônica because the worker, Ignácio Justino, invited him to a drink and was offended by his refusal. The invitation seemed especially impudent because Calegari had fired Ignácio a couple of years before and suspected that Ignácio had tried to set fire to his house in revenge. To make matters worse, Ignácio was drinking with a current (and also black) employee of Calegari’s who was supposed to be working. An Italian employee of the venda described the argument that preceded the blows:

Luiz Calegari arrived and seeing his worker named Joaquim Albino in the company of Ignácio Justino and Francisco Leite, expressed surprise at seeing him relaxing at that hour when the same Albino had pledged to work three quarters of the day, that at that moment Ignácio Justino invited Calegari to drink something, to which Calegari did not agree, saying that he was the one who could pay because he had more resources than Ignácio Justino, for that reason an argument began between the two, during which Calegari called Ignácio an arsonist accusing him of having some time ago set fire to the house in which Calegari was living with his family, that arguing like this the two went outside of the store.

The blows clearly were not dealt in self-defense. Calegari later claimed that Ignácio had attacked him with a razor, but none of the witnesses corroborated this, saying instead that Ignácio was either unarmed or, if he had a razor, never had time to pull it out. The circumstances suggest that, rather than defending himself, Calegari was trying to teach Ignácio a lesson and put him back in his place. Other, presumably white, patrons of the venda apparently enjoyed the spectacle, for a witness stated that he heard a small group calling out “hit him, hit him.”

This brief analysis suggests that the insecurity of Italians who had risen to positions of power and authority contributed to a certain degree of “excess violence” in their relations with dark-skinned subordinates. To fully investigate this hypothesis, one would also have to examine comparable authority relations between white Brazilians and people of color.

**Solidarities**

Despite the racial violence and intimidation, this was no segregationist society. In the absence of a rigid, state-backed caste system, and given the relative incapacity of the Italian “community” to enforce racial discipline on members—due largely to regional divisions and a high degree of geographic mobility—individual relationships often crossed color lines and could involve genuine affection and solidarity as well as symbolic tensions. In addition to the evidence of interracial contact, cooperation, sociability, and intimacy, it is not difficult to find, in the criminal records, examples of solidarity that crossed racial lines. In the fazenda barn dance described at the beginning of this paper,

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55 Statement of Vicente Mauricio
56 FPM, Criminais, C. 276, No. 6432, 1913, Luigi Calegari.
57 Statement of Agostinho Chianelli during police investigation.
Italian *colonos* acted quickly to isolate the pistol wielding Antonio Lariago and protect the black man he was trying to intimidate. Although he did not intervene to stop the violence, the Italian carter who had filled in the well with Cláudio Cherubino de Sousa demonstrated considerable sympathy for Cláudio’s plight and none at all for the Italian barber and the Syrian peddler who attacked him. Perceptions of events and judgments of who is at fault often do tend to differ systematically by the social identities of the witnesses, but in other cases one encounters a willingness to judge people as individuals rather than as representatives of categories, which could mean condemning members of one’s own group. In 1893, a former slave born in Africa “fifty years, more or less” earlier, helped acquit an Italian *venda* owner who shot a *preto* in a fight over debts in the rural Quilombo district, stating that the Italian shot because the black was pursuing him with a knife and that the Italian tried to escape before pulling out his pistol, which is almost identical to statements by Italian and white Brazilian witnesses.\(^59\)

Interethnic solidarity could sometimes extend to acts of violence against members of one’s own group. In mid 1895, after a fight between an Italian and Caetano Lourenço de Camargo, a young black well digger, outside the Italian’s *venda* in the town of São Carlos, the Italian set out to take revenge, accompanied by a black boarder of his named Felizardo Arruda.\(^60\) Finding Caetano on another street, Felizardo clubbed him over the head several times and the Italian fired two pistol shots at him, but missed. Felizardo was sentenced to a year in jail for this act of solidarity, whereas the Italian, despite confessing that he had fired, was acquitted.

In 1898, an attempt by an Italian to collect a late rent payment from Ana Mendes, a 45 year old *mulata* widow who supported herself by taking in washing, led to an argument between the rent collector, Giovanni Francesco Chiomino, and the *mulata*’s neighbor Serafina de Fani, a 39 year old Italian widow.\(^61\) Giovanni was employed by the owner of the house, an Italian priest named Matheus Pugliese, who was a relative of Serafina’s deceased husband. To Giovanni’s request for payment, Ana, who was also known by the nickname Ana Espada, responded that she could not pay because she had not yet been paid by the soldiers whose clothes she washed. Serafina intervened saying, according to her deposition, “go away, Ana Espada cannot pay the priest the rent for the house now and it is better that he do an act of charity for poor dear Ana [a pobre da Aninha].” In response, according to an Italian neighbor, “the carter told Serafina de Fani and her daughter to go [back] to the whore who gave birth to them,” at which “Serafina threw a brick at Chiomino, who in turn [threw it back], appearing at that time [Serafina’s son-in-law] Thomaso Giampá ordering Chiomino to leave under penalty of receiving a beating and at the same time as he said this picking up a brick which he threw at

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\(^{58}\) Statement of José Victorino during police investigation.

\(^{59}\) FPM, Criminais, C. 292, No. 54, 1893, Cristoforo Martinelli. The shooting victim died several days later. The African was Lauriano de Camargo.

\(^{60}\) FPM, Criminais, C. 298, No. 28, 1895, Felizardo Ferreira de Arruda and Salvatore Galena.

\(^{61}\) FPM, Criminais, C. 279, No.259,1898,Thomaz Giampá
At this point two shots rang out. One of the bullets hit Ana Espada, who had been standing by during the fight “with her arms crossed.” She fell down and died on the spot. Giovanni Chiomino claimed that Giampá shot at him, but none of the witnesses could confirm this and some said he was elsewhere at the time, so the jury acquitted Giampá.

Although Thomaso seems to have gotten involved mainly to protect his family’s honor against Giovanni’s insults, the nature and vehemence of Serafina’s intervention, in opposition to the interests of her relative the priest, suggests a real bond between the two widows. Manifestations of interracial solidarity were presumably more likely when those involved knew one another and maintained ongoing relationships. Sharing the same social situation could also evoke feelings of solidarity—common widowhood and roughly similar age probably facilitated identification between Ana and Serafina. At the same time, Serafina’s use of the diminutive and the adjective “poor” to characterize Ana smells of condescension. This complex mixture of affection and condescension seems to have characterized many personal relationships between Italians and Afro-Brazilians at the time, and it could lead to violent conflict between friends under other circumstances.

**Hardening racism**

Over time, as Italians collectively absorbed the racial ideologies of white Brazilians and, perhaps, reformulated them to fit their own experience, they probably developed more explicitly articulated notions of Afro-Brazilian and indigenous inferiority. With the growth of the immigrant population, Italians and other Europeans were also in a better position to carve out some segregated spaces—even if the extent of such de facto segregation would always be limited by the lack of elite interest in promoting it. Resentment against blacks and browns was probably exacerbated by the deteriorating position of many Italians. After about 1900, overproduction led to declining coffee prices, and the real wages of coffee colonos and camaradas declined as well (Hall 1969). Rather than accumulating the savings or land that they had dreamed of on arrival in Brazil, many Italians were sinking deeper into poverty. Several cases of violence hint at hardening racial attitudes during the second decade after abolition, and increasing hostility of Italians toward blacks simply for being black, independently of their behavior.

Early in the evening on February 2, 1906, Giovanni Marcolino was walking home to the Italian owned plantation where he worked as a colono after drinking a bottle of wine in the village of Ibaté. At the village gate, he encountered, according to his later statement to the local subdelegate, “an unknown preto without hat or blazer, in a drunken state, with a pineapple in his hand.” The black

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62 Finita Viola, during police investigation and in deposition before the judge.
63 Statement of Francesca Fortunato during police investigation.
64 The degree to which people related to one another as individuals rather than as members of categories can be gauged, in the criminal records, by whether they referred to others by name or by ethnic or color categories (the pardo, the Italian, etc.).
man followed him and offered to share the pineapple. Giovanni lent him a jackknife to peel it and the two walked along eating the pineapple. Arriving at the fazenda,

the accused tried to go to the colônia where he resided, in which he was accompanied by the preto, … the accused, suspecting that he was accompanied by a thief, asked what he wanted, to which the preto responded that the business he had was with him, the accused, and as he ordered him to go away, the preto became infuriated and grabbed the accused by the neck and fearing that he would be hurt, he [Giovanni] took out a piercing instrument that he had on his belt (that they the Italians called a revolta) dealing a blow on the neck, prostrating him on the ground and because he still was alive he dealt him more blows until he left him dead.

The only “witnesses” were the Italian planter, some Italian workers and one Brazilian worker, who either viewed the dead body of Marcelino “de Tal” or heard Giovanni’s version of the event. All witnesses who saw the body remarked on the absence of blazer and hat, signs of masculine respectability. Although no one could contest his allegation that the black man attacked him first, Giovanni was condemned to fifteen years in jail, largely, it seems, because of his unrepentant attitude. He told the subdelegate that he was so furious at the preto that “on that occasion he would kill three or four times whoever appeared and even his own father,” also stating that he was “feeling sorry only to have to suffer for killing a black, but in spite of this he was not sorry for the crime he committed.”

One does not encounter such open assertions of black inferiority in earlier records of Italian-black conflict. Racial hierarchy was implicit in Italian actions, not proudly affirmed in front of local authorities. Giovanni’s account of his anger is also striking. He clearly wanted the subdelegate to believe he killed Marcelino out of fear, but his uncontrollable fury, and his determination to kill the preto, suggest that he was raging against all black men.

In March of 1904, a group of Italian colonos, both men and women, attacked a black man simply for entering the colônia where they lived on the Fazenda Salto. On orders from his employer, Coronel Tito Martins, Simão Joaquim de Assis had gone to the Fazenda Salto to get sugarcane shoots for planting on Martins’s fazenda. After the plantation administrator showed him the cane field, he remembered that he did not have a tool for cutting the shoots, so he went to the colônia to asked to borrow a sickle or a knife. The Portuguese colonos he asked first directed him to the house of some other Portuguese at the other end of the settlement, but he stopped at the house of some Italians on the way to ask them. According to one of the aggressors,

Yesterday at one o’clock in the afternoon Simão Joaquim de Assis, preto, arrived in the colônia where the declarant lives and asked for a sickle or a knife to cut cane shoots, which the colonos refused to provide …ordering him to go away because they did not want a negro in the colônia. Simão left, returning later, at that time he the declarant in the company of three companions named Bernardo, Rocco, and Donato went to put Simão out of the fazenda.

When Simão reappeared, he apparently was on his way to the house of the Portuguese at the end of the colônia, where the first Portuguese had told him he might find a sickle. It was this

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66 FPM, Criminais, C. 289, No. 11, 1904, Bernardo Bartolomeu, Donato Sotomano, Rocco di Grosso, Antonio Calesimo, Simão Joaquim de Assis.

67 Statement of Antonio Calesimo during police investigation.
reappearance (and insistence on doing his job), after being ordered away, that so agitated the Italian colono, determined to defend their space from nonwhite intruders. A Portuguese witness later stated:

The colono then said that they did not want a negro there, that he should go away and soon after that the deponent saw the colono named Avelardo so and so beating Simão, which was also done by Donato [and] Rocco di Grosso, that the wounded Antonio Calesimo and some women were also part of the group that persecuted Simão, who very wounded returned under the blows of cudgels and stones to the house where he had left [his] shotgun and there taking it he fired on the group, the projectiles going to wound Antonio Calesimo and Maria Francisca.°

The colono continued chasing Simão, who was finally rescued by the plantation administrator:

The deponent [the administrator] saw Simão who was being attacked in the colônia by men and women, armed with clubs and stones. …He the deponent seeing that Simão was being sacrificed by the colono, ordered his employee named João Ignácio to the aid of the victim, and he immediately took Simão out of the power of the aggressors. The deponent seeing that the colono still pursued Simão went to the colônia, finding Simão [and] bringing him to his house, where he stayed until the police arrived.°

The success of such attempts to define segregated spaces was limited because fazendeiros and other elites did not support them. Even so, the intimidating power of crowds of irate Italians would have been sufficient to caution black strangers about walking carelessly through the colônias, which became increasingly white as the number of immigrants grew—and here it is important to remember that for every police investigation into such events, several other incidents of small scale violence or intimidation must have gone unnoticed by the police. This climate of intimidation probably also restricted the interracial socializing that was evident during the first decade after abolition.

This case suggests that the relationship of Portuguese colono to blacks was somewhat different from that of Italians. To what extent this was true and why will have to await further research focusing specifically on conflicts between Portuguese immigrants and Afro-Brazilians.° We know that Italian immigration to São Carlos peaked during the 1890’s, whereas most Portuguese colono arrived after 1900, so it is possible that the Portuguese involved in this case had not been in Brazil long enough to internalize the racial abhorrence manifested by the Italians. The aggression ratios presented above, however, suggest that the “excess violence” by non-Italian immigrants (the great majority of whom were either Portuguese or Spanish) against people of color was similar in degree to that of Italians.

In yet another case of group violence, at least three Italians attacked a black man after he was stabbed several times by another Italian early on an August evening in 1909.° Domingos Romualdo, the 42 year old victim, was coming back from the train station carrying a basket of oranges on his back when a Calabrian named Nicola Galhardi stopped him at the corner of the Rua José Bonifácio and the

68 Statement of Manoel da Silva Ferreira during police investigation.
69 Statement of João Albano da Silva Barros during police investigation.
70 We are now starting to research conflicts between Brazilians and other immigrants (principally Portuguese, Spaniards, Arabs [turcos], and Germans).
Rua do Mercado, asking to buy the oranges. Domingos replied that he could not sell them because they belonged to somebody else, which led to an exchange of insults, according to the several Italian and Brazilian prostitutes who observed the event from their windows. Then Galhardi knocked Domingos down and stabbed him several times in the buttocks and legs. At this point two Italian men and at least one woman left a nearby venda to join the fight, punching and kicking Domingos. If the initial attacker was responding to something Domingos did (refuse to sell the oranges), the other Italians had no reason at all for fighting with the victim—or at least for fighting with this particular victim, and seem to have joined in for the pure joy of kicking and knocking around a black man as he lay bloodied on the street, which is to say that they attacked Domingos simply for being a member of a despised category of people.

The evidence of increasing racial polarization suggests that, after about 1900, Italian attitudes toward blacks and other dark skinned Brazilians were becoming less conditional on their behavior and more an automatic response to skin color. There is some contrary evidence—as late as 1907 we find a young mulatto entering a fight against a middle aged preto on the side of an Italian coworker—but the general tendency seems to have been toward a hardening of racial lines. If I am correct about this, all blacks were increasingly despised. Although I have found no direct evidence that Italians blamed Afro-Brazilians for declining wages, blacks did symbolize everything that Italians feared becoming, and their refusal to accept subordination to Italians would have become even more annoying as Italians saw their own position deteriorate. In addition, over time, explicit stereotypes of blacks as treacherous, immoral, drunken and thieving diffused more widely among Italians and, with their vastly superior numbers, Italians and other immigrants in western São Paulo were able to threaten and intimidate Afro and indigenous Brazilians without much fear of retaliation.

As for pretos and other dark skinned Brazilians, they tried to protect themselves as well as they could. This often meant strengthening patron-client bonds with fazendeiros or urban elites, in effect using another one form of subordination to ward off another. In many cases of immigrant violence against blacks on plantations, including some of the examples discussed above, the planter or his administrator stepped in to protect the victim. This renewed dependence on planters must have troubled many libertos, and it is quite likely that the restricting experience of being caught between immigrant intimidation and planter clientelism contributed to the rural-urban migration of black and brown people during the first few decades after abolition.

One could also try to limit contact with Italians and other immigrants. In September, 1905, Rafael Rosa de Toledo, a pardo worker resident on the Fazenda Bella Vista, forbade the woman he lived with to take in the washing of some single (or unaccompanied) Italian men “because they were Italians and because from this there could result some problem, which it would be better to prevent.”

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72 FPM, Criminais, C. 214, No. 136, 1907, José Candido Pereira, Felício Carona, Olympio Gregório.
73 FPM, Criminais, C. 199, No. 102, 1905, Giocomo Macien. Declaration of Rafael Rosa de Toledo before the judge.
It is not clear if Rafael was concerned about possible fights over debts and lost clothing or about sexual harassment and seduction—other cases show that both were possible.\textsuperscript{74} What is important here is that, in earlier cases, one does not find Afro-Brazilians cutting off contact with Italians simply because they were Italians.

For the vigorous, or just angry, another form of protection that beckoned was to make one’s self feared, serving as a plantation capanga or a police recruit. At least a capanga could walk tall. To characterize police service as a form of emancipation would be exaggerated, given the violence within this militarized force, but it did allow one to intimidate Italians and other immigrants on city streets with a high degree of impunity.

One might suppose (as I did at the beginning of this project) that the use of black or brown capangas by fazendeiros and the presence of these color categories among police recruits intensified Italian resentment against the dark skinned. Certainly an individual such as Bráulio Borges de Carvalho, a moreno who went around impersonating a police delegate in order to rob Italians more easily, earned their animosity.\textsuperscript{75} However, the criminal records of São Carlos show little evidence of a general tendency for Italians to identify blacks and browns with the repressive forces of the state and planters. There is good evidence that Italians disliked both fazendeiros and the police, but the individuals who wielded violence against them on behalf of the powerful—or on behalf of themselves, in the case of the rather unruly police force—were men of all colors, and they were almost invariably led by whites. In addition, blacks, like Italians, were favorite targets of repression both on plantations and in city streets.

One of the more dramatic incidents of plantation violence occurred on the fazenda of Captain Jacyntho Cintra in the district of Água Vermelho in early 1898. The white plantation administrator and two capangas, one of them preto and the other pardo, went on a rampage, successively beating and whipping an Arab peddler, an Italian colono, an Italian brick maker, a (possibly nonwhite) Brazilian colono from Minas Gerais, her Brazilian companion, and a visiting Italian carpenter, as well as pursuing but failing to catch another Italian colono and his wife.\textsuperscript{76} This series of events apparently began because the administrator felt that an Italian empreiteiro (person contracted to fell the forest and form new coffee groves) was not heeding his authority. Immediately after the dispute with the empreiteiro, the administrator encountered the Arab peddler on the plantation without his permission and ordered the capangas to beat him. Each of the other victims was beaten for intervening to stop the violence against the previous victim, in an impressive demonstration of interethnic solidarity. The administrator took these interventions as affronts and tried to impose his authority by terror.

\textsuperscript{74} The prohibition and, possibly, Rafael’s jealousy led to a fight with one of the single Italians, in which Rafael hit the Italian with the handle of a sickle and the Italian knocked him down and gave him a blow with a machete.

\textsuperscript{75} FPM, Criminais, C. 275, No. 4097, 1905.

\textsuperscript{76} FPM, Criminais, C. 334, No. 3683, 1898, Luiz de Tal, Roberto de Tal, Gabriel de Tal. This case is discussed in greater detail in Monsma & Medeiros 2002.
At the risk of further violence by the administrator and capangas, the victims went to the town of São Carlos to denounce the incident to the police delegate. An Austrian and four Italian witnesses backed up their story. What is most important here is that the victims and witnesses, while recognizing the participation of the capangas, blamed the administrator for the beatings. One of the Italian victims said that the capangas were simply following the administrator’s orders. One of the Brazilians and another Italian victim both mentioned, as evidence of the administrator’s violent tendencies, that he had beaten two black workers the previous week. In such circumstances, Italians may well have detested individual black or brown capangas, but it was difficult to generalize this specific form of hatred to all Afro-Brazilians. The common Italian aversion to blacks seems to have been more an expression of generalized contempt than a reaction to the participation of some blacks and browns in the forces of class and state repression.

Conclusion

Although criminal records provide evidence of cooperation, friendship, conviviality and intimacy between immigrants and nonwhite Brazilians, the ever-present possibility of violence permeated and shaped social relations. This was by no means a new phenomenon in Brazil, as Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco’s (1974) work on the pre-abolition free population makes clear, and it was by no means a uniquely Brazilian phenomenon, as Norbert Elias (1994, 1996) demonstrated in his writings on the “civilizing process” in Europe. The São Carlos criminal records show that the possibility of violence was inherent in everyday relations within as well as between ethnic and color groups. What was different about relations between Italians and people of color was less the frequency of violence than the nature of the situations, attitudes and interactions that generated it and its imbalance, with Italians attacking nonwhites much more often than vice versa.

The examination of police and criminal court records above indicates that the great majority of violent conflicts between Italian immigrants and Afro or indigenous Brazilians occurred largely or entirely for symbolic reasons. The central issue was whether Italians would take precedence over black and brown Brazilians or whether people of all colors would be treated with equal respect and dignity. This basic conflict between groups was expressed in a wide variety of everyday disputes over who would defer to whom and who had the right to give orders to whom. It was also expressed in insults that classified members of the other group, identifying them by ethnicity or color and associating the entire group with negative characteristics (“stupid black,” “Italian son of a whore”). For every such clash that was reported to the police, there must have been others that came to blows but produced no police investigation because they did not result in serious wounds, and many others that stopped short of physical violence because one side backed down. One of the most important

\[\text{Statements of Bernardo Barsoline, João Simão Lourenço, and Andrea Guerino during police investigation.}
\text{The administrator and the capangas were never brought to trial. In almost all cases of violence against workers by fazendeiros or administrators that did not result in death, either the police delegate never finished the investigation or the judge (often at the request of the prosecutor) decided to file away the case without trial.}\]
consequences of the violent fights examined here was an atmosphere of intimidation, in which Italians and other whites could impose their will on blacks and browns through implicit or explicit threats of physical violence. Soon after abolition, the Afro-Brazilians of the coffee growing west were vastly outnumbered by immigrants, especially in rural areas. This demographic imbalance restricted the capacity of blacks and browns to fight back and facilitated group aggression by immigrants. Over time, attitudes seem to have hardened. If Italian racist outbursts of the early years were largely spontaneous and situational, dependent on black or brown demeanor, later attacks more often suggest hatred of blacks simply for being black, a tendency exacerbated, perhaps, by the deteriorating economic situation of Italians.

Italians were not alone in their tendency to lord it over and intimidate the dark skinned. Indeed the quantitative results presented above indicate that the Italian tendency for “excess violence” against browns and, above all, blacks corresponded to similar tendencies among both white Brazilians and other immigrants. Everything suggests that Italians learned from the white Brazilians around them that pretos and other people of color could be threatened, attacked or killed to put them back in their place if they presumed to know more than whites, refused to accept orders, or otherwise showed disrespect. Other immigrants, who only began arriving in large numbers after Italy banned subsidized immigration in 1902, probably learned to hate blacks largely from Italians.

As much as immigrants may have wanted racial preference and segregation, these never became official state policy in São Paulo or anywhere else in Brazil. I suspect that this was due primarily to a lack of elite interest, despite obvious racism, in granting official privileges to poor whites. At several points in the above analysis, I have mentioned evidence that local elites generally did not support Italian violence against the dark skinned. More systematic evidence can be found in the rates of conviction for those accused of interethnic or interracial violence. Prosecutors, judges and jurors were unquestionably members of the elite. Although some police delegates had humbler origins, they were quite sensitive to pressures from the local elite because they could easily be replaced if they displeased powerful families.

Table 3, which includes cases not brought to trial because of judicial or police decisions, shows that Italians who assaulted or killed dark skinned Brazilians were actually more likely to be punished than the relatively few people of color accused of violence against Italians. This anomaly can be explained in part by the impunity of black capangas. What is most important here is that the data show no tendency for police, judges and jurors to systematically favor Italians over dark skinned Brazilians. Lest one think this result was due to judicial autonomy—rather limited under the First Republic (Leal 1948)—the table shows that white Brazilians did enjoy special consideration in the justice system. They could attack Italians with an especially high degree of impunity and, if they suffered violence from black or brown people, the attackers were especially likely to be punished. No doubt this did not reflect the privileges and impunity of poor white Brazilians but those of fazendeiros, plantation administrators and other local elites. Curiously, the data also show that about a quarter of
the white Brazilians who attacked nonwhites were convicted, which is somewhat higher than the percent convicted among white Brazilians who attacked other white Brazilians, although still considerably lower than the 36% conviction rate for nonwhites who attacked white Brazilians.

TABLE 3. PERCENT CONVICTED IN CASES OF HOMICIDE AND AGGRESSION, BY ETHNICITY OR COLOR OF ACCUSED AND VICTIM (Cases with named aggressors; denominators in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aggressor</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>white Brazilian</td>
<td>nonwhite</td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white Brazilian</td>
<td>15.9 (132)</td>
<td>24.4 (86)</td>
<td>5.7 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonwhite</td>
<td>35.7 (28)</td>
<td>26.9 (93)</td>
<td>14.3 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>16.9 (59)</td>
<td>25.4 (59)</td>
<td>18.6 (199)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=712
Source: São Carlos police investigations and criminal trial records, Fundação Pró-Memória, São Carlos.
Notes: Includes cases never brought to judgment due to unfinished police investigations or judicial decisions to halt proceedings (arquivamento). Excludes cases in which the alleged aggressor is not identified by name and in which judgment did not occur because the accused either fled or died before trial. Excludes events attributed to the Mangano bandit gang.

In his comparative study of racial domination and resistance movements, Anthony Marx (1998) argues that the official, state-backed racism of South Africa and the US South, as well as tolerance of the southern racial regime by the national state in the United States, resulted from largely successful attempts to overcome deep divisions among whites through the exclusion and subjugation of blacks, whereas the Brazilian state did not institute an official regime of racial domination after abolition because schisms among whites were not serious enough to threaten national stability. Marx addresses several forms of division and competition among whites that tended to strengthen official white privilege and black exclusion in the first two countries. For our purposes, one to the most interesting is political party competition. Both the Democratic Party of the US South and Afrikaner nationalists competed for the votes of poor and working class whites by supporting official privileges for whites and restrictions on blacks.

In Brazil’s First Republic, however (and here I am going beyond Marx’s analysis), the political opinions of poor whites were largely irrelevant to party competition because the great majority of them were disenfranchised, as were most immigrants. Local power brokers, generally referred to as coronéis (because many were officers in the National Guard), maintained their power through varying mixtures of family ties, clientelism, fraud, and violence. Once abolition had removed the threat of slave rebellion, local paulista elites were not much interested in promoting white unity because they had little need for the support of poor whites, especially foreigners, to maintain their political and economic power, and they preferred to avoid sharing power with poor people of any color. Fazendeiros seem to have preferred playing immigrants and poor Brazilians, especially colored Brazilians, off against one another.
Limited elite support can also help explain why collective racial terrorism was relatively rare in São Paulo and why there was no organized white supremacist movement comparable to, say, the Ku Klux Klan. The tolerance and participation of local elites and authorities, including the police, is central to most analyses of lynching in the US South. Several historians have demonstrated that lynching constituted a public spectacle that not only terrorized potentially insolent blacks but also symbolized and solidified white domination and unity (e.g., Hale 1998; Tolnay & Beck 1995). The available sources relate only one true racial lynching in São Carlos. A month and a half after abolition, a black man was accused of raping and mauling a respectable white woman. The crowd of about 400 that dragged him out of the municipal jail, killed him, and strung up his body on a tree in the central plaza was apparently comprised almost entirely of Brazilians. The annual report of the state’s police chief devotes several paragraphs to the event, but makes no mention of immigrant participation, stating that “the population of the city” carried out the lynching. There were also a few racial lynchings in other paulista towns, but they are not remotely comparable in number to the over 2,000 North American lynchings in the half century following the end of reconstruction (Tolnay & Beck 1995, p. 17). A few of the events discussed above do come close to being racial lynchings by Italians, but they were relatively rare and they generally occurred in rural areas in the absence of authorities, not with their connivance. The fact that Italians and other immigrants could not count on the tolerance or aid of local elites for racist attacks tended to limit interracial conflict to everyday tensions, naming disputes, intimidation and interpersonal violence rather than collective violence or social movements.

One might also ask why poor Brazilians, especially those of color, did not form any organized anti-immigration or nativist movement. Such movements are common where natives of a country are harmed (or imagine they are harmed) in some way by the presence of immigrants (Olzak 1992). The subsidized immigration system in São Paulo was explicitly designed to increase competition in the rural labor market, depress wages and free fazendeiros from the necessity of negotiating with libertos, whose demands they often considered inordinate (Andrews 1991). Compared to what might have happened in the absence of immigration, the influx of foreigners certainly restricted the opportunities of rural workers, especially former plantation slaves and their children. In the towns too, competition for housing and crimes committed by Italians could produce anti-immigrant sentiment.

An obvious explanation for the absence of a nativist movement is that anti-immigrant sentiment may well have existed among poor Brazilians, but it was difficult to organize an opposition movement due to the local power of fazendeiros, who wanted immigrants and, at least in the “interior” of the state, could easily repress movements they didn’t like. When one adds to this the illiteracy of most former slaves, their inexperience with the official political system, and color divisions among the

78 Relatório apresentado ao Ilmo e Ex Snr. Dr Pedro Vicente de Azevedo Presidente da Província de São Paulo pelo Desembargador Ernesto Julio Bandeira de Mello, Chefe de Policia no dia 7 de janeiro de 1889. São Paulo. The Chefe of Police also stated that “rigorous investigation” failed to identify the participants.
Brazilian poor, it becomes evident that constructing an organized social movement for immigration restriction was an almost impossible task.

Yet slaves had agitated quite successfully for abolition, without any formal organization, largely through collective disobedience and flight. It is possible to imagine forms of collective action against immigrants by ex-slaves and their descendants that would have been difficult for fazendeiros to control: burning immigrants out of their homes at night, ambushing them on rural roads, or destroying their crops and killing their animals. But the existing sources include no evidence of collective violence by blacks designed to drive immigrants away from São Carlos. Instead we find spontaneous individual outbursts of rage against particular immigrants, generally in response to symbolic violence.

It is important to remember that most nativist movements occur in contexts of real or imagined deterioration of opportunities or conditions of life for some part of the native population. The first phase of mass immigration in São Paulo was not associated with a change for the worse for blacks and browns, but with abolition. Plantation slaves were only too happy to lose their jobs to immigrants, and other dark-skinned people celebrated too. Immigration clearly was not the cause of abolition, but at least the presence of large numbers of immigrant workers ensured that fazendeiros would not be tempted to re-enslave the black population. The sight of Europeans toiling at the same tasks in the same fields from which they had recently been delivered also must have aroused a certain degree of sympathy among ex-slaves, and one does find some manifestations of solidarity across color lines in the surviving records of violent conflict between immigrants and fazendeiros or their agents. Too many things were changing at the same time for the hypothetical gains from stopping immigration to become an important motive for black and brown collective action. To this we must add the fact that, in the principal coffee growing regions of western São Paulo, immigrants rapidly outnumbered nonwhites, especially on the plantations. In this situation, overt collective action, especially violent action, against immigrants would have been suicidal.

Given that interracial conflict and violence generally did not take the dramatic collective forms it took elsewhere, historians who compare the fortunes of immigrants and nonwhite Brazilians after abolition have tended to ignore day-to-day relations between them. Everyday intimidation and the very real possibility of suffering immigrant violence could have important consequences for the opportunities available to blacks and browns. Immigrant intimidation tended to punish exactly the qualities that often contributed to success in the “society of classes” (Fernandes 1978): confidence, boldness, the desire to excel, the willingness to take risks. The result, I suspect, was to limit freedom of movement and to bind blacks and browns more tightly to local patrons, which in turn limited the possibilities for collective action in defense of group interests. This situation stimulated migration to the cities, but even there dark-skinned Brazilians encountered everyday intimidation and limits imposed by the immigrant majority.
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